Cultural Clash and Religion

Edited by William Sweet

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INTRODUCTION

CULTURAL CLASH AND RELIGION:
SOME PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS

WILLIAM SWEET

Samuel Huntington’s controversial 1993 essay, “The Clash of Civilizations?”1 – expanded in 1996, with the question mark removed, as The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order2 – advanced the view that, in the contemporary world, after the fall of Communism and the end of the Cold War, the primary source of conflict will be people’s cultural, including their religious, identities, and not ideology or economics.3 Huntington’s analysis acquired a significant following after the events of “9/11” – the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York City and on the Pentagon, on 11 September 2001 – and, even in the second decade after these events, it continues to influence how many interpret international political and social events.

Huntington’s thesis of a clash of civilizations has been challenged by many,4 but it seems that one might still – and less grandiosely – claim that there are clashes of cultures, particularly where religion is involved. In works such as A Secular Age, by Charles Taylor, Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World, by Hent de Vries, José Casanova’s Public Religions in the Modern World, and Jürgen Habermas’s “Religion in the Public Sphere,”5 much attention has been given to how religion – at least in the sense of ‘that which expresses one’s ultimate commitments’ – is part of, or is drawn into debates about, putative clashes of culture. For example, in the United States, the phenomenon of ‘red’ states and ‘blue’ states – marking differences between the urban and rural, traditionalists and progressives, and internationalists and protectionists – not infrequently correlates with deep disagreement about the relation between religion and the secular, as well as about religion itself.

This volume brings together philosophers, historians, sociologists, political scientists, theologians, and scholars of religion, to review and comment on some of the underlying issues involved in talking about ‘cultural clash,’ to show what responses have or could be given to apparent clashes of cultures, to consider the place of religion and philosophy in such putative clashes, but also to see what problems have arisen or may arise in attempting to address them. Together, these essays aim at identifying and clarifying some of the key issues involved in the discussion of the so-called ‘clash of cultures,’ especially where religion is present; reviewing the particular contributions of philosophy, theology, and religious studies, but also history, political science, and anthropology, to the discussion; and,
finally, considering directions in which reflection, especially philosophical
reflection, on this topic might be fruitfully pursued.

**DEFINING ‘CULTURE’ AND ‘CULTURAL CLASH’**

Before presenting the specific topics raised in the essays that follow,
however, it may be helpful to consider briefly what is meant by ‘culture.’

*Culture*

The word ‘culture’ is an ambiguous one; it is used in many senses,
and there is substantial disagreement on what, exactly, the term means.

The classic definition of ‘culture’ is generally held to be that
provided by the anthropologist, Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, at the beginning
of his *Primitive Culture* (1871). Tylor writes: “Culture… is that complex
whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any
other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”

The term ‘culture’ has, however, come to be understood in a variety
of ways.

Matthew Arnold (1822–88) used the word ‘culture’ to refer to an
ideal of individual human refinement, of “the best that has been thought and
said in the world.” Over a half century later, in his *Notes Towards the
Definition of Culture* (1948), T.S. Eliot wrote that, while ‘culture’ is “first
of all what the anthropologists mean: the way of life of a particular people
living together in one place,” a culture “can never be wholly conscious –
there is always more to it than we are conscious of” – and that an elite is
necessary to “bring about a further development of the culture in organic
complexity: culture at a more conscious level, but still the same culture.”

Thus, culture is “the whole way of life of a people, from birth to the grave,
from morning to night,” but it is adequately appreciated and developed
only by a few. (‘Culture,’ here, is what sociologists have called ‘high
culture,’ where the existence of cultural diversity is not considered to be of
particular value.) In fact, in their *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (1952), Alfred L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn provide
some 164 different senses of the term. Not surprisingly, then, ‘culture’ has
been said to be: “a more or less consistent pattern of thought and action,”
or “the product of learned behaviour,” or “ideas in the mind,” or “a system
of ideas, signs, associations, and modes of behaviour and communication.”

Today, people speak of a ‘culture of science’ or a ‘culture of health,’ which seems roughly equivalent to ‘ideology.’ (Though some, interestingly, reject the notion of culture altogether, alleging that it is
“a logical construct” or “a statistical fiction.”)

Nevertheless, and despite this debate, it seems fair to say that one can
take the term ‘culture’ in a very broad sense as ‘a collection
of representations or ideas shared by and pervasive through a group of
individuals’ – as a set of what the idealist philosopher Bernard Bosanquet
called “dominant ideas.” Such a description provides a heuristic norm or a regulative idea for a study of culture, without being a complete definition – or even claiming that ‘culture’ can be defined.

One may well wonder, then, are religions cultures? This is a controversial question. Religion – in the etymological sense of *religare*, as that which ties, fastens, or binds people to one another – would seem to be, at least at first glance, part of culture, if not constituting a kind of culture itself. While this is an issue that is discussed at length later in this collection of essays, for the moment one can certainly say that there is, at the very least, a close relation between the two.

Cultural Clash

The notion of ‘clash’ usually indicates that there is not only a difference of opinion or opposition, but a confrontation and conflict, where emotions tend to run high. Clash, therefore, often involves violence. Moreover, *pacē* Huntington, ‘clash’ generally suggests an event of relatively short duration, as distinct from a struggle or a war. Of course, some clashes repeat, and so, overall, they may not be short term. Still, clashes are not as ‘comprehensive’ as many other forms of conflict.

There are, clearly, different kinds of clash. People may clash when they misunderstand one another but, once the misunderstanding is cleared up, the clash disappears. Disagreements – particularly when they are about values, beliefs, and practices, and not just facts – can also be, or lead to, clashes. Some clashes occur when there is a deep lack of mutual understanding, and the confrontation immediate and direct, such as that between the wealthy and the dispossessed, the urban and the rural, and the young and the old. But some clashes may occur when the parties seem to understand one another all too well – when the disagreement is not just over one value or belief, but over sets of values and sets of beliefs, and the corresponding social, political, and economic structures that go with them, such as those who press the demands of the market versus those who emphasise non-economic values.

Thus, clashes occur in varying degrees – as misunderstandings, disagreements, inconsistencies, impasses, conflicts, and perhaps even incommensurabilities.

Clashes, however, do not occur just among individuals; there can be clashes of businesses or teams; of sports fans; of communities and regions; of armies; of social or economic classes; and of ideologies. There can, presumably, be clashes of cultures as well – though, as noted above, the nature of the clashes can differ – which bears on how one might respond to them. A clash of *cultures*, then, can have the form of cultural misunderstandings, cultural disagreements, cultural incommensurabilities, cultural impasses, and overt cultural conflicts.
EXAMPLES OF CULTURAL CLASH

What are some examples of possible cultural clash? If culture is, indeed, ‘a collection of representations or ideas shared by and pervasive through a group of individuals,’ there can be clashes of ethnicities, of speakers of majority, and speakers of minority languages; of aboriginal groups versus ‘newcomers’; and of adherents of different worldviews or of different ideologies – such as libertarianism and communitarianism, or Marxism and liberalism.

Some of the clashes most often referred to today, however, are ones involving religion. Huntington himself writes “The revitalization of religion throughout much of the world is reinforcing … cultural differences.” Among the more obvious examples are the confrontations between secular authorities and religious groups (and, conversely, religious authorities and secularists) – but also those within and among religious groups themselves: for example, we see clashes among Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox; Shi’a and Sunni; and Hindu, Muslim, and Christian. In a more subtle way, these latter clashes or conflicts may be internal, among progressives and ‘traditionalists,’ but even among members of these groups, and so on. By way of example, we can think of the following kinds of conflicts and apparent clashes in which religion is said to play a role.

In India, particularly over the past two decades, there have been an increasing number of clashes between Hindu nationalist groups and Muslims, but also between these Hindu groups and Christians – what is called “communal violence.” Such clashes include the demolition of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 (allegedly supported by Hindu organizations like the Shiv Sena Party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad); the Godhra Train fire (in which 59 Hindu pilgrims, returning from the disputed site of the Babri Mosque, perished in a train fire at the Godhra railway station in Gujarat); and the subsequent Gujarat riots of 2002, where it is estimated that over a thousand people – mostly Muslims – were killed. Such clashes continue to this day. For example, organisations such as the Students Islamic Movement of India are believed by many to be responsible for the 11 July 2006 Mumbai train bombings, in which nearly 200 people were killed.

In some countries, such as Canada, there have been minor clashes and conflicts between established communities and minorities or recent immigrants (particularly those from Asia and Africa who bring with them strong religious commitments). For example, in 2006 in Montréal, there was a public controversy when the Jewish Orthodox Council for Community Relations insisted that a fitness centre replace some of its standard transparent windows, with opaque, frosted glass, in order “to prevent young boys and teenagers studying at the synagogue just across the street from the gym from having a full view of the women exercising.” Or again, in 2007, the town council of Hérouxville, Québec, passed a motion to establish a “code of behavior for immigrants, concerning practices which the residents
deemed unsuitable for life in Hérouxville – such as carrying a weapon to school (even if symbolic) and covering one's face." The council also declared that stoning women or burning them alive, female genital cutting, and the like were prohibited. And, perhaps to show that it was not just Islamic practices that concerned the town councillors, the council also declared that physicians “do not have to ask permission to perform blood transfusions” – a comment on a practice of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Such ‘clashes’ of religious values and practices with secular or different religious values and practices, led to wide public debate and the establishment of a government commission to determine how to identify, and work towards the ‘reasonable accommodation’ of, difference.

On a wider scale, one can note the tensions and clashes between southern European countries (where Christianity and Enlightenment values have formed the ethos) and the nearby predominantly Muslim countries. One example of such clash is the issue of the admission of Turkey into the European Union. While those opposed have often argued that there are a number of economic and political reasons why Turkey’s accession is not possible – for example, that Turkey has opened only 11 of 35 policy chapters that need to be negotiated – many have argued that, at its root, the actual issue is that there is a profound cultural difference between Turkey’s predominantly Islamic character and the secular or Christian traditions of the countries of the European Union.

Examples of clash are far from new, however, and four essays in this volume provide additional examples of apparent cultural clashes in history in which religion figures centrally.

One ‘classical’ case of cultural clash is that which arose between Christians and Jews in Europe during the High Middle Ages. In the thirteenth century, both secular and ecclesiastical authorities sought to ‘encourage’ Jews to convert to Christianity by forcing them to attend Christian evangelical sermons. Such a practice was clearly one in which there was cultural clash, and a person might well ask whether it could be justified. In “Thomas Aquinas on Communication between Christians and Jews: A Clash of Religious Cultures” (pp. 39-48, below), Jennifer Hart Weed approaches this question by focussing on Aquinas’ views on how Christians should interact with Jews. Aquinas’ view, interestingly, is that clash should be – and can be – avoided, and that authorities should recognise that natural justice and natural law ought to govern not only interaction but both political and theological edicts. This approach gives guidance on how relations between the two faiths should proceed, and helps to bridge the gap between clashing cultures.

David Bellusci examines the case of a clash within Christianity in the early sixteenth century – that between Roman Catholics and Lutherans during the Regensburg meeting of 1541, which was to consider a reconciliation between the two parties. In “Dialogue and Clash: Gasparo Contarini and the Colloquy of Regensburg of 1541” (pp. 49-62, below), Bellusci describes the encounters – and the clashes – between Cardinal
Gasparo Contarini, the papal legate, and the Lutherans, led by Philipp Melanchthon, over fundamental articles of faith. Bellusci argues that the clash was due, however, “not only to theological differences, but also the religio-political arena of sixteenth-century Europe” – that is, to broader cultural and political concerns.

An intriguing case of cultural ‘clash’ in which religion plays a role is found in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in northern Canada. Cecil Chabot (“Windigo Killings and the Clash of Cultures”; pp. 63-78, below) relates several examples of clashes of culture arising from incidents of ‘windigo’ possession. Northern aboriginal communities recognized that, in conditions of starvation, a person can be driven to apparent madness, accompanied or followed by violence and cannibalism; their explanation was the possession or transformation of the person by a (mythological) monster, the ‘windigo’ – and, when necessary, they would kill the ‘windigo.’ The question then became whether such acts would or should be prosecuted by the (non-aboriginal) legal authorities. Chabot points out that the cultural clash involved in this question is not just that of ‘indigenous culture’ versus ‘European.’ There is a more profound clash – between those who, in times of “great insecurity,” accept the appropriateness of an appeal to the supernatural, and those who insist that all accounts of events be naturalistic.

Finally, in “The Clash of Cultures in Canada: Apocalyptic Fear and Christian/Muslin Relations” (pp. 79-94, below), Martha F. Lee argues that clash among religions has a lengthy history in Canada, and that non-Christian religious faiths have long been the objects of intolerance by the majority, Christians. At present, the target of intolerance has tended to be Islam; such clash, Lee argues, often reflects a ‘millenarianism’ that is not restricted to Christian religious belief and that may also be political. Lee reviews some recent incidents in Canada. She suggests that while such clashes can generally be addressed by government action and the proper functioning of judicial institutions, public opinion favouring toleration and multiculturalism can have a crucial role as well.

Such instances of conflict and tension are, arguably, instances of a clash either among religions or among cultures in which religion has a central role. What we find in many of these cases, however, is that the clash was often not so much resolved as ignored or not fully addressed, and that the focus moved to larger theological or cultural or political debates. Is there any way in which people might productively react and respond to such cases?

RESPONDING TO CULTURAL CLASH

Assumptions

A first and perspicacious question is to ask whether what appears to be a cultural clash is, in fact, a cultural clash – whether a clash is, for
example, a product of differences of national or ethnic or cultural or religious identity, or whether it is the result of more specific geo-political factors. Thus, while conflicts between a ‘secular’ West and the Islamic world, for example, may seem to some to be about religion or religious (including cultural) identity, the issues at the base, it may be argued, are more political or economic – about access to resources such as oil, or about establishing spheres of economic and political influence for states or trans-national corporations. Or, again, some might hold that ‘clashes’ of religions are simply surrogate conflicts, rooted in political domination and oppression – or in efforts to resist them. For example, it is sometimes held that, despite the lengthy history of religious conflict in Northern Ireland, “The Troubles” – the clashes there from 1969 to 1997 – were more over economic oppression of the large working class (usually Catholic) population in the country than religion as such.

That being noted, however, many of the major clashes that one finds today are not just economic or political, and they frequently draw on other, more fundamental conflicts. Religious and cultural identities and allegiances are often the product of centuries and, therefore, far more enduring than differences of ideologies and politics. Even if the origin of some clashes is, for example, economic, they can become more broadly cultural – i.e., a matter of religious and cultural identity. Thus, clashes of established communities with new immigrants may initially have been over the availability of employment, but then be solidified over matters of race, culture, or religion. This is not to suggest, however, that such clashes are arbitrary or contingent. For many, debates about religion are debates about what is real and authoritative, not just about matters of private opinion or belief, and so religion will inevitably claim a place or a presence in the public arena as well.

Explaining Clash

A second concern is why there are cultural clashes that involve religion, and whether there is anything about religion that explains this. A number of responses, not mutually exclusive, have been offered.

a. Some have argued that there may be something characteristic of certain religious cultures that leads to opposition and conflict – for example, a tendency to have comprehensive doctrines or ‘universalistic’ visions, or to offer universalistic solutions. Clash among some monotheistic religious cultures, for example, seems to be due to the fact that they propose ‘universalistic’ accounts of reality, are resistant to revision, change, or compromise and, thereby, reject or exclude other accounts.

b. Some have said that the cultural clashes involving religion and religious identity are rooted, in part, in their respective philosophical presuppositions – for example, where one culture places a fundamental value on individual autonomy while another sees the person as a fundamentally social being – or, again, where one reflects a materialist and
naturalist account of reality and another the reality of the spiritual or the transcendent.

c. Some, such as Thomas Philbeck, argue that the source of the clash may lie elsewhere still. In “Metaphysical Commitments: A Precondition of Cultural Clash in Education and Society” (pp. 95-110, below), Philbeck holds that cultural clash may be rooted not in practices as such, but in the respective underlying metaphysical and, thereby, epistemological and value systems. Although it is clear that no member of any culture or society accepts all of that society’s beliefs, values, and rules entirely, there are still broad differences among cultures on the “foundational understandings about how the world is and should be organized.” Philbeck notes, by way of illustration, that the attitude towards authority in many countries of the Middle East is different from what one tends to find in the West. In the Middle East, one does not generally place authority – especially textual authority – into question; underlying this, Philbeck says, is a “metaphysical commitment to an ultimate reality wherein authority disseminates from a single source and is not to be questioned, except by those who have politico-religious power.” In the West, however, there seems to be more liberty to analyse and to challenge any authority – including texts, worldviews, and even “authoritarian hierarchies.” It is no surprise, therefore, that one finds cultural clash: “Islamic political and theological hierarchies call into question and challenge the foundations of Western Humanism and its consequent values” – and vice versa. While education has often been considered as a means of overcoming this divide, Philbeck argues that the ‘migration’ of the underlying assumptions and values of western education into non-western cultures, for example, may be far more difficult than first appears.

Addressing clash

A third question, however, is how specifically one might address apparent or real clashes. In the philosophical literature, one notes a number of different – again, not necessarily incompatible – responses, and the authors in the present volume follow suit. Answers have been given on two levels: general and practical.

General Responses

At the general level, one finds several ways that have been proposed concerning how cultural clash, particularly that involving religion, might be addressed.

One such way is suggested by Richard Rorty. In his 1993 Oxford Amnesty lecture on “Human Rights,” Rorty looks at examples of clash, war, and dehumanization – at that time, between Muslims and non-Muslims in the former Yugoslavia. Rorty’s solution to these clashes is not to provide rational arguments about what it is to be human, or how all human beings...
are equal, or how all are equally deserving of respect, and so on, but, rather, to focus “on manipulating sentiments, on sentimental education.” It is in this latter way that “we” will come to see others as “like us” and, thereby, Rorty thinks, will be less likely to degrade and dehumanize those of other cultures and traditions.

A second, very different way is the model of public reason associated with John Rawls. Such an approach requires that people set aside their own comprehensive views of the good, accept a particular political theory (i.e., democratic liberalism) for procedural purposes, and agree to give ‘publicly accessible’ reasons for their views if they wish to participate in debates in the public sphere. This, Rawls says, ensures a political culture of liberty and mutual respect, where citizens take each other seriously, and ‘clash’ can thereby be avoided or at least managed. The job of philosophers, then, is to help to articulate this model of public reason and the corresponding basic practical principles of action.

In “Liberalism, Communitarianism, and the Clash of Cultures” (pp. 111-135, below), David Lea provides a response that has affinities with that of Rawls. Lea argues that the claims of clashes and oppositions of cultures—such as that of an “individualistic West versus the socially-determined Islamic tradition”—are exaggerated, and based on the presupposition of an essentialist notion of community and culture (which, Lea writes, is a product of communitarian approaches to political philosophy). Lea argues that such an understanding of community and culture has led to a “de-universalizing” of liberal principles, making them “cultural rather than transcultural realities,” and that this has had a number of serious consequences. First, if these liberal principles and values are regarded as part of a particular culture, and not objective principles, they lose their normative force. Second, when communitarian cultural values are regarded as a part of “one’s way of life,” a person will tend to have an undue and uncritical attachment to them. Finally, the “de-universalizing” of liberal principles suggests that there is a real, incommensurable opposition among different cultures, where in fact there is not. Lea insists that a commitment to fundamental universal human rights, following a broadly Kantian model, is necessary to avoid discussion collapsing into a cultural relativism and, thereby, leading to cultural clash.

Another way of responding to instances of cultural clash is suggested by the recent work of Jürgen Habermas. Like Rawls, Habermas believes that we need to create a political culture of mutual respect and ‘civility.’ The way to do this, however, is to encourage the widest possible public or citizen participation. While politicians and those representing public authorities must observe ‘public reason,’ this stricture need not apply to all citizens who wish to participate in debate. Moreover, to encourage participation, societies need to avoid imposing an asymmetrical burden on believers. Thus, in those cases where believers are called on to provide reasons in a way intelligible to those who do not share that belief, secularists must themselves engage in “a self-reflective transcending of a
secularist self-understanding of Modernity,”31 and express their views accordingly.

The work of Charles Taylor suggests yet another approach to cultural clash.32 Taylor acknowledges the tension or clash between contemporary secularism and religion, particularly in the West. As a philosopher who seeks to promote wide civic engagement in the public sphere, Taylor thinks that people of faith need to respond to – but also, to an extent, accept – secularism; as a Christian, he is interested in the future of Christianity in such an environment. In “Authenticity and Community: An Inquiry Concerning the Future of Christianity” (pp. 163-182, below), Walter Schultz describes Taylor’s account of the rise of authenticity and how authenticity and individual integrity need to be realised and preserved in the contemporary world. For Taylor, there is no fundamental conflict between people of religious faith and those without. Taylor holds, however, that “people of faith must grow to accommodate pluralism, democracy and freedom of conscience.” Taylor’s response to ‘clash,’ then, is to insist on adopting a commitment to the other, on promoting human flourishing, and on defending a vision of civic mutuality. This, Taylor writes, is a central task for the Christianity of the future.

In certain respects, Taylor’s project is anticipated by and parallel to that of, the French Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain (1882-1973). Schultz points out, specifically, Maritain’s emphasis on the importance of “acknowledging the sanctity of each individual person,” which is exemplified by Maritain’s defence of an integral humanism and the natural, inalienable rights of human beings – a defence which had a profound influence on the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Maritain’s work, then, offers another ‘solution’ to cultural clash; this is elaborated at length by Mario D’Souza (in “Being, Becoming, and the Philosophical Transformation of the Self”; pp. 183-194, below). D’Souza notes that Maritain was well aware of the cultural and religious diversity that began to influence Western democratic societies after the end of the Second World War, and that one of Maritain’s objectives was the promotion of civic friendship; this is key to any genuine dialogue. While some have proposed that such a model of friendship or dialogue could be imposed ‘externally,’ D’Souza demurs. Instead, he calls for an attentiveness to what underlies this dialogue – the value of and respect for the person. This is, D’Souza notes, the basis of Maritain’s Christian pluralism and integral humanism. Maritain’s view is that “personality tends by nature to communion,” so that not only do persons require membership in society, both for their “dignity” and for their “needs,”33 but there must be an intercultural dialogue. Such a dialogue can help to avoid or mitigate clash, so long as it respects the person and, thereby, avoids materialism, consumerism, and moral relativism on the one hand, but also exclusivist, intolerant religion on the other.

A further, provocative response to cultural clash has been the development of a ‘global ethic.’ In “Global Ethic as a Response to the Clash
of Cultures” (pp. 195-202, below), Uchenna Okeja follows the suggestion of Hans Küng that a global ethic – “a fundamental consensus on binding values, unconditional standards and personal attitudes”34 – can address such clash. This ethic, Okeja insists, is nothing new. It may be found, as Küng writes, in all major world religions. Okeja notes, however, that a global ethic is not obviously a universal ethics – that it is, in the first instance, an ‘inductive’ claim, and not a universally-justified set of principles. Nevertheless, he insists that an argument for such principles may be able to be made – and here he draws on insights from the African philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu, concerning the fundamental moral notion of “sympathetic impartiality” to which people from different traditions can subscribe without abandoning their own basic moral beliefs.

Among the responses that are to be found in the contemporary discussion of cultural clash, then, there are calls for sentimental education, for public reason, for the respect of universal principles, for a ‘neutral,’ secular public space, for (a religiously-inspired, intercultural) dialogue, for a global ethic, and more. The key questions, however, are whether and how, practically, such responses might work.

Practical Measures in Addressing Clash

The issue of how to respond practically to the preceding challenges is a difficult one, and many of the authors of the papers in the present volume seem to regard this as a matter of public policy, not philosophy. There are, however, exceptions.

For Charles Taylor, the practical response to cultural clash – particularly clash that involves religious identity and religious belief – is to start ‘at home’; that, before being concerned with intercultural dialogue or dialogue among believers and non-believers, it may prove more fruitful to address the clashes within one’s own society, and attempt to create a space in which one can work with those with whom one disagrees. Solange Lefèbvre provides insights into this approach in her “Secularism According to Charles Taylor and Gérard Bouchard: The Bouchard-Taylor Report on Cultural and Religious Accommodation in Quebec” (pp. 203-224, below). Lefèbvre notes that, in his role as a co-commissioner of the “Consultative Commission on Accommodation Practices related to Cultural Differences” (established by the Canadian province of Québec, and which filed its report in 2008), Taylor dealt specifically with how “reasonable accommodation” of diverse religious practices should be managed, what model of ‘secularism’ – or, better, “laicity” – should be adopted, and how such a model might inform both political and judicial decisions. As Lefèbvre explains, Taylor’s answer is that reasonable accommodation is not required if a practice interferes with the function of a person who serves the public, if it contravenes state neutrality, or, more generally, if a practice (e.g., the wearing of a religious symbol) has a discriminating character. Taylor will admit that the specific character of this accommodation is context
dependent – that some secular societies, such as Québec, may expect a higher standard of state neutrality (e.g., concerning public prayer or the display of religious symbols, such as a crucifix) than other, less strongly secular, societies.

In “Integral Humanism or Exclusive Humanism? Reconsidering Maritain’s Political Philosophy” (pp. 225-240, below), David Klassen outlines what he believes would be Jacques Maritain’s ‘practical response’ to cultural clash. Klassen shows that Maritain (like Taylor) challenges the “self-sufficing humanism or exclusive humanism” of modernity which seems to clash fundamentally with religious humanisms that place human beings “in a larger spiritual and cosmic order.” Maritain’s general solution, according to Klassen, is a Christian pluralism – an “integral humanism” – that acknowledges “the autonomy of the temporal sphere,” “the equal dignity of all human persons,” and “the freedom of persons to pursue their spiritual perfection free of coercion by the state.” More specifically, Maritain calls for the creation of a democratic community bound together by Christian values of fraternal love and openness to the transcendent. In particular, Klassen continues, Maritain argues for the presence of a corps of activists – “little flocks” – which would focus on bringing Christian values that are also good secular values to “the sanctification of [their] immediate vicinity, which [they] then attempt to widen.” Such groups, then, will engage in a “common work,” but also ensure that public discourse remains open to transcendent truth without becoming religious or sectarian.

Sari Nusseibeh, in “Cultural Clash and the Moralist Quest” (pp. 157-162, below), offers another practical response, rooted in an analysis of the nature of the human person. Nusseibeh begins by pointing out that clash is almost inevitable. He writes that, if human beings are to have a special status in the world, it is either because of their relation to the divine, or something in their very natures. Emphasis on the former, however, can lead to an absolutism, and emphasis on the latter to a relativism – and both can therefore lead to clash. Nevertheless, Nusseibeh argues that, even though there will be cultural clash, there is also evidence of a gradual convergence across cultures and traditions, religious and non-religious alike. (Indeed, in recent years, one notes, there have been a number of UNESCO-sponsored events on the “Dialogue of Civilizations.”) Nusseibeh invites his readers, therefore, to continue to work in a way that continues and promotes this convergence.

The authors in this volume, then, offer a number of ways to respond to cultural clash, and all are hopeful that such clash can be addressed. But might religion have a role in addressing cultural clash? Religion, as we have seen, has been drawn into the debates and disagreements among various cultures and world views. It seems to have been part of some clashes, responsible for some clashes, and at the centre of some clashes. Yet, even if this is so, might religion, in turn, be capable of providing a ‘solution’ to cultural clash?
The Role of Religion in Responding to Cultural Clash

In “Religion, Culture, and the Intellectuals” (pp. 19-38, below), Richard Schaefer warns us to be wary about attributing the source or catalyst of cultural clash to religion. Many observers, he notes, see religion as fundamentally a matter of culture, and tend to assume that religion and its truth claims reflect the same dynamics – and are subject to the same criteria – as knowledge in general (e.g., concerning truth and falsity). This leads them to see the relation of the secular and the religious as a clash of cultures. Schaefer argues, however, that religion is not just a matter of culture, and that religion does not always give knowledge and meaning; indeed, it can frustrate meaning – it can be ambivalent, unsettling, and subversive. Religion as such – i.e., apart from its institutions – may not lead to clash among religions or with secularism. Schaefer concludes, then, that a broader understanding of religion will help in recognizing its proper place within culture, and that people should therefore be reluctant to see religion as such as a contributor to clash. In other words, more awareness of the role of religion in relation to culture may help in understanding how to respond to cultural clash.

Several of the authors in the present volume argue that religion does, in fact, have a place in addressing cultural clash. Like Charles Taylor, they argue that the Christian religious believer, for example, must take secularism seriously. There are, however, different ways of doing so. For Taylor, Christianity offers a model of the separation of religion from the secular, exemplified in the notion of “render unto Caesar....” But Christianity can also offer a model of charity, self-sacrifice, renouncing or overcoming violence, and so on, that is expressed in the notion of loving one’s enemies. This latter approach enjoins religious believers to engage secularism constructively, and it is one which Christian institutions, for instance, should better emulate.

Leslie Armour (“The Idea of Religion and the Clash of Cultures”; pp. 135-156, below) argues that “the idea of religion” itself may provide a solution to how to resolve or avoid clash. Armour sees religion as a principle of convergence and unity; it involves people relating to a reality which then provides orientation and direction. What would serve as a genuine source of orientation must, Armour writes, be intelligible, objective, and morally acceptable. This is (what he calls) an infinite mind. As human beings move towards this source of unity for orientation – this is a fundamentally rational activity – they form communities. Thus, resolving clash and establishing unity is something that is done at the ‘mental’ level. Such a move to unity does not, however, exclude diversity. Infinite mind cannot be adequately expressed by any finite concept, and requires an infinity of points of view in order to be manifested. Diversity, then, is what we should expect to find in the world. Armour insists that there is no incompatibility among “the idea of religion,” unity, and diversity, and that
the move to community means building a public culture which will undermine violence, clash, and hatred.

Similarly, in “Establishing Relations through Truth and Love” (pp. 241-250, below), Jean-Nil Chabot’s solution to clash, particularly where it involves religion, is not some kind of Rawlsian public reason but a metaphysical principle. The principle Chabot offers, which is also practical (i.e., applies to action and promotes a common good), is love – for, Chabot writes, love tends to unity without dissolving distinctness. The concrete product of this, Chabot argues, is democracy – an evangelical democracy or a democracy informed by love – which is personalist, exhibits a properly-oriented economy, and shows solidarity. But it is also, Chabot says, neutral with regard to religious affiliation. The task of philosophers, then, is not only to identify metaphysical principles (such as love and the nature of the human person), but also to inform leaders of them. So again we see the importance of building a public culture – this time, of freedom, love and, truth. Taking inspiration from encyclicals of Benedict XVI, Chabot argues that it is God that is the foundation of the hope for such a culture.

In each of these latter cases, then, the authors signal the importance of understanding what religion is, in order to determine what it is about religion that putatively leads to or, as the case may be, addresses clash.

Religion is, in its very etymology, binding and unifying, but there are also ambiguities, tensions, and even ‘mysteries,’ in it. If, as suggested above – and as developed in some of the essays that follow – religion is not to be identified simply with an institution or a set of doctrines, but as an experience, it is – it must be – ‘open ended,’ for experience is open-ended. Indeed, if religion has this character of being both unifying and open ended, of serving to bind but also as sometimes being ambiguous and incomplete, then one can see the possibility of change and development in religion in response to culture, and vice versa – and also see religion contributing to a dialogue among cultures.

Schaefer, Armour, and Chabot all suggest, though in different ways, that the solution to clash involves finding a principle of unity – not, however, of uniformity – amid diversity. Religion or “the idea of religion” can have a role in addressing clash. The notion of religion in the broad sense – as open-ended, responsive to novelty, and recognizing diversity – is also, arguably, present in all the great world religions.

For religion to have a role in addressing cultural clash is not without its challenges. It requires reflection on the nature of religion, and it will undoubtedly meet with opposition. Moreover, some past efforts at unity, inspired by religion, have not worked – and they have been undermined by economic and political interference, by competing values, and even by religious institutions. Still, these three authors seem to agree that, despite what one often hears, religion can have a positive role in addressing cultural clash.
CONCLUSION

A person does not need to accept Huntington’s account of a “clash of civilizations” to recognize that a significant source of conflict today is people’s cultural – including their religious – identities. If culture is, as has been suggested above, ‘a collection of representations or ideas shared by and pervasive through a group of individuals,’ it involves looking at reality through these ideas and the various related practices. It is almost self-evident that the world is home to a diversity of cultures and cultural identities – and, given the many differences among them, there will almost inevitably be clashes.

One aim of the essays that follow, then, is to clarify problems – and, as we have seen, the authors approach this issue of cultural clash from a variety of perspectives: from history, sociology, anthropology, political science, religious studies, theology, and philosophy. While some events that may appear to be clashes of culture may not be so on closer inspection, there are still many cases where cultures – or, if one prefers, world views, or perspectives, or “dominant ideas” – do clash.

As the papers in this volume remind us, religion often appears to be part of such clashes, for religions are, among other things, sets of dominant ideas – ‘collections of representations pervasive throughout a group of individuals.’ In this sense, then, religions are not only a part of cultures, they may sometimes constitute cultures.

Still, religions are not just cultures in at least the following sense: while some see cultures as independent of and, at a deep level, incommensurable with, one another, religion is not a culture or part of a culture in this way – i.e., in a way that separates it from other cultures. Religion is not and should not be reduced to the level of a cultural curio or regarded as simply a way of looking at the world. Besides, it is important to recognise that culture is not just those ideas and representations that are different and distinctive of a community, but all the dominant ideas that are shared by or are pervasive through a group.

The authors of the papers that follow acknowledge that there are clashes of cultures, and that they are of various kinds and degrees. But they also suggest that there are ways of responding to these clashes and that, in at least many cases which attract our attention these days, there are no inherent, inevitable, irresolvable, conflicts.

What is the role of religion in this response? Some of the authors in this volume hold that, even if religion is a part of culture, it is not limited by culture, and that religion may have resources to respond to cultural clash – even where religion itself seems to be involved.

For the authors in this volume, then, the way of addressing cultural clash is not necessarily by building new institutions or passing laws, but by changing culture. Indeed, a recognition of the positive character of religion or, at least, of the values that animate religion, may be a way to address conflict and clash, and, thereby, to effect such a change.
What directions should future investigation and discussion on this topic take? How can cultures move from conflict or apparent conflict to unity? Is it possible to justify the basic principles of action that are required for such a unity to be achieved? Will people abandon their right to pursue their own good in their own way, and instead be open to a more common or unifying good? While the authors in the papers that follow provide some suggestions, they also invite their readers to pursue these questions, and to engage, concretely, the preceding and related challenges.

NOTES

3 Huntington writes: “The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural” (“The Clash of Civilizations?,” p. 22). In the subsequent book, Huntington writes:

In the post-Cold War world, the most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural. Peoples and nations are attempting to answer the most basic question humans can face: Who are we? And they are answering that question in the traditional way human beings have answered it, by reference to the things that mean most to them. People define themselves in terms of ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs, and institutions. They identify with cultural groups: tribes, ethnic groups, religious communities, nations, and, at the broadest level, civilizations.” Clash of Civilizations, p. 21 (emphasis mine).


10 Eliot, Notes Towards the Definition of Culture, p. 120.

11 Eliot, Notes Towards the Definition of Culture, p. 94. See also Eliot’s comment that “Culture cannot altogether be brought to consciousness; and the culture of which we are wholly conscious is never the whole of culture” (p. 107).

12 Eliot, Notes Towards the Definition of Culture, p. 37.

13 Eliot, Notes Towards the Definition of Culture, p. 31.


18 Thus, it is fair to say (as many critics of Huntington have pointed out) that there can be clashes of cultures within states and regions, and not primarily ‘externally,’ among what Huntington identifies as ‘civilizations.’


22 CBC News, “Hérouxville drops some rules from controversial code,” 13
In February 2007, the government of the province of Québec established a two-person commission – the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences – to investigate the issue of reasonable accommodation. One of the two commissioners was the Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor.

On September 18, 2004, Pope Benedict XVI (then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) gave a speech to pastoral workers in the diocese of Velletri. In the newspaper Il Giornale del Popolo (Lugano, Switzerland), Ratzinger was reported to have said:

Historically and culturally, Turkey has little in common with Europe; for this reason, it would be a great error to incorporate it into the European Union. It would be better for Turkey to become a bridge between Europe and the Arab world, or to form together with that world its own cultural continent. Europe is not a geographical concept, but a cultural one, formed in a sometimes conflictual historical process centered upon the Christian faith, and it is a matter of fact that the Ottoman empire was always in opposition to Europe.


For Habermas’ recent work, see note 5 above.

Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere,” p. 15.


CHAPTER I
RELIGION, CULTURE, AND THE INTELLECTUALS

RICHARD SCHAEFER

INTRODUCTION

In 2005, when Stanley Fish predicted that religion would be the next ‘hot topic’ in the academy, he couldn’t have known how right he was. Indeed, in the last few years, religion seems to be everywhere. Blogs, books, conferences and journals all unite in declaring that religion is back. The editors of the Journal of the American Academy of Religion have declared that “never in the JAAR’s history has religion been so prominent a factor in the public consciousness as it is today.” And some have even gone so far as to declare that the time is right for a ‘religious turn.’ In my own field, history, more historians now identify ‘religion’ as a research interest than any other sub-field. The theme of the next national conference is “History, Society, and the Sacred,” and both the Organization of American Historians and the American Historical Association have stressed the need for students and teachers to focus more on religion. One way of interpreting this growing interest in religion is to see it as part of the ebb and flow of ‘hot topics’ that structure scholarly work. Growing out of impulses inside the academy, such trends can sometimes serve as bellwether indications of broader shifts in society. It is worth noting, therefore, that current interest in religion was presaged in some measure by the more mystical strains of postmodern theorizing at the end of the last century. Although seemingly paradoxical, given the overall postmodern rejection of stable foundations and authoritative ‘master narratives,’ there is no denying that encounters with figures like Walter Benjamin and Emmanuel Levinas prompted some to rethink the significance of religion, if in admittedly unorthodox ways. John Caputo, Gianni Vattimo, Slavoj Žižek, Hent de Vries, and even Jacques Derrida are just some of the thinkers who have cast religion as a potent resource for opposing the destructive realities of life in advanced industrial, technological society. Though their vision of ‘religion without religion’ might strike the average churchgoer as unrecognizable, their readiness to look afresh at religion has been an important stimulus to the broader rethinking of religion taking place today. At the very least, these efforts have helped lift the taboo that has prevented intellectuals from taking religion seriously at all for so long. Reflecting on this new situation among the intellectual elite, René Girard observes:
The Christian religion cannot even be mentioned in certain settings, or it can only be discussed in order to keep it under control, keep it in check, on the pretext that there is nothing positive in it, indeed on the grounds that it bears prime and sole responsibility for the horrors of the modern world. And it seems to me that there is a remarkable irony in the fact that the people who completely abandoned this tradition are now beginning to take a fresh interest in these problems – especially the most influential sector of the avant garde.…

In addition to impulses within the academy, however, there is no overlooking how the biggest impetus to rethinking religion today comes from outside the academy, namely, in the decidedly public resurgence of religion around the world. Pope Benedict XVI’s remarks concerning violence and Islam; reactions to the publication of the cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed as a terrorist; President George W. Bush’s endorsement of intelligent design in the science classroom; Anglican Archbishop Rowan Williams’s suggestion that Sharia law be adopted in the United Kingdom; the Swiss decision to ban building minarets; all of these are part of a sea-change that is pushing religion into the centre of discussions in the public sphere. Though we must take care not to give the impression that religion lingered merely in the shadows in the twentieth century, it is hard to underestimate its significance in the twenty-first. It is furthermore hard to overlook, as José Casanova argues, that what is decidedly new about religion today, in its various forms, is its determination “to participate in the very struggles to define and set the modern boundaries between the private and public spheres, between system and life-world.…” Rather than accept the right of state and other authorities to enforce a particular vision of its proper role, in other words, what defines public religion in the twenty-first century is its willingness to “rais[e] questions publicly about the autonomous pretensions of the differentiated [social] spheres to function without regard to moral norms or human considerations.” What is decisive, in this context, is not religion’s desire to overwhelm the barriers that secular states use to fix the legal rules governing religion, or to impose its agenda on the rest of society; for very often these same rules are mobilized by religious groups to defend their autonomy from encroachment by the state. What is decisive is religion’s refusal to “accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity…[and] secularization had reserved for them.” The resurgence of public religion thus poses a challenge, not only to governments, school boards, and newspaper editors, but to all those who articulate the basic theoretical architecture of modernity in various ways. For Casanova, the “deprivatization” of religion has thus helped expose the normative roots of secularization, without being a simple reversal of the “thesis of the
differentiation and emancipation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms.\textsuperscript{12}

If public religion challenges secularization as a normative vision of the proper place of religion in the modern world, then it most certainly also calls to account those who have heralded this vision for so long, namely, intellectuals. Secularization and its critique are deeply enmeshed in presuppositions structuring the fabric of modern consciousness. Pulling at this fabric therefore can’t help but call into question the very nature of the task of the intellectual who has done so much to weave secularization into it. And though in this essay I focus on the classic type of public intellectual, most of what I say is relevant to the broader cadre of academics and journalists commenting on religion today. On all sides of the culture wars, intellectuals of every stripe are weighing in on what religion is or should be, and their voices will not be irrelevant to the outcome of these debates. It is therefore important to take stock, however provisionally, of how they approach religion as a topic in general. In contrast to one very popular interpretation, I suggest that the challenge for intellectuals might not be to debate the merits of an Enlightenment versus a multi-cultural sensibility.\textsuperscript{13} The deeper challenge might very well be to accept that culture itself is not the best perspective for thinking about religion.

\textbf{RELIGION AND CULTURE}

There is no room in this short essay to give a comprehensive overview of the many efforts aimed at re-evaluating secularization, or of the increasingly voluminous literature on the new face of global religion. One tell-tale sign of the power of this discourse, however, has been Peter Berger’s de-conversion from the secularization thesis. In 1999, Berger openly reversed his previous conviction that secularization entailed a large-scale waning of religion, and declared that “[t]he world today…is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever.” In order to explain how a “whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labeled ‘secularization theory’ is essentially mistaken,” Berger pointed to the lack of a truly global perspective on religion and the failure to account for the “interplay between secularizing and counter-secularizing forces.” But he also pointed to the way secularization has penetrated important strata of society:

There exists an international subculture composed of people with Western-type higher education, especially in the humanities and social sciences that is indeed secularized. This subculture is the principal ‘carrier’ of progressive, Enlightened beliefs and values. While its members are relatively thin on the ground, they are very influential, as they control the institutions that provide the ‘official’ definitions of reality, notably the educational system, the media of mass
communication, and the higher reaches of the legal system. They are remarkably similar all over the world today, as they have been for a long time (though, as we have seen, there are also defectors from this subculture, especially in the Muslim countries).\textsuperscript{14}

Cutting across national boundaries, this “globalized elite culture” is the chief opponent of “religious upsurges…[of] a strongly populist character” that, Berger now admits, intellectuals have misunderstood and misconstrued for so long. In order to remedy this mistake and better understand this broad-based, popular “religious impulse” – almost wholly indifferent to the secularization theories of “professors at elite American universities” – he now advocates what is known as the “desecularization” thesis.

Berger offers important insight into the way intellectuals have played a role in transforming secularization into a broader ideology through education and other channels of ‘elite culture.’ But in so doing, he also reinforces a view of religion that reduces it, ultimately, to culture. Indeed, it is telling that Berger does not summarize the conflict between the “globalized elite culture” he identifies and “populist” religious resurgence in class terms, or as politics, but as one of warring subcultures. In so doing, he affirms the centrality of “culture” in contemporary criticism, and blunts what might be seen as the more difficult issues raised in these conflicts by subsuming them under the all-too labile idea of “culture wars.” This is not idiosyncratic, but symptomatic of the prevalence of culture as the dominant analytic rubric of the last thirty years or so.\textsuperscript{15} As perhaps the primary instrument for interpreting human affairs today, culture stresses the contingency of religious practice over against the formal rules of doctrine and membership, and elevates local meaning-production over against the prescriptive force of institutional authorities.\textsuperscript{16} Part of the broader shift away from Marxian and other categories of social analysis in the 1980s and 90s, culture has enabled scholars to think more deeply about agency, about how people creatively inhabit the social worlds that they ultimately make and remake in the course of their lives. In a statement that is emblematic of this trend, Edward Said defines culture as “all those practices…that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms.”\textsuperscript{17}

Though perhaps most forcefully articulated by anthropologists, nevertheless, culture is a topos that cuts across various academic interests and disciplinary boundaries. In my own field of history, culture has helped historians uncover the rich texture of meaning in local, popular practices like carnivals, pilgrimages, and even pornography.\textsuperscript{18} It has, furthermore, helped move historians away from the more arid analyses of society and structure into the richer dimensions of mentalités, and vastly increased our confidence in mapping lived experience as a complex web of knowledge, suspicion, guesswork and desire.\textsuperscript{19} But if cultural analysis, broadly
understood, has yielded important advances in how we understand the world as a dynamic place, it is important to acknowledge an overwhelming reductionism still in place when it comes to religion. In their recent volume *Seeing Things Their Way*, Alister Chapman, John Coffey and Brad S. Gregory point to how historians overwhelmingly prefer “to explain religious beliefs as a mask for more fundamental social, economic, or political interests.” In their own effort to counter this preference in the history of ideas, they insist that “religious ideas are not more or less intrinsically intelligible than political or philosophical ideas; that religious ideas are at least as important in understanding the general course of history and the texture of past societies as political or philosophical ideas; and that religious ideas (like political, philosophical or scientific ideas) need to be understood first and foremost in their own terms....”

Of course, it is precisely the desire to see things “in their own terms” that has made cultural analysis so attractive. For Claude Lévi-Strauss, it was only within the totality of a culture that “superstitions” could be understood as “a kind of wisdom” rather than silly or irrational beliefs. Nevertheless, I want to indicate how there is still an important reductionism at work in the preference for seeing religion as culture in recent debates. This comes in two forms. The crasser version appears in the form of what Mahmood Mamdani has dubbed “culture talk.” Culture talk, “assumes that every culture has a tangible essence that defines it, and then explains politics as a consequence of that essence.” In the hands of policy analysts and media commentators, culture talk has recently become an especially popular way of framing discussions of geo-politics, and of reintroducing religion back into public consciousness. However, it typically presents religion as the unreflective core of culture. In the case of discussions of Islam and terrorism, this takes the following form:

In post 9/11 America, Culture Talk focuses on Islam and Muslims who presumably made culture only at the beginning of creation, as some extraordinary, prophetic act. After that, it seems Muslims just conformed to culture. According to some, our culture seems to have no history, no politics, and no debates, so that all Muslims are just plain bad. According to others, there is a history, a politics, even debates, and there are good Muslims, and bad Muslims. In both versions, history seems to have petrified into a lifeless custom of an antique people who inhabit antique lands. Or could it be that culture here stands for habit, for some kind of instinctive activity with rules that are inscribed in early founding texts, usually religious, and mummified in early artifacts?

While Mamdani is very careful to distinguish between “the culture studied by anthropologists – face-to-face, intimate, local, and lived –
Richard Schaefer

[and]…talk of culture [that]…comes in large geo-packages,” this preference for good over bad cultural analysis still affirms the power of culture as the predominant intellectual instrument for cognizing religion. It also suggests that we be on the lookout for other, perhaps subtler, forms of reducing religion to culture.

The preference for seeing religion as culture is not always due to the imposition, as Berger sees it, of an elite agenda on the uneducated majority.\(^\text{25}\) The desire to view religion as culture can be equally rooted in a sincere desire to plumb the depths of religious experience from the inside. This, of course, is the starting point for Clifford Geertz’s essay “Religion as a Cultural System,” which has served as an influential model for a cultural approach to religion since its publication in 1966.\(^\text{26}\) In it, Geertz defines religion as “a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.”\(^\text{27}\) And to grasp the “social and psychological role of religion” means “understanding how it is that men’s notions…of the ‘really real’ and the dispositions these notions induce in them, color their sense of the reasonable, the practical, the humane, and the moral.”\(^\text{28}\) From this perspective, religion is especially important because it subsumes threatening realities within an overarching order that gives them meaning. Interwoven with the total range of cultural practices of a society, religion manages the disruptive potential of ignorance, pain, and injustice by reassuring people that its version of a fundamental order can withstand chaos by habituating them via a “prior acceptance of authority” whose formative experience is ritual. The “religious perspective” is thus based on the axiom: “he who would know must first believe.”\(^\text{29}\) Believers immerse themselves in rituals in order to experience the authority of the order they ultimately find so reassuring against a threatening world. For Geertz:

Having ritually ‘leapt’…into the framework of meaning which religious conceptions define, and the ritual ended, returned again to the common-sense world, a man is – unless, as sometimes happens, the experience fails to register – changed. And as he is changed, so also is the common-sense world, for it is now seen as but the partial form of a wider reality which corrects and completes it.\(^\text{30}\)

Geertz’s approach to religion foregrounds the ways that people inhabit worlds of their making, worlds in which they seek to live satisfying productive lives. It challenges the view, common in his day and not uncommon in our own, that religion is imposed on people by institutions, parents, or states. Nevertheless, one can point to problems in the way Geertz universalizes a conception of religion based on a cognitivist approach to
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culture. By construing symbols as tools of understanding, as Talal Asad points out, Geertz construes religion as theory, rather than recognizing it as historically situated systems of authority for distributing real power in concrete situations. Geertz’s conclusion that religion helps people live with “ignorance, pain, and injustice,” moreover, hardly seems to differentiate religion from any philosophical or ethical system, or capture much that is religion. For Asad, “Geertz’s treatment of religious belief [therefore]…is a modern, privatized Christian one…to the extent that it emphasizes the priority of belief as a state of mind.” Even more problematic perhaps is the fact that Geertz’s approach “makes it possible to think of religion as a more ‘primitive,’ a less ‘adult’ mode of coming to terms with the Human Condition,” since it implicitly argues that there are more sophisticated ways of coming to terms with the same threatening realities. There is thus in Geertz, who is certainly not to be confused with the kind of culture talk that Mamdani analyzes, nevertheless a reduction to culture at work that blunts our understanding of religion. In the next section, I will try to show how this same pattern is still very much alive in the recent work of high-profile intellectuals, and how it stems from a conviction that the intellectual’s role is to engage in a certain form of critique.

RELIGION AND THE INTELLECTUALS

Intellectuals are not immune from their own version of culture talk. Though most are careful to avoid a ‘clash of civilizations’ model that reduces everything to fundamental and irreconcilable religious worldviews, intellectuals exhibit a marked tendency to see religion as fundamentally about culture. One reason for this, of course, is because it puts religion within a multicultural framework where it serves to shore up identity. Defenders of multiculturalism thus argue that religion serves multiple functions and cannot be confined to worship alone. As a core component of identity, religion should remain unfettered to the maximum degree possible. Detractors of multiculturalism, by the same token, argue precisely the same thing, but from a different angle. They claim that national cultures cannot thrive if undermined by religions that inevitably foster competing identities because of their encompassing – cultural – claim on the whole person. Both sides prefer to see religion as primarily cultural, because it enables a more forceful argument. The deeper reason that intellectuals reduce religion to culture, however, is that it offers a generative source of ultimate meaning, and here Geertz’s approach can be taken as paradigmatic: in the face of reality, what religion does is provide answers to the question of why things are the way they are. Reduced to culture in this way, religion is therefore, in principle, no different than any other meaning system, and indeed, can be compared and evaluated according to a variety of non-religious criteria. This also enables intellectuals to unmask religion as about something else, and maximize their critical insight into the complexity of society. I will now
try to illustrate this critical move in a short excursus on Judith Butler and Jürgen Habermas.

In 2007, Judith Butler delivered the annual British Journal of Sociology lecture at the London School of Economics. Subsequently published as “Sexual politics, torture, and secular time,” her essay is a thoughtful commentary of the way that assumptions about modernity and temporality lend themselves to “a kind of dogmatism” that treats culture as “a uniform and binding groundwork of norms.” As an example, she cites the requirement that new immigrants to the Netherlands be forced to view images of homosexual couples kissing as a precondition to application for immigration. Though intended to foster tolerance, Butler asks whether the requirement might also be seen as “a broader effort on the part of the state to demand coercively that they [new immigrants] rid themselves of their traditional religious beliefs and practices in order to gain entry into the Netherlands?” Indeed, the episode raises the broader issue of how a distinctly modern philosophy of history, in which religion and tradition are figured as ‘other,’ reinforces a “model of cultural pluralism” that is figured as...a set of cultural norms that are understood as internally self-sufficient.” Incontrovertible, uncontestable, and ultimately fundamentalist, “liberal freedoms [are thus] understood to rely upon a hegemonic culture, one that is called ‘modernity’ and relies on a certain progressive account of increasing freedoms.” All pretensions to the contrary, this view too easily becomes the “basis for sanctioning forms of cultural and religious hatred and abjection.”

Butler then moves on to discuss a similar overlap between sexual politics and culture in France, and draws an important parallel between the way French culture prioritizes the homosexual family and the theology of Pope Benedict XVI. Both endorse the primacy of heterosexuality and patriarchal families, even though the universality of sexual difference is communicated differently in both cases, that is to say, as culture and as nature respectively. Though intended to show the still potent Christian roots of French culture, and raise “the question of whether this symbolic order…functions in alliance with theological norms governing kinship,” Butler’s analysis can be read another way; namely, as denuding the Pope’s position of theology and revealing it to be an embodiment of the culture that she decries as dogmatic. To see this requires first understanding her own positive definition of religion as “a matrix for subject formation whose final form is not determined in advance; a discursive matrix for the articulation and disputation of values, a field of contestation.” Now, while I very much agree that we should understand religion as incomplete and a site of near constant contestation, as I will outline shortly, Butler’s declaration that religion is ultimately about the “articulation and disputation of values” once again lays bare the cognitivist prejudice that we saw first in Geertz. Once again, religion is soft theory; and theology is denuded of anything that doesn’t conduce to the “matrix of subject formation.” Religion is therefore
really culture, and it is bad culture to the extent that it fosters an uncritical attitude towards its own claims. Thus by equating papal pronouncements on the Catholic position and French “culture” – indeed, they are treated as almost identical, in spite of the historical conflicts between them – what Butler ultimately does is set up two instances of the same kind of bad, dogmatic culture. In the French case, the problem is its “disavowal of a religious tradition that inchoately and continuously informs and supports its own ostensibly post-religious claims.” In Benedict’s case, the problem is that he fails to subject his position to sufficient “contestation and dynamism within a global frame.” This point is reinforced by her criticism of his Regensburg address, where she quite rightly takes him to task for trying to expunge the violence from Christian history by displacing it onto Islam, but accuses him of operating within a “mythical time” that unfortunately taps into long-standing prejudices about “backward” Catholics. But the bigger issue here is not Butler’s outrage at the Pope. What is important is how culture serves as her main frame of reference at the expense of a closer look at religion itself. Good culture – dynamic, self-critical, elaborated in practice by free agents – exposes the essentialism at the heart of bad culture, but religion as such is set aside. Though Butler acknowledges that the Pope “argues on religious grounds” and that “there are clearly religious opponents to the Pope’s view,” she says nothing concrete about what these might be, or how religious reasons might not fit neatly into the dynamics of culture she presumes. One is almost left feeling as though there is something of a hole where religion should be.

The preference for seeing religion as culture is also evident in Jürgen Habermas’s recent writing on religion. As one of the foremost living philosophers, and someone who has helped define the role of the public intellectual in our time, Habermas has devoted considerable attention to religion in recent years. What makes this work especially interesting, when one considers the absence of any substantive discussion of religion in his earlier work, is how it strikes a new note of appreciation for the distinctly theological heritage of critical social theory. In stark contrast to the Marxian tradition from which the early Habermas drew inspiration, he now affirms that “[u]niversalist 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.” Even more striking, however, is his observation that “[t]his legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of a continual critical reappropriation and reinterpretation.” For having recognized this legacy as historically decisive for critical theory, Habermas seemingly rejects any contemporary or future such encounter by doggedly declaring religion off limits to philosophy. He writes: “I only want to say that the evidence of my relation to a theological heritage does not bother me, as long as one recognizes the methodological difference of the discourses; that is, as long as the philosophical discourse conforms to the
distinctive demands of justificatory speech. In my view, a philosophy that
oversteps the bounds of methodological atheism loses its philosophical
seriousness. Now, lest I be accused of mis-representing Habermas, I
should say that he is perfectly right, it seems to me, to insist that philosophy
must conform to certain discursive norms for it to remain philosophy. But
while this might be true, his reticence to engage more directly with theology
seems to pay short shrift to what he acknowledges as its potential to nourish
critical social theory. Indeed, given the historical influence of religion he
identifies, one can, and perhaps should, ask: does the insistence on the
methodological atheism he outlines threaten to cut off continued meaningful
exchanges with religion? How much can religion nourish critical theory
today (and in the future) if one disavows any real encounter with the heart
and soul of religion, as a matter of principle?

A similar dynamic informs Habermas’s more recent thinking on
religion in the public sphere. In a fascinating supplement to his
groundbreaking work of over four decades ago, Habermas has recently
acknowledged how religion must be taken seriously as the continuing
source of political sensibilities relevant to contemporary issues. In a direct
challenge to “secular citizens [who] are convinced that religious traditions
and religious communities are… archaic relics of pre-modern societies,” he
encourages such citizens to “grasp their conflict with religious opinions as a
reasonably expected disagreement.” Moreover, he challenges secular
citizens to engage in a complementary search for “morally convincing
intuitions and reasons” in what their religious opponents say. Such an
exercise would help establish the “limits of secular reason,” and defray a
secularist ideology that sees religion as purely atavistic. Even when it comes
to philosophy, Habermas “insists on the difference between the certainties
of faith, on the one hand, and validity claims that can be publicly criticized,
on the other.” He insists, furthermore, that philosophy must “refrain from
the rationalist presumption that it can itself decide what part of the religious
doctrines is rational and what part irrational,” and that “[t]he contents which
reason appropriates through translation must not be lost for faith.” But these
protective overtures towards religion, while certainly laudable, also come at
the expense of almost any encounter with religion at all. While it is certainly
the case that “an apology of faith with philosophical means is not the task of
philosophy proper,” it is altogether something else when Habermas
concludes that,

[...] best, philosophy circles the opaque core of religious
experience when reflecting on the intrinsic meaning of faith.
This core must remain so abysmally alien to discursive
thought as does the core of aesthetic experience, which can
likewise only be circled but not penetrated by philosophical
reflection.
Here again we see an approach to religion that affords it maximum influence in establishing values in the public sphere, that is to say, as cultural identity broadly speaking: but coupled with a resistance to actually encounter what religion has to say. Religion is thus taken as the crucible for so many ideas, values, and ways of orienting oneself in the world, but at the same time put under erasure as “abysmally alien to discursive thought.” Not only does this characterization leave something to be desired, I would even go further and say that, precisely to the extent that Habermas and others have shown themselves newly willing to take religion seriously, this decidedly ambiguous posture raises serious questions about how intellectuals approach religion in general.

There is no denying that intellectuals’ readiness to talk about religion constitutes a striking about-face from the way they have traditionally marginalized religion over the last few hundred years. And though my analysis of Butler and Habermas challenges their inclination to talk about religion as culture, I do not want to diminish in any way the importance of their efforts to treat religion with dignity. My goal, instead, is to move things forward, and especially to move discussion away from the still-dominant rubric of ‘culture wars.’ Now of course there is an obvious sense in which Butler and Habermas, too, see their goal as improving the tenor of discussion, deepening it, and creating new possibilities for thinking afresh about the present and future. That is an essential part of what means to be an intellectual. And so let me be clear that it is not with their intentions that I find fault, but rather in their overriding fidelity to ‘critique’ as a mode of analysis that I locate the frustrating preference for construing religion first and foremost as culture. Critique seeks to identify the conditions of possibility of phenomena. Though certainly inadequate, this broadly Kantian way of looking at the matter reminds us that the critical project has always involved looking beyond what was immediately obvious. It also reminds us how critique has involved revealing what is obvious to be troublesome, especially to non-intellectuals, who are treated as hopelessly naïve about their own lives. Even when this is recast as the power of everyday discourse – and this is the impetus behind cultural analysis – there is still a way that intellectuals have of revealing to people something about themselves that they didn’t but perhaps ought to know.

Critique is not inherently negative, but it does devalue ordinary reality to the extent that it locates what is true about it elsewhere: alongside, beyond, underneath, or on the margins of everyday experience. This not only pulls the rug out from anyone insufficiently trained in the art of critique who tries to make a simple case for what they think, but it also systematically denigrates those attachments that undeniably make things meaningful in the first place. Frustrated with this hostility towards ordinary life, the sociologist and historian of science Bruno Latour has recently sought to account in a more detailed way for how critique alienates the public from intellectuals. The key is to see critique as a two-pronged attack. First, critique “show[s] that what… naïve believers are doing with objects is
simply a projection of their wishes.” Then, it shows them how this “behavior is entirely determined by the action of powerful causalities coming from objective reality that they don’t see.”\textsuperscript{43} What is truly disingenuous is not just the simultaneous denial and affirmation of objective reality, but the fact that intellectuals change the rules of the game when it suits them. In the first critical unmasking, reality is unveiled as so many projections or ‘fetishes,’ but in the second, it is invested with all of the objective force of gravity acting on brute matter. Latour concludes:

You are always right! When naïve believers are clinging forcefully to their objects, claiming that they are made to do things because of their gods, their poetry, their cherished objects, you can turn all of those attachments into so many fetishes and humiliate all the believers by showing that it is nothing but their own projections, that you, yes you alone, can see. But as soon as naïve believers are thus inflated by some belief in their own importance, in their own projective capacity, you strike them by a second uppercut and humiliate them again, this time by showing that, whatever they think, their behavior is entirely determined by the action of powerful causalities coming from objective reality they don’t see, but that you, yes you, the never sleeping critic, alone can see.\textsuperscript{44}

Latour’s reference to gods here is, of course, not incidental. One might see the very foundation of modern critique – recall Kant’s awakening from his “dogmatic slumber” – as a relentless effort to expose every vestige of theology in order to root it out. But more important, for our purposes, is not the ways critique can be used by those hostile to religion, but how it gets in the way of even those seeking a more positive assessment.

To make critical thought relevant again, Latour advocates the “cultivation of a stubbornly realist attitude” that moves closer to the facts, rather than away from them. In a personal confession, Latour admits: “The mistake we made, the mistake I made, was to believe that there was no efficient way to criticize matters of fact except by moving away from them and directing one’s attention towards the conditions that made them possible. But this meant accepting too uncritically what matters of fact were.”\textsuperscript{45} For the underlying truth of facts is that they only become facts by means of “very polemical, very political renderings of matters of concern.” For Latour, “matters of fact are a poor proxy of experience and of experimentation and…a confusing bundle of polemics, of epistemology, or modernist politics that can in no way claim to represent what is requested by a realist attitude.” In contrast with the obsessive “debunking” of critique, realism restores the “rich and complicated qualities of the celebrated Thing,” which should not be confused with what is rendered ‘objectively’ as matters of fact.\textsuperscript{46} Instead, “[a] gathering, that is, a thing, an issue, inside a
Thing, an arena” must be understood and described as fully as possible according to “the number of its participants, its ingredients, nonhumans as well as humans.” The “participants [that] are gathered in a thing to make it exist and maintain its existence” cannot be identified according to traditional tools of critique, because these bracket the deeply ambivalent, highly charged matters of concern that bind participants together. What needs to happen, therefore, is for intellectuals to muster the course to describe the inside of things – the noumena that Kantian critique had for so long proscribed as unknowable. But to achieve this requires a readiness to work with the complex human experience that is too often bracketed in the name of purer structures, for there is no privileged access to the inside. Could this kind of realist attitude help us better understand religion? Without concrete examples, it is hard to know. But what I find promising is the effort to recognize the uniqueness of things, and the sense that there is something to be gained from taking things at face value that is missed when we critically unmask them to be about something else.

THE PROBLEM OF RELIGION

Stemming from the desire to isolate facts from values, the tendency to sideline religion as a “matter of concern” is routinely achieved by bracketing what religious people claim to be doing and translating it into an account of what they are really doing. Historically, treatments of religion thus frequently tack back and forth between seeing it as a projection of what humans need and using it as an objective measure of human irrationality or hypocrisy. In this way, religion is emptied of its contents and recast in social scientific terms that enable a deeper and more objective understanding of society. The recent wave of interest in religion among intellectuals, though less interested in exposing religion’s shortcomings, nevertheless, persists in a similar bracketing of religion in the name of decoding the meaning of religion in society. This stems from an overriding impulse towards critique, but it also derives from what might be termed the problem of religion. That problem, simply put, is the difficulty that surrounds any attempt to define religion. And here the problem is not whether those things typically categorized as religious exhibit sufficiently similar or typical features such that we can say meaningful things about religion as a whole. The problem lies in the historical evolution of “the idea of religion, as a great objective something,” and especially the “diversion of interest from man’s personal sense of the holy to what we might call the observable product or historical deposit of its outworking.” This transition, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith has shown, was fostered above all, by an Enlightenment sensibility that

stressed an intellectualist and impersonal schematization of things.” Emerging in tandem with a powerful critique of Christianity, it produced a still very prevalent view of religion
as "something that one believes or does not believe, something whose propositions are true or are not true, something whose locus is in the realm of the intelligible, and is up for inspection before the speculative mind."49

This approach to religion, forged in tandem with the burgeoning critical attitude during the Enlightenment, still predisposes intellectuals to ferret out the meaning of religion in cognitivist terms. It is, as Asad shows with respect to Geertz, especially evident in the cultural approach to religion where symbols are interpreted as more broadly available, but no less theoretical, means of making sense of the world.

There is, of course, absolutely nothing wrong with a cultural approach to religion, and far be it for me to suggest that Geertz’s powerful and influential insights into religion are wrong. At the same time, it is fair to say that cultural analysis at its best is always conducted in a historically specific way, and that making it the defining criterion for a universal definition of religion leaves something to be desired. I would also not want to overlook how the preference for seeing religion as culture has helped wean a significant constituency of intellectuals from their traditional hostility towards religion. But in the name of what? If intellectuals today approach religion with the encompassing rubric of culture, with its presuppositions of grass-roots cognitive orientation, surely it is in order to better overcome the still potent clichés about religion as irrational. Doesn’t the retreat from cultural analysis thus threaten to move the discussion backward? Won’t we be in a poorer position overall if we move the discussion away from culture? I don’t think so, in large part, because it was always the intellectuals themselves who presupposed that reason’s nemesis was religion, and this seems to have faded considerably in the wake of the surge in public religion. Simply put, intellectuals today manifest a striking lack of confidence when it comes to religion and there is, on the whole, a lot of uncertainty about what to do next. As Hent de Vries puts it in his introduction to *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, “the relationship between the theological and the political is no longer obvious, let alone direct.” Instead, “we are left with blanks and dots (that is to say, words, things, gestures, and powers)... which we continue to attribute to ‘religion,’ as if we knew what that means. The ways these disarticulate and reconstellate themselves as the elementary forms of political life in the twenty-first century are no longer transparent.”50

The time seems right therefore for considering new approaches to religion. Of course, this does not mean eliminating a cultural approach. But where cultural analysis falls noticeably short is in maintaining that religion is primarily a cognitive endeavor that can be separated out from the welter of manifestly non-cognitive elements. There is no denying, of course, that dogmatic forms of religion can make it seem as though doubt is the antithesis of a religious life, and this only reinforces an inclination to see religion as a strong avowal of basic ‘theories’ about the world. And yet,
when we listen carefully, not only to religious virtuosos like Mohandas Gandhi or Martin Luther, it is hard to overlook the role of doubt, skepticism, and even lukewarm commitment (i.e., what is called the ‘free-rider’) in people’s religious experience. Indeed, to understand religion truly, it seems unfair to bracket these variations in the name of an alleged purity of experience that frequently clashes with what people themselves actually report about their religious life. Too often, religious people are presented as a uniform, homogeneous group of “believers,” incapable or disinclined to think through their position; and, as the theologian John Haught has characterized it, scholars studying religion are presented like ants crawling all over a fishbowl, trying to understand the inhabitants within, but just as sure that they can’t. This seems to me a very good image of the problem that Cantwell Smith identifies, namely, the presupposition that being religious sets people off as being in a great ‘objective’ something, removed from society whose inside is so radically different as to thwart any genuine understanding from the outside. The irony here, of course, is that what is thus truly religious is made to seem like a black hole that is known only by its effects, with any ‘data’ emanating from within that hole lost in advance to its gravitational pull. This problem is only complicated by the fact that the status of “religion” in contemporary religious studies is far from clear. To be sure, there is a lot of buzz surrounding neuro-scientific and rational-choice theories right now, and yet my sense is that this is so precisely because they represent the denial of culture. After so much cultural analysis, these reject meaning in motion in favor of a more ostensibly concrete analysis of the facts about religion. Though I have my reservations about their fruitfulness in the long run, they can be taken to express an important desire to pursue the kind of realism towards religion that Latour suggests as the antidote to critique; for they manifest a readiness to pay particular attention to what is so obvious about religion that it has been routinely dismissed by more refined and critical minds, like the fact that it is a phenomenon connected with human brains and that it involves a kind of bargaining that is not unlike haggling over a used car. Such obvious “matters of fact” and “matters of concern” need more sustained attention.

Another obvious but frequently overlooked aspect of religion, of course, is the dialectic between creativity and orthodoxy, or what James Carse discusses as the dynamic between religion and belief. There is no denying that certain religious communities claim definitive positions as religious truth. But if such systematic “beliefs” are the condition for membership in these communities, they hardly seem able to stem the tide of creative expression that is at the heart of religion. The deeper vitality of religions is precisely their capacity to generate disagreement alongside belief, which conduces as much to creativity and even ambivalence, and is as important over the long-term as rigid assertions of orthodoxy. One of the most important shortcomings of the reduction of religion to culture is precisely the way it seems to foreground religious “identity” as a more or
less stable fact of life, that is, until it is upset during a moment of crisis. This way of looking at things locates stability inside religion, which as ‘culture’ is taken as a generative source of meaning that defrays anxiety and rootlessness. And yet, there is an important sense in which religion itself conduces to instability. By calling people to do more, and be more – to “self-transcendence” as Hans Joas calls it – religion articulates new coordinates of experience. Indeed, as Joas puts it, religious “[f]aith does not simply emanate from either rousing or anxious experiences,” but “articulates such experiences of self-transcendence” in ways that are unavailable to nonbelievers. This new, distinctly religious reality, I would argue, is the goal, not the ground of religion. And it is ill-suited to be grasped as culture precisely because of the inherent, ever-present possibility of its failure. According to a view of religion as culture, the full effects of religion – transformation, conviction, belief, etc. – are said to have their cause in the way religion cultivates authoritative solutions for believers. But sometimes, as Geertz himself notes, the process fails. Sometimes, rituals fail to transform an individual into a believer or, at least, into a believer of the right kind. This, one would suppose, is the root cause of apostasy. But one might also wonder if the failure of religion helps explain other phenomena like the ‘free-rider’ and the zealot, both of whom stand within, but sometimes threaten the religious mainstream in their own way. Seen in this way, perhaps the failure of religion is much broader and more integral to religion than we generally suppose, for there is no question that, on the ground, the failure of meaning and belief are just as much to be expected as robustly ‘religious’ avowals of unquestioning faith. On this view, religion does not just diminish the threat of chaos, as Geertz would have it; it conduces to it.

CONCLUSION

Religion doesn’t just supply answers, in other words; it asks questions, and those who immerse themselves in it often do so with a view to engaging in a deeper kind of questioning than is available in other spheres of life. To see this depends on suspending the tendency to pattern religion exclusively on the model of culture, which sees human individuals as meaning-making-machines, weaving and re-weaving symbolic webs aimed at thwarting the disintegration of meaning. Precisely because religion does so much to fix the person in a meaningful world, intellectuals typically assume that it conforms in large measure to the same dynamics as theoretical knowledge. But this assumption fails to account for how religion might frustrate meaning by promoting unsettling and even subversive kinds of self-reflection. It overlooks the constitutive role of ambivalence in religion, not as something to be overcome, but as perhaps its natural state. To see ambivalence at play in religion does not invalidate the strength of conviction. On the contrary, it helps us take account of how people very
often hold multiple and even conflicting commitments at the same time. And it suggests that this might be as productive a state of affairs as it is unsettling. Mild, serious, or even crisis-causing, ambivalence undercuts the assumption that religion is immune to self-doubt, and therefore to change and even self-transformation. If religion is about “ultimate concerns,” it is often cast in such a way that competing commitments appear to present a singular choice based on a mutually exclusive and exhaustive dichotomy, like science or religion, to cite only one example. But such a view only begs the question of how moments of “crisis” (religious, or otherwise) sustain options as equally viable in the first place: How is it that what is said to be mutually incompatible can serve as answers to the same questions? Rather than thwarting meaning, then, ambivalence may be what enables one to hold open multiple and competing possibilities at the same time, either in the search for closure or as part of the search for new and fruitful alternatives. Whatever the case, we should seize the opportunity afforded by the current surge in public religion to better appreciate the true varieties of religious experience.

NOTES

2 To cite only one example, in 2007, the Social Science Research Council, based in New York, launched The Immanent Frame, a prominent blog featuring essays and comments by high-profile scholars like Charles Taylor, Hans Joas, and Joan Scott. The SSRC website also features a new guide to “Religious Engagement among American Undergraduates,” with essays by scholars from a variety of fields all voicing more or less the same opinion, that it to say, that religion needs more sustained attention.
7 Hent de Vries, Philosophy and the Turn to Religion (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).


13 This has been the overriding theme in debates in Europe about the role of the intellectual vis-à-vis religion, and is the focus of Paul Berman’s recent The Flight of the Intellectuals.


15 For an interesting perspective on the broader transition of academe to a “university of culture” see: Bill Readings, The University in Ruins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).


22 Mahmood Mamdani, Good Muslim, Bad Muslim. America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

23 Mamdani, Good Muslim, Bad Muslim, p. 18. The classic form of this argument, of course, is found in: Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” Foreign Affairs, vol. 72, no. 3 (1993).

24 Mamdani, Good Muslim, Bad Muslim, p. 18.


27 Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” p. 90.


The desire to avoid the ‘clash of civilizations’ model is especially evident in the various essays published by the American Academy of Arts in their special edition of *Daedalus* “On secularism & religion” published in 2002.


Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?” p. 239.


Catherine Bell, “Paradigms Behind (and Before) the Modern Concept of Religion,” *History and Theory*, Theme Issue 45 (2006).


This is, of course, the position of people like Sam Harris, who insist that religious liberals are not really religious. Sam Harris, *The End of Faith. Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: Norton, 2004).


Part of the problem might very well be the focus on the individual. In his compelling account of religion from the perspective of multi-level selection theory, David Sloan Wilson stresses the significance of culture as something
that transcends individual consciousness. Itself a product of evolution, culture is uniquely suited to promoting further evolution because it is so finely tuned to harnessing individual motives to group-level needs. David Sloan Wilson, *Darwin's Cathedral. Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

56 Of course, I use “ambivalence” here in a broadly psychoanalytic sense. For Freud, ambivalence indicated not only the simultaneous incidence of love and hate, but was the key to understanding the diffuse possibilities of how affect migrated in different directions.
CHAPTER II

THOMAS AQUINAS ON COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND JEWS: A CLASH OF RELIGIOUS CULTURES

JENNIFER HART WEEP

INTRODUCTION

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) arrived at the University of Paris in 1245. That same year, a papal letter institutionalized the practice of compelling Jewish individuals to hear Christian evangelistic sermons, whenever a preacher desired to offer one.¹ Twenty-four years later, King Louis IX ordered the attendance of all Jews at evangelistic sermons preached by Pablo Christiani, a Dominican and former Jew.² At that time, Aquinas was teaching at the University of Paris and writing his famous *Summa theologiae*.³

Against the backdrop of this clash of religious cultures, Aquinas addressed the question of how Christians should interact with Jews. He discussed the role of the Jews in salvation history in his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. He referenced intellectual encounters with Jewish authors and their writings in the *Summa contra Gentiles* and *Summa theologiae*. And he itemized the ethical and political social considerations of Jewish-Christian interaction in both *Summas*, as well as in the *Letter to Margaret of Flanders*.

A survey of his writings shows that he describes and analyzes the following potential points of contact between the two groups,

1. Intellectual engagement
2. Face to face discourse
3. Theological interactions between Christian religious authorities and the Jewish community
4. Political interactions between Christian political authorities and the Jewish community

In this paper, I will explore Aquinas’s approach to the thirteenth century clash of religious cultures between Christians and Jews. In particular, I will focus on a single example of each of the four potential points of contact listed above. In so doing, I will present his attitude toward the Jewish intellectual tradition, his discussion of the conditions for face-to-face discourse between Christians and Jews, his repudiation of the forced baptism of Jewish children, and his advice to Margaret of Flanders with respect to how she should govern the Jewish population living under her
principality. In conclusion, I will present a few insights from Aquinas that could be applied to a more contemporary approach to interreligious dialogue.

INTELLECTUAL ENGAGEMENT

In reading Aquinas, one is immediately struck by the breadth of sources that he uses in his solutions to various philosophical and theological problems. For example, the writings of Aristotle are quoted alongside those of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Averroës, Philo, and Rabbi Moses Maimonides. Maimonides appears to be Aquinas’ preferred Jewish authority and he cites him no less than seventy-three times in his *corpus*, eighteen of those instances occur in the *Summa theologiae*.

In the *Summa*, Aquinas adopts the structure of the disputed question. In answer to each question, he marshals what he takes to be the best arguments in favour of the *pro* and *con* positions, regardless of the religious affiliations of their respective sources. In using Maimonides as a favoured source, Aquinas explores an intellectual engagement with Jewish opinions on various religious and ethical matters. This engagement transcended the clash between Christians and Jews that was raging around him in thirteenth century Paris. Given that conflict, one might wonder why a Dominican at the University of Paris would bother reading the writings of Rabbi Moses, let alone cite them in his theological works.

To answer this question, one needs to take a closer look at Aquinas’s view of truth, namely, “… truth that the human reason is naturally endowed to know cannot be opposed to the truth of the Christian faith.” Aquinas holds that truth known through natural reason must be compatible with the tenets of Christianity. Natural reason is grounded in the nature of a human being, that of a rational animal, and it is a source of knowledge. As Aquinas explains in the first question of the *Summa theologiae*, natural reason is not all-encompassing and thus some truths must be revealed. Nevertheless, a human being can know some truths via natural reason and, thus, Aquinas appears comfortable helping himself to the wisdom of a variety of different thinkers, including Greeks, Muslims and Jews, as he works out various philosophical and theological problems.

Like St. Augustine, Aquinas holds to the principle of the unity of truth, which is derived from a point of logic. In short, a true premise cannot be contradicted by another true premise; true premises are only contradicted by false premises. Returning to Aquinas’s use of Jewish sources, if, say, Maimonides were to make a claim that was true, then this claim could not contradict the truth of Christianity. So for this reason, it is appropriate to quote Maimonides as a source on those issues on which he states the truth without any concern that the veracity of the Christian tradition will be weakened.

Alternatively, in those cases in which Maimonides holds a view that Aquinas believes to be false, such as, for example, Maimonides’ almost
exceptionless commitment to the *via negativa* with respect to naming God, Aquinas cites Maimonides as providing an alternative position within the context of a disputed question before offering his own arguments as to why that position is false.\textsuperscript{8} Thus, the engagement between Christians and Jews as manifested in Aquinas’s writings is one that is undertaken within the confines of a philosophical discussion, where the rules of logic are applied. These rules, Aquinas no doubt supposes, transcend religion and culture, providing a commonality that can be invoked in various discussions.

**FACE TO FACE DISCOURSE**

Intellectual engagement was not the only point of contact between Christians and Jews in the Middle Ages. Members of these communities frequently had face to face interactions, some of which were notably unpleasant. Although Aquinas seemed to spend most of his time with his fellow Dominicans, he does not hold the view that Christians should shun Jews or avoid conversations with them. In fact, Aquinas views former Christians and heretical Christians as more dangerous to the faith than a Muslim or a Jew. He writes,

\ldots the Church does not forbid the faithful to communicate with unbelievers, who have not in any way received the Christian faith, viz. with pagans and Jews, because she has not the right to exercise spiritual judgment over them, but only temporal judgment, in the case when, while dwelling among Christians they are guilty of some misdemeanor, and are condemned by the faithful to some temporal punishment. On the other hand, in this way, i.e. as a punishment, the Church forbids the faithful to communicate with those unbelievers who have forsaken the faith they once received, either by corrupting the faith, as heretics, or by entirely renouncing the faith, as apostates, because the Church pronounces sentence of excommunication on both.\textsuperscript{9}

Aquinas distinguishes between those who have not converted to Christianity, such as Jews, and those who are heretics or apostates. The Church only forbids Christians to communicate with those who used to be Christians. Aquinas presents excommunication as an exercise of spiritual judgment over an individual. Heretics and apostates, because they have some historical connection with Christianity and the authority of the church, are subject to the Church’s judgment. Jews are not.

However, Aquinas identifies an exception to this practice,

\ldots it seems that one ought to distinguish according to the various conditions of persons, circumstances and time. For some are firm in the faith; and so it is to be hoped that their
communicating with unbelievers will lead to the conversion of the latter rather than to the aversion of the faithful from the faith. These are not to be forbidden to communicate with unbelievers who have not received the faith, such as pagans or Jews, especially if there be some urgent necessity for so doing. But in the case of simple people and those who are weak in the faith, whose perversion is to be feared as a probable result, they should be forbidden to communicate with unbelievers, and especially to be on very familiar terms with them, or to communicate with them without necessity.  

In keeping with his own practice of using Jewish sources, Aquinas maintains that communication between Christians and Jews should not be prohibited, except in those cases in which an individual Christian is weak in her faith. Aquinas’s worry is that some Christians might convert away from Christianity as a result of their interactions with unbelievers. Far from discouraging face to face discourse between Christians and Jews, Aquinas encourages it, under certain conditions.

Despite the attitude of some of his contemporaries, Aquinas does not believe that people should be forced to convert to Christianity. In fact, he recognizes that interactions between different religious groups will bring with them a whole host of ethical issues, which bring us to our next two points.

**REPUDIATION OF FORCED BAPTISM**

While recognizing that the Church can exert some temporal judgment over the Jewish community, Aquinas does not think that this gives the Church carte blanche to treat the Jews unethically. For example, Aquinas repudiates forced baptisms,

The children of unbelievers either have the use of reason or they have not. If they have, then they already begin to control their own actions, in things that are of Divine or natural law. And therefore of their own accord, and against the will of their parents, they can receive Baptism, just as they can contract marriage. Consequently such can lawfully be advised and persuaded to be baptized. If, however, they have not yet the use of free-will, according to the natural law they are under the care of their parents as long as they cannot look after themselves. For which reason we say that even the children of the ancients ‘were saved through the faith of their parents’. Wherefore it would be contrary to natural justice if such children were baptized against their parents’ will; just as it would be if one having the use of reason were baptized against his will. Moreover under the circumstances it would be
dangerous to baptize the children of unbelievers; for they would be liable to lapse into unbelief, by reason of their natural affection for their parents. Therefore it is not the custom of the Church to baptize the children of unbelievers against their parents’ will.¹¹

In Aquinas’s theological context, baptism was the first sacramental step in a person’s conversion to Christianity. Unfortunately, some Christians took it upon themselves to take the children of unbelievers and baptize them. Once the child was baptized, the child would be separated from his or her parents, since it would be considered unseemly to have a Christian child raised by unbelieving parents. So-called “forced baptisms” were a pretext to forcibly convert unbelievers and to separate them from their families.

While Aquinas’s conclusion is certainly praiseworthy, it is the principles that he uses to justify his position that are of crucial importance. First, he appeals to natural justice. Natural justice (ius naturale) is supposed to govern the interactions among all human beings, and not just Christians.¹² Thus, it can be invoked to cover the relations among members of different religious communities.¹³ Aquinas describes natural justice in the following manner:

The natural right or just is that which by its very nature is adjusted to or commensurate with another person. Now this may happen in two ways; first, according as it is considered absolutely: thus a male by its very nature is commensurate with the female to beget offspring by her, and a parent is commensurate with the offspring to nourish it. Secondly, a thing is naturally commensurate with another person, not according as it is considered absolutely, but according to something resultant from it, for instance the possession of property. For if a particular piece of land be considered absolutely, it contains no reason why it should belong to one man more than to another, but if it be considered in respect of its adaptability to cultivation, and the unmolested use of the land, it has a certain commensuration to be the property of one and not of another man, as the Philosopher [Aristotle] shows.¹⁴

Although it might not be immediately clear from the text cited above, Aquinas thinks that children belong to their parents along the lines of the first aspect of natural justice, i.e., “a parent is commensurate with the offspring to nourish it.” This idea carries with it the notion of a parent’s responsibility to care for and protect his children. In the sacrament of baptism, the will of the parents (or sponsors) of the child being baptized is substituted for the will of the child. It would be unjust, therefore, to usurp that responsibility and separate a child from his parents or to violate the
authority of a parent over his child by forcibly baptizing that child. Similarly, human beings who have attained the use of reason and who do not want to be baptized should not be baptized against their will, because to do so would be to fail to give them what was due, namely, the exercise of their free will.

Despite Aquinas’s clear commitment to the conversion of unbelievers to Christianity, he is unwilling to allow those conversions to be brought about through coercion. In his view, those conversions would be illegitimate.

Someone might object that all infant baptisms are forcible since the infant does not will to be baptized. It is likely that Aquinas would respond to this objection by analogy, pointing out that we normally don’t think of feeding an infant as an act that violates an infant’s will. In fact, we would blame those parents who fail to feed their children. The parents are responsible for the child and substitute their will for the child in order to procure various physical goods, e.g., nourishment, medical care, education, etc. Similarly, in the case of baptism, the parents of the child substitute their will for the child in terms of procuring a spiritual good for the child. Consequently, having one’s child baptized doesn’t appear to be an act that violates the will of the child.

Someone might object that natural rights can be superseded by legal rights. Thus, if King Louis IX of France were to decree that all minor Jewish children were to be baptized, this edict would take precedence over the natural justice that governs parents and children. In answer to a similar puzzle, Aquinas makes the following determination, “If, however, a thing is, of itself, contrary to natural right, the human will cannot make it just, for instance by decreeing that it is lawful to steal or to commit adultery.”

Thus, legislation cannot make an act to be just when it violates natural justice.

Returning to the issue of forced baptisms, even if it were the case that a political authority declared that forced baptisms were to be legislated, Aquinas would have deemed those acts to be unjust. No amount of legal wrangling can make an unjust act to be just. The same could be said for any theological edict. Despite Aquinas’s commitment to obeying the authority of the Church, it seems clear from the above quotation that a simple act of will cannot make something to be just. Thus, a theological edict to forcibly baptize infant unbelievers would not make the act just, either.

Aquinas would argue that despite the ecclesiastical or temporal authority claimed by Christians, all interactions between the two groups should be governed by the principle of natural justice. This means that even within the context of the perceived furthering of the Christian kingdom, one cannot treat an individual unjustly. Returning to our discussion of the intellectual and personal engagement of Christians and Jews, these interactions would be governed by natural justice, too.

Aquinas argues that one of the reasons why forced baptisms are to be forbidden is because of the concern about what the child might do when he
or she is of age to actively and thoughtfully practice his or her religion. Hearkening back to his discussion of communication between Christians and unbelievers, Aquinas thinks it is better to be a faithful and observant Jew rather than to be a convert to Christianity who later apostatizes.16

In making these claims, Aquinas distances himself from those who would view political authority as legitimizing forced conversions. Innocent III (1161-1216), for example, held the view that some converts to Christianity could return to Judaism if they had objected strongly and vociferously during their baptism, while those who remained silent must maintain their Christianity.17 Nonetheless, Aquinas states that the Jews are by no means (“in nullo modo”) to be compelled to the faith.18

According to Aquinas, belief is ‘to think with assent.’19 Assent is associated with the will.20 Thus, he includes a voluntary aspect to his concept of belief, at least when it comes to Christian faith, and he emphasizes the fact that unbelievers are to be left ‘free to believe’, even if they are under the political authority of Christians.21 This means that Aquinas does not view political authority as a justification for asserting control over a person’s religious beliefs.

POLITICAL INTERACTION BETWEEN CHRISTIAN POLITICAL AUTHORITIES AND THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

On at least one occasion, Aquinas was asked to provide an opinion on how a Christian ruler should treat her Jewish subjects. For many years it was thought that his response, the Letter to the Duchess of Brabant, was a personal letter written to the Duchess. More recent scholarship argues that the letter was written to Countess Margaret of Flanders.22 While not claiming to be an expert in the matters put to him by the Countess, Aquinas endeavoured to answer her questions. Here is his first response,

… Your Excellency inquired whether it is allowable for you at some time and in what way to make an exaction upon the Jews.

To which question (proposed in an unqualified way) it can be answered that although as the laws say, the Jews by reason of their fault are sentenced to perpetual servitude and thus the lords of the lands in which they dwell may take things from them as though they were their own – with, nonetheless, this restraint observed that the necessary subsidies of life in no way be taken from them, because it is still necessary that we ‘walk honestly even in the presence of those who are outsiders’ (I Thess. 4:11), ‘Lest the name of the Lord be blasphemed’ (I Tim. 6:1), and the Apostle admonishes the faithful by his example that (I Cor. 10:32-33), ‘They be without offense in the presence of the Jews and the Gentiles in the Church of God’ – this seems to be what should be
observed, that, as the laws have determined, the services coerced from them do not demand things that they had not been accustomed to do in times gone by, because those things that are unexpected more often rattle souls.\textsuperscript{23}

In his response, Aquinas cites legal precedent, Scripture and a principle of restraint. This principle can be viewed as following from the principle of natural justice, for it would be unjust to take away the necessities of life from a human being. In support of this opinion, Aquinas offers three Scriptural passages that exhort Christians to treat outsiders honestly and without offense.

In cases where Christians find themselves responsible for the health and well-being of a Jewish minority, the survival of that minority is extremely important. Christians are not allowed to reduce Jewish subjects to starvation and death for any reason. No matter the perceived faults of the Jewish community (as the Countess of Flanders attempted to exploit), Jewish subjects are to be treated justly and fairly, in the same way that their Christian countrymen are to be treated.

In keeping with natural justice, Aquinas offers also this opinion:

\ldots since the Jews may not licitly keep those things which they have extorted from others through usury, the consequence is also that if you receive these things from them neither may you licitly keep them, unless perhaps they be things that the Jews had extorted from you or from your ancestors hitherto. If, however, they have things which they extorted from others, these things, once demanded from them, you should restore to those to whom the Jews were bound to restore them.\textsuperscript{24}

Thus, Aquinas argues that it would be illicit for the Countess to take away the proceeds of usury from her Jewish subjects and keep them, unless they be things that were taken from her or her ancestors. Instead, she needs to return the items or money to their owners. His rejection of the possibility of keeping the proceeds of usury reflects his commitment to natural justice. Simply put, the Countess has no right to the money or goods that have been transferred (albeit through usury) from her Christian subjects to her Jewish subjects. Natural justice requires that each individual be given his due and so those Christians who have lost goods to usury should have those goods returned to them. One can only imagine how surprising this opinion was to the Countess when she received Aquinas’s letter.

CONCLUSION

In Aquinas’s writings he identifies at least four different kinds of interactions between Christians and Jews. But what is of lasting interest is his focus on two principles that are grounded in natural reason: first, the
principle of the unity of truth, and second, the principle of natural justice. Insofar as both of these principles are grounded in natural reason and not in revelation, they are principles that can be shared across religious communities, possible in such a way as to bridge the gap between clashing cultures or at least in such a way as to begin a dialogue.

While Aquinas argues that the principle of the unity of truth should govern intellectual interactions between Christians and non-Christians, he argues that more personal interactions between Christians and Jews should be governed by the general ethical principles that govern all human interactions, in addition to those relevant theological principles that are meant to govern the way Christians interact with non-believers. In so doing, Aquinas lays the groundwork for positive interactions between the two communities. Intellectual interactions and engagement can be grounded in the similarity of beliefs, particularly with respect to both philosophical and theological commitments. Aquinas develops these within in the contest of his Summas.

Political and theological interactions between the two communities must be grounded in the principle of natural justice, which insofar as it is grounded in natural reason can function as a shared ethical principle. Thus, one could argue based upon Aquinas’s treatment that what is at issue in an interreligious dialogue is not solely a philosophical or theological matter; what is at issue is the way in which communication between the groups proceeds as well as the ethics of the interactions amongst the individuals.

In summary, then, Aquinas provides us with a historically interesting account of how he thinks relations between the two religious communities should proceed. His account is made far more interesting when it is compared with the common practices that appear to be taking place all around him, especially in Paris.

Far from content to maintain the status quo, Aquinas considers each encounter afresh, applying both reason and revelation to these issues. The content of his considerations can provide a framework that offers the potential for further reflection and consideration in the twenty-first century.

NOTES


7 St. Augustine discusses this principle within the context of his work, *De Genesi ad litteram*.
8 Aquinas’ citation of Maimonides on the *via negativa* occurs in *Summa theologiae*, Ia.1.1.
9 *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae. 10. 9. resp.
10 *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae. 10. 9. resp.
11 *Summa theologiae*, IIIa. 68. 10.
12 *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae. 10. 12. ad 3.
14 *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae. 57.3. corpus.
15 *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae. 57.2. ad 2.
16 *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae.10.9.
18 John Y. B. Hood holds the view that Aquinas kept his misgivings about Church policy to himself. However, Aquinas’s statement that Jews should in no way be compelled to the faith seems to be a clear exception to this trend, particularly when the statement is viewed against the backdrop of Innocent III’s teachings. See John Y. B. Hood, *Aquinas and the Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), p. 98.
19 *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae. 2. 1.
20 *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae. 2. 1. ad 3.
21 Of course, this freedom does not extend to those who have been converted already. Converts are expected to keep to their conversion, according to Aquinas. But I think the further discussion of what Aquinas thinks the true nature of conversion is will make clear the fact that any forced conversion is not an actual conversion.
24 Aquinas, *Letter to Margaret of Flanders*. 
CHAPTER III

DIALOGUE AND CLASH: GASPARO CONTARINI AND THE COLLOQUY OF REGENSBURG OF 1541

DAVID BELLUSCI, O.P.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I argue that, at the Regensburg meeting of 1541, the major obstacle concerning ‘justification’ had been overcome by Catholics and Lutherans, but the position of the Lutheran theologians on the Eucharist and papal authority was not able to be reconciled with Roman Catholic teaching. The Regensburg meeting of 1541, that started with hope and optimism, degenerated as Cardinal Gasparo Contarini clashed with the Lutherans on fundamental articles of faith.

In the sixteenth century, Catholic-Lutheran religious allegiances disintegrated into local conflicts and created the threat of war dividing Christianity. Contarini in his meetings with Pope Clement VII maintained that a Council was needed to bring peace to the Christians of Europe. The need for a council addressing reform in the Church was evident, but the Council of Mantua-Vicenza was an unexpected failure when on May 21, 1539, Pope Paul III declared the council suspensio ad beneplacitum. The decision of Paul III was considered quite serious since both the Catholics and the Lutherans recognised that the council was fundamental to a reformatio in capite et in membris. The consequence of this failure was the overall deception and weakening trust in the papacy since the Council was seen as the only means of a reform.

With the collapse of the Mantua-Vicenza Council, some means were needed to address the religious crisis threatening Catholicism, and escalating into armed conflict. In Germany, the princes recognised that the religious conflict creating sectarian division had political consequences for the empire. Joachim II of Hohenzolern wanted a Council which would be attentive to the Lutheran grievances before any kind of condemnation would be considered, while the opposite position was held by Duke George of Saxony, who did not want Lutheranism to spread into his territories, seeing the religious and political conflicts that the Lutheran-minded reformers had caused. At the political level, both Charles V and Ferdinand of Hapsburg recognised the importance of a united Empire at a time when the Muslims threatened Christendom with the advancing Ottoman Turks.
CHURCH AND STATE

While Pope Paul III wanted to send the Papal Nuncio, Tommaso Campeggio, as representative of the Holy See, Charles V made it clear that his mind was set on Gasparo Contarini. Paul III believed that a second session, a more important one, would employ Contarini’s diplomatic skills at which point he would represent the Holy See. Campeggio’s authority, however, was limited given the influence of the Papal theologians who were assisting him; as a result, another colloquium was decided to be held at Worms on October 28. The Worms colloquium was handled by the German theologian Johann Eck for the Catholics, and Phillip Melanchthon on the Lutheran side.

The Worms colloquium, however, was interrupted by the Emperor who decided to transfer the colloquium to the Diet of Regensburg, and which he intended to attend himself. Gasparo Contarini had also been nominated January 10, 1541, as the legatus a latere. When Contarini reached Regensburg in March, Rome was in full pre-Lenten carnival festivities,

In these days few things can be written except about the Carnival, even though this year, I did not go through the trouble of seeing many, but I can say, nevertheless, that I did see the play and celebration [Machiavelli’s La Clizia], which last night was presented in Cardinal Frarnese’s palace. As for the large number of people who were there, it was quite difficult to get in.

Paul III makes it clear to Contarini that he must participate in the negotiations, assist the theologians with great kindness, control the debates at a distance, and affirm the primacy of his legation, without making on his own serious decisions. These policies showed that Contarini did not have the extent of authority which the Emperor had wished since the policies were proper to the Office of the Papacy.

The detailed reports given by Francesco Contarini, the Venetian Ambassador to King Ferdinand, to the Venetian Senate, reflected the theological subtleties in the ongoing debates,

His Holiness is praised to the skies for having decided to send the Rev. Contarini here. As for myself, I believe and hold that which Holy Mother Church believes, and intend to die in this. Hearing the Rev. Legate talk, I am extremely pleased, and it seems to me that there is no one who understands matters better than he does. However, when I then talk with Lutherans (since it is not possible to avoid being also with them), they present so many arguments with a flood of words that I must
Contarini and Regensburg

frankly confess to Your Excellencies that I do not know what to answer them, since that is not my profession.11

Francesco’s comments reflect the depth and power of the Lutheran arguments. As Gleason maintains, if they were compelling for a Catholic, they must have been all the more for the Lutherans.12 The Catholic side in Germany was less united than Contarini had expected. The Catholics were represented by the Bavarian Dukes differing in their views, namely, the Duke of Brunswick, and the Prince-Bishop, the Cardinal of Mainz who felt it was necessary to mobilise a military campaign against the Lutherans. Charles V and Granvelle expressed a need for dialogue and compromise, suggesting a chasm between the two Catholic camps. The Lutherans, instead, were united under the Elector of Saxony and his supporters. Contarini’s challenge was not only to negotiate with the Lutherans, but also to find a solution with the German Catholics who had diametrically opposing positions in dealing with the Lutheran problem. Contarini could not allow concessions to the Lutherans that Granvelle was prepared to make without alienating the Bavarian Dukes who wanted war.13

PAPAL ORDER: FARNESE DEFEATS COLONNA

Unfortunately, Pope Paul III was embroiled in an Italian campaign to subordinate Ascanio Colonna and the Colonna family whose territorial possessions were in conflict with the papacy. The rivalry between Paul III, a member of the Farnese household, and Ascanio Colonna involved the feud between two powerful Roman families.14 The Pope’s soldiers battled against Ascanio and his men, finally razing the Colonna lands of Marino, Rocca di Papa and Palliano during the Regensburg meetings.15 Paul III was concerned about his authority being attacked, an issue that was to be addressed during Regensburg. The German princes and the Lutherans would use this war against his vassal, Ascanio Colonna, as further proof that the Pope was more of a worldly leader, a secular Italian prince, than a spiritual leader. Papal authority exercised in Italy was reinterpreted by the Lutherans in worldly and political terms. At a time when the Papal taxes could have been used, in the interest of Christendom, to support Hungary against the Muslim Turks, Paul Farnese appeared more concerned about consolidating his own power in Italy. Contarini, as Papal legate, was in the unfavourable position of being challenged at two fronts: he was expected to defend an unpopular cause, the Pope’s war against the Colonnas, and he had to deal with the Lutheran support for Ascanio Colonna. As Contarini kept Cardinal Farnese informed about religious matters concerning Regensburg, the Cardinal replied with letters giving accounts of “fighting, sieges or surrenders.”16

From the time he was Venetian Ambassador, well before his cardinalate, Contarini had a sense that just government required law and order which was expressed in a hierarchy of authority. Ascanio Colonna’s
insubordination showed a deviation from the hierarchy and, therefore, the risk of anarchy that would follow, a collapse of social order. The sovereign had the responsibility to uphold the law and preserve order, which was expressed in Paul III’s actions against Ascanio Colonna, the Pope’s vassal. After his arrival at Regensburg on March 11, 1541, Contarini would write in a letter to Cardinal Farnese, “I see little good here in Germany, nor am I surprised that the people are in such confusion, given the conditions I see prevailing among their secular and ecclesiastical leaders and those of religious orders.”

**CONTARINI’S DIPLOMACY**

Although the Regensburg meeting was intended to resolve the Catholic-Lutheran differences, Contarini was confronted with the Turkish threat challenging the Emperor and the sovereignty of the Empire. This is clear in Contarini’s numerous letters making reference to the Turks, and not knowing whether the danger of the Turkish advances should be resolved before the imposing Lutheran theology. In a letter written to Cardinal Farnese, April 16, 1541, Contarini maintained, “First the matters concerning religion needed to be accepted, before the war against the Turks could be discussed….”

Contarini’s diplomatic skills and personality made a favourable impact on the Lutherans, although it may not have been what the Catholic members of the Diet had wished. The Legate took an approach to the Lutherans that was friendly, respectful and understanding; the Bull *De coena domini* against the heretical views of the Lutherans was not published, nor was an indulgence announced.

Satisfaction with the Most Reverend Legate increases every hour, and Monsignor Granvelle and the other Ministers say that God created him with his goodness for this purpose, because he conducts himself with great gentleness, prudence and doctrine, in which it is reputed that all others will advance, which are in this place, so that the same adversaries not only love him but also revere him with great honour of Our Lord, and of that of the Holy Apostolic See.

On April 27, 1541, at the first working session, the six theologians were able to reach an agreement. For the Catholics, the Emperor named the Erasmists, Johann Eck, Johann Groper and Julius Pflug, while the Lutherans were represented by Melanchthon, Martin Bucer and Pistorius. The four articles debated at the first session were (1) the human condition; (2) free will; (3) the cause of original sin; and (4) original sin. With an encouraging start, there was a feeling of optimism that dispelled concerns of apprehension whether the sessions would be successful. The more delicate issue of Justification was dealt with on May 2nd. The six men agreed on
Contarini’s conciliatory text that offered a definition on Justification that had been previously blocked by an impasse. Contarini’s text defined Justification as follows,

Therefore, the faith that justifies is this faith made efficacious by charity but it is nonetheless true that up to this point we are justified by this faith, that is, that we are accepted by God and reconciled with Him as far as this faith embraces the mercy and justice imputed by Christ and His merits.20

Contarini’s success, in spite of the highly charged theological points of contention, reflected his authentic conciliatory desire from the onset of the meetings. Removing any suspicion that the Papal legate’s presence was to impose Catholic doctrine on the heretics, Contarini showed not only the skills of a politician, but his willingness to listen to the Lutheran concerns expressed during the debate. Contarini, however, also expressed what seems to be some apprehension in a letter written to Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga, where he maintains, “And because, eventually, there may be a doubt on two points which I evoked in the adjoining texts, I would like to have your opinion on the subject.” These two points concerned the expression “double justification” [duplex iustitia], and the absence of the key term “merit” [meritum].21 Instead of looking for doctrinal errors, Contarini’s approach was to be attentive to the religious inspiration that was reflected in Luther’s teachings on justification.22

Contarini approached the Diet believing that, while some articles of faith could be discussed, others were necessary to accept and believe for salvation; such articles were not open to discussion. Disagreement over words could lead to division, a risk that could parallel the division between Roman and Greek Christianity over the filioque doctrine. Division would be repeated if the Italians and the Germans misinterpreted words in the Catholic-Lutheran debate. Articles not necessary for salvation could be re-examined, and no doubt, there would be differences of opinion. However, Contarini was unaware that even what constituted central articles of faith would be contentious.

Contarini’s openness to the Lutheran theologians reflected a generation of intellectual and theological formation immediately prior to the Reformation. The Lutherans, from the perspective of Contarini’s formation, were German protesters who could be re-integrated into the Church by listening to their grievances, and making a genuine attempt towards Church reform on the part of the Catholics.23 To reach the concord that Contarini sought between Lutherans and Catholics, an unstable equilibrium was evident in his “ecumenism, his Catholicism and his Curialism.”24 Catholicism did not have the articulation of faith that the Lutherans sought. There were articles of faith, but there was also a fluidity in Roman Catholic teaching that permitted an openness in interpretation – at least, this was the case of the pre-Tridentine Church, the Church in which Contarini had
received his intellectual and theological formation. The Lutherans demanded a more precise articulation of faith which for Contarini was a more narrow way of looking at theology. Documents from April 27th to May 14th show the varying theological views that existed amongst Catholic thinkers in the Roman tradition. What the German Lutherans had seen as a time of theologische Unklarheit for Roman Catholics, represented the mystery often underlying theology allowing for theological breadth rather than precision. Roman doctrinal fluidity was successfully questioned and challenged by a Germanic theology that believed divine mysteries could be doctrinally clarified and categorised by reference to the Scriptures. Even the disputatio that the Church knew and was developed with great sophistication by St. Thomas Aquinas, allowing for open intellectual debate, would seemingly come to an end given the imminent and real danger of separation from the Church due to relentless disagreement.

Contarini expressed a traditional way of looking at Church structure, his ecclesiology was unquestionably Catholic (reflected in his response to Ascanio Colonna and his defence of Pope Paul III), and he had experience as a Venetian Ambassador and diplomat where government was inseparable from law, order and hierarchy. He also had a non-negotiable understanding of the Sacraments as being essential for salvation. Yet, Contarini’s spirituality which was more subjective – one might say, Augustinian – almost resembled that of Luther, where interior turmoil and personal struggle had led Contarini to the same conclusion as Luther, that one was justified by faith. The Regensburg Book was the basis of the discussions during the colloquy, and Contarini himself was doubtful about the manuscript; it was evident that the attempt being made was to have a single German Lutheran Church which, no doubt, would be a threat to Rome. Contarini’s aim was unquestionably to seek conciliation with the Lutherans and he would do this first of all by softening the hard positions taken by the Lutherans, and then, leading them back to the Catholic Church.

As reflected in the apprehensive tone of his letter, Contarini correctly anticipated a reaction of Paul III and the Roman Curia – that the agreement expressed in Contarini’s conciliator text was seen as making too many concessions to the Lutherans. Though Article 5 on Justification caused stumbling, Articles 6 to 9 on Church authority, the word of God, Penance, and the Magisterium were dealt with, and did not create any serious obstacles. Contarini decided to leave the debate on the primacy of the Pope in relation to Councils for the end of the discussions, due to the intensely controversial nature of the debate. Discussions continued on the Sacraments, Articles 11 to 13, Ordination, Baptism, Confirmation, and agreement was reached with little difficulty.

**JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH**

The foundation to Lutheran theology was “justification by faith” but the article, De justificatione hominis, was resolved through a compromise –
the teaching of double justification. This teaching asserts that all justification comes from Christ, with two different interpretations that were both accepted: (i) there can be no justification without Christ, but the sinner’s faith is efficacious, making it an act of the intellect and the will, pleasing to God, and accepted because of this faith in Christ; and (ii) God’s gift to the individual has no bearing on human effort, while good works are rewarded only if they are the fruit of faith. The two positions are, in fact, clearly an attempt to harmonise the Catholic and Lutheran views, but it failed, since the two positions are incompatible and the theological traditions remain evident. The Catholic view was that the intellect and will cooperate with the Holy Spirit. In the Lutheran view, justification was a free gift of Christ; there was no choice, and what the person did made no difference. Theologians interpreted this as either being basically Catholic, or basically Lutheran, or a muddled doctrine between the two.

Contarini was not concerned about intellectually compelling claims that could be left to scholastic disputations. Like Luther, Contarini maintained that faith was trust and hope in God’s mercy; faith was ultimately an act of the will, unlike the post-Tridentine view that faith was an act of the intellect moved by the will. Contarini maintained in his letter to Cardinal Farnese that double-justification was cattolichissimo. The Catholic doctrine of salvation was also subjected to claims of Pelagianism, and therefore, double-justification, proved that the Pelagian claim was false.

Elizabeth Gleason maintains that Contarini’s intense spiritual journey and personal experience with his knowledge of the Lutheran reformers “made it impossible for him to remain content with a purely Thomistic explanation of the process of Justification.” What appears to be a muddled articulation of double-justification reflects the impasse in reconciling Thomistic and Lutheran theologies. The insurmountable difficulty caused by Justification appeared to have been resolved with the principle of double-justification and Contarini felt reassured that the meeting at Regensburg between Catholics and Lutherans was on its way to conciliation, the first time since 1517.

FAILURE AT REGENSBURG

The next article to prove problematic after that of Justification was the sacrament concerning the Eucharist, De Sacramento altaris, “On the Sacrament at the Altar.” Contarini himself did not seem to be prepared to compromise what is meant or understood by this sacrament in any way. If Contarini had been previously conciliatory on Justification, the Eucharist was not something he was willing to negotiate. For the Lutherans, neither Transubstantiation nor Adoration could be incorporated into their theology, while for Contarini Transubstantiation and Adoration represented beliefs that were fundamental to the Christian. Article 14 constituted an insurmountable obstacle, and Contarini took the matter to the Emperor since the impasse seemed to show no way out.
The Papal legate now found himself in a position where he could not negotiate with the Lutherans since both sides held categorical views on the Eucharist. Nineteen Lutheran theologians decided to hold a meeting which took place May 8. In a letter to Cardinal Farnese, Contarini affirmed that the aim of the colloquy was to “preserve truth and agree on truth,” maintaining that it was unthinkable that what had been taught by Christ, St. Paul and upheld by the Church Fathers, Greek and Latin, ancient and modern, and defined by the Fourth Lateran Council under Innocent III, was rejected by the Lutherans. Calvin summarised the conclusion of the nineteen theologians in complete opposition to Catholic teaching, “It was the opinion of all that Transubstantiation was a fictitious thing, that reservation [of the host] was superstitious and its adoration idolatrous, or at least dangerous, since it is done without the word of God. Contarini acknowledged that not only were theological propositions at stake, but the very foundation of the Christian Church, with the authoritative structure of the Catholic hierarchy being questioned, the very government of the Church, and thereby, social order. Contarini came to realise that the Lutherans had a different exegetical understanding of key Biblical passages that gave Catholicism its basis for ecclesial hierarchy.

The Lutherans were obstinate in their positions, and for Contarini, key articles of faith that had a biblical and Conciliar tradition could not be compromised. The Papal legate’s views of the Lutheran theologians began to change. If any irreconcilable point had been reached, it was not that of Justification but, rather, that of Transubstantiation. Contarini acknowledged that, in the case of Transubstantiation, the matter concerned not a word, but the meaning, and Contarini could not ignore the fact that the Lutherans rejected the Catholic meaning of “transubstantiation.” Contarini found himself challenged by Granvelle, who was prepared to omit the word so that negotiations with the Lutherans would not be disrupted. Though Contarini sympathised with Granvelle’s concerns that the progress of the colloquy was now threatened, Contarini’s view was that truth could not be compromised in the negotiations with the Lutherans. Contarini’s position towards the Lutherans had sharply changed.

I see the Protestants very obstinate and pertinacious, and have no hope, unless God performs a miracle, that concord among us will be achieved… I trust in God, and shall remain firm in the truth and proceed with God’s help in such a way that the world will never be able to accuse the Apostolic See of disturbing concord and peace, the preserver of Christian dogmas.”

Contarini’s tone suggests that he was not only disillusioned with the Lutherans, but he did not believe they were working towards peace; that they continued to propagate discord with their unwillingness to acknowledge a common foundation for Church authority, the basis of
making any progress in the colloquy. The meetings further disintegrated with the Sacrament of Penance, where again Contarini saw the Lutherans did not admit to the necessity of confessing mortal sins, and he believed the Lutherans were misleading in their use of terminology.

Contarini wanted Charles V to demand the Lutherans to accept three fundamental articles of faith for all Christians: the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Eucharist. Once again, Contarini recognized that, if progress in the colloquy was to be made, some common agreement was needed in fundamental areas of faith, and if the Lutherans refused any three of these fundamental articles, dialogue was not possible. Hoping the Emperor would use his position of authority over the German theologians and princes to adhere to these fundamental teachings, Contarini had thought that the Emperor’s power in Germany was like that in Venice, where commands and prohibitions to the citizens could be executed. The significant difference emerging between the Lutherans and the Papal legate was that the German theologians believed they could simply disregard centuries of tradition such as Transubstantiation, something Contarini was not willing to do. Moreover, the picking and choosing on the part of the Lutherans, what they accepted and what they rejected, made their contribution to the negotiation both subjective and relative compared to the more objective Articles of faith upheld by the Church of Rome. Contarini now found himself in conflict with the Emperor who wanted to make progress in the colloquy without having terminology cause obstacles. With the uncompromising position of Melanchthon who sought to please both the German theologians and the Elector of Saxony, the colloquy came to an end May 31, 1541.

Regensburg proved to have three major obstacles: (i) Justification (left for Pope Paul III’s response), (ii) Papal primacy in relation to Councils (left for the end of the Sessions), and finally (iii) the Eucharist. The session was closed with the view that it had lasted long enough and there would be the convocation of a General and Ecumenical Council. By July 27, 1541, the Diet of Regensburg was dissolved and the Articles of Regensburg would have to be approved at a future council. Regensburg was an attempt to bring conciliation between the Catholics and the Lutherans, a conciliation wished by the Pope and Emperor alike. Instead, with the impass and the obstacles preventing any kind of common agreement, Gasparo Contarini felt that the Regensburg meeting ended in failure. The fact was that Contarini may have sought conciliation between Catholics and Lutherans as Papal legate, but his religious position was fundamentally Catholic genuinamente cattolico, having felt offended that his catholicity would be put into question. The reception in Italy to Contarini’s contribution to dialogue with the Lutherans was devastating. He was accused of succumbing to Lutheran demands for reform:

“Where are these great Chapters that you conceded to the Lutherans?” To which the Cardinal replied that that was a lie of Pasquino’s and not to pay attention and that nothing must
be accepted without the authority of the Church, not even the Gospel of Saint John. This good man replied that what he had said did not come from Pasquino but that he had read it from the hand of a great cardinal that he named.43

Contarini asked the Pope to suspend all judgment of him until he had a chance to talk to him, and to let him see the truth of the matter, and that he deserved gratitude rather than criticism. The criticism coming from the College of Cardinals came especially from the French sector which did not approve of Contarini’s doctrine of Justification. Questions at Regensburg concerning Papal authority and the Roman curia were also criticised by the College and, at the political level, conciliation with the Emperor was questioned.44 Contarini’s sympathetic position towards the Lutherans left him with a reputation of “philo-Lutheran heterodoxy” in his doctrine of Justification (developed in his Opera), and a position that would be posthumously condemned by the Inquisition.45 Neither Article 4 on Justification nor Article 14 on the Eucharist caused fundamental difficulty for Rome and the Curia, but rather Article 10 that was suspended to the end of the session, the article concerning Papal authority in relation to Councils. Contarini’s handling of Article 10 was interpreted as Contarini’s submission to the Emperor, the latter’s political aims in Germany, and opposition to Rome.46

With the breakdown in the Regensburg talks, Contarini found himself not only alienated from the Lutherans, but he was misunderstood and treated with suspicion by the Roman curia. In his letter written to Cardinal Farnese on May 29, Contarini did not write ex officio, but as a concerned Christian while Farnese’s preoccupation was “papal supremacy and victory” over the Lutherans.47 Contarini informed the Cardinal that Lutheranism had established itself, not only among the Protestants, but all the Germans. The fact remained that Lutheranism was spreading rapidly, whether because it was a novelty or because it rejected the many obligations required by Catholicism. Contarini believed that, in order to respond to the advancing spread of Lutheranism in Germany, there would be three things necessary: (i) prohibiting Catholic territories from joining the Protestant League; (ii) German bishops needed to show exemplary moral conduct themselves, teaching the faithful by good preaching, like their Lutheran counterparts; and (iii) concession should be given to the Lutherans to receive Communion under both species. In the first instance, Contarini believed that the Catholic League needed further reinforcement – showing his sense of political co-solidarity. In the second, Contarini’s concerns were expressed in writing to Farnese: “Even though they are not Catholic schools, instead being good and many schools for the Protestants, the youth of Germany is instructed in their schools and from the early years they drink the poison.”48 In the third recommendation, Contarini showed sensitivity to both the Lutheran desire, but also the practise that was in continuity with the practise in the early Church, both Greek and Roman.
The differences between Catholic “servant of the Anti-Christ,” and Lutheran “Heretic” had become increasingly divided over the twenty year period, making conciliatory language, and overcoming mutual suspicion, practically impossible. Contarini recognised the importance of the unity of the Church, and therefore, the preservation of the Roman hierarchy. Luther’s error may be seen not so much in his theology, but rather the rejection of Papal authority.49

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have shown that Contarini’s clash with the Lutherans is due, not only to theological differences, but also to the religio-political arena of sixteenth-century Europe. While Contarini showed both diplomatic skill and every good intention of dialogue with the German theologians supporting Luther, the fundamental difference between Contarini and the Lutherans was the interpretation of the Articles of faith. The Catholics were prepared to accommodate a more open understanding of dogmas, allowing for some fluidity, while the Lutherans wanted a clearly articulated theology. While Contarini refused to discuss key Articles of faith such as Transubstantiation, the problems of Justification had been successfully dealt with. It was, at the end, Papal authority that would give a final blow to Regensburg, on which account Contarini would have to accept failure.

NOTES

4 Tommaso Campeggio was not new to delicate religious-state matters. Campeggio was also the Papal legate sent by Clement VII to England in 1528 to determine whether grounds for an annulment between King Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon could be established.
5 Viallon, *Italie 1541*, p. 82.
7 Johann Eck was responsible for the diffusion of Luther’s condemnation in Germany, a few months after the condemnation was given in the Bull, *Exsurge Domine* by Pope Leo X, June 15, 1520.
11 Francesco Contarini, Dispatches, 26 March, 1541, in *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts Relating to English Affairs, Existing in the Archives*

13 In addition to the German problem, there was the French King, Francis I, who found it in his favor to have a divided Germany weakened by religious conflict. The King did not welcome Contarini’s intervention, believing that unity in Germany would only strengthen the German Emperor. These religious-political conflicts showed that Contarini was not only being challenged by Lutheran theology, but also by Catholic political interests. See Gleason, *Gasparo Contarini*, p. 211.

14 Contarini and Vittoria Colonna moved within the same Roman circles. Colonna, coming from a family that was known for political and military opposition to the Papacy, was a patron to reform movements, consumed by the same ecclesial and secular politics consuming Contarini. She questioned Contarini on freewill at a philosophical and theological level, often expressing thoughts in her poetry. See Constance M. Furey, *Erasmus, Contarini, and the Religious Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 98-99.


20 *Fides autem iustificans est illa fides quae est efficax per caritatem, sed interim hoc verum est, quod hac fide eatenus iustificamur, id est acceptamur et reconciliamur Deo, quatenus apprehendit meseridcordiam et iustitiam quae nobis imputatur propter Christum et eius meritum. Gasparo Contarini, Epistula de iustificatione, in *Concilium tridentinum*, in Societas Goerresiana ed. (Frieburg i.B.: Herder [reprint], 1966), pp. 314-22. [My translation.]


25 The expression “theologische Unklarheit” is used by Hubert Jedlín, *Le Concile de Trente*, p. 349.

26 The Roman Inquisition of 1542 under Pope Paul IV had Contarini’s *Oeuvres complètes* censured. The Sorbonne imprimatur of the Parisian edition...
of Sebastian Nivelle was withdrawn and then revised by the Dominican Marco Medici and published at Venice by Aldo Manuzio in 1578, and Damiano Zenario in 1589.

27 Gleason, Gasparo Contarini, p. 226.
29 Viallon, Italie 1541, p. 85.
31 This echoes St. Thomas whom Contarini closely follows.
32 Gleason, Gasparo Contarini, p. 229.
33 Letter to Cardinal Farnese, June 9, 1541 in, Pastor, p. 478.
35 Gleason, Gasparo Contarini, p. 233.
40 In Pastor, “Die Correspondenz des Cardinals Contarini während seiner deutschen Legation (1541),” p. 386.
41 Gleason, Gasparo Contarini, p. 239.
44 Viallon, Italie 1541, p. 88.
45 Viallon, Italie 1541, p. 88.
46 Viallon, Italie 1541, p. 88.
47 Gleason, Gasparo Contarini, p. 241.
CHAPTER IV

WINDIGO KILLINGS AND THE CLASH OF CULTURES

CECIL CHABOT

INTRODUCTION – AND SOME PROGRAMMATIC REMARKS

Gilbert Keith Chesterton once remarked to George Bernard Shaw: “To look at you, anyone would think there was a famine in England.” Shaw rejoined: “To look at you, anyone would think you caused it.” How could an Englishman and an Irishman who professed very different beliefs and espoused very different philosophies tease each other as only great friends can? We can learn much about cross-cultural conflict by briefly examining this example of its counterpart: cross-cultural friendship. To one Roman’s famous question “What is truth?” Chesterton and Shaw could both have answered with T.M. Knox and Aristotle: “truth is the greater friend.” Because they were first φιλοι σοφιας (‘friends of wisdom’ – philosophers) and because they constantly sought to re-ligare (‘re-bind’) themselves to the truth – to live by it – they could also be friends with each other, not in spite of, but rather because of the very different but sincere answers they often gave to the question: “What is the truth … about God, about morality, etc.?” If their differences of culture, religion and philosophy fostered a ‘clash’ of friendship it was because – at a much deeper level – these ‘fighting friends’ shared a common culture, religion, and philosophy, built on epistemic honesty: the quest for unity of understanding with reality, of action with understanding, and of experience with action. They tried to understand things as they were, to live according to such understanding and to experience – in some form – the results of their action, so as to learn from it, all while learning from others’ experiences, understandings and actions. In contrast, Chesterton would likely have found much more of a cultural clash between himself and another Catholic who, despite reciting the same creed, was seeking uniformity of understanding – either out of insecurity or a desire for power over his own life or others.

It is often in times of great insecurity, or when the power to control our lives (or others) is at stake, that cultural clashes are most pronounced. In the historical North American context, there are few more striking clashes of culture than those arising from incidents of ‘windigo’ possession and execution.

Windigo incidents have usually arisen in the context of starvation: of famine far more real and desperate than the sort that Shaw teasingly accused Chesterton of starting. In the nineteenth and early twentieth-century incidents that will be examined here, European fur traders and the Cree and
Ojibwa of the North American subarctic came face to face with starvation violence, cannibalism, and madness. The Cree and Ojibwa associated such phenomena with the windigo. This mythological monster – with its heart of ice and superhuman strength – most frequently manifested itself as a human being driven to serious loss of self-control, accompanied or followed by violence and cannibalism, particularly in times of starvation. The human person was deemed to have either transformed into, or been possessed by, the windigo. Historically, the Cree and Ojibwa would either try to cure anyone suspected of becoming a windigo, or – if necessity forced their hand – they would kill him, whether a close family member or a relative outsider, such as a European fur trader.

The historical contexts of windigo incidents may appear deceptively distant. On the contrary, however, they bring us to the heart of the problem at hand, and may also point to answers that can help mitigate, diminish, and/or resolve many contemporary clashes of culture, especially on difficult moral issues such as abortion, which, writes Jeff McMahan, “remains one of the most intractably controversial of all moral issues.”

Although the windigo incidents looked at here may initially evoke the notion of a clash between Indigenous North American and European cultures, a closer examination challenges this dominant ‘Indigenous versus European’ interpretive paradigm. Instead, there is a more profound clash of cultures. On the one side are those who seek unity of understanding with reality – firm in their conviction that ‘truth is the greater friend,’ even with its sometimes mysterious and elusive character. On the other side are those who seek uniformity of understanding: who reduce reality to a list of fundamentals that excludes mystery (fundamentalism), or everything except mystery (relativism). In the end, the relativist and the fundamentalist are feuding twin brothers, and although the relativist often claims the moral high ground of tolerance and open-mindedness, accusing his brother of ‘fundamentalism,’ he is in fact the more fundamentalist of the two, for he reduces reality to just one fundamental. In an individualistic society, such relativistic fundamentalism can maintain an illusion of moral superiority and tolerance; however, when the bubble of individualistic freedom is threatened by the reality of our interdependent relationships and the responsibilities that flow from them, the relativist becomes the fiercest and most intolerant of the fundamentalists. For his rejection of religion is very deep: he does not want to re-ligare – to bind – himself to any truth or authority other than the law he posits for himself, which is frequently that of his own appetites and self-interest. In this sense, religion – the effort to bind oneself to the truth, to be possessed by the truth – is rarely, if ever, the cause of conflict; rather it is irreligion – the desire to be possessor or controller of the truth, whether fundamentalistic (reducing the fullness of truth to several fundamentals) or relativistic (reducing the truth to only one fundamental) – that causes conflict.

Too often, unfortunately, we allow fundamentalism to fight on our behalf against the errors of relativism or we allow relativism to fight on our
behalf against the errors of fundamentalism. This is the real danger, Amy Gutmann points out: that we let them dominate the public discourse. Therefore, in defense of those who earnestly and honestly support opposing positions on such intractable moral issues as abortion, and in defense of all those who are affected by such issues, it is vital that we not be fooled by more visible cultural, philosophical and religious differences, or by polarizing discourses, into misapprehending the true source of the clash of culture, religion and philosophy.

WINDIGO KILLINGS

The Cree and northern Ojibwa are Algonquian peoples of subarctic North America whose encounter with Europeans began with the French penetration of the St. Lawrence valley in the 16th and 17th centuries, and intensified with the advent of French and English exploration and trade expeditions directly into Hudson Bay and James Bay in the 17th century. Charles Fort, the first Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) post – later re-founded as Rupert House – was established in south-eastern James Bay in 1668. By the early 19th century, the HBC had several well-established posts along the James Bay coast, and were expanding inland into the interior. Their transatlantic exchange with the Cree and Ojibwa soon extended beyond furs to intimate connections of marriage and, to varying degrees, mutual recourse for alternative sources of subsistence.

The HBC depended more heavily and regularly on Cree and Ojibwa country provisions, but when these failed – which they did both unexpectedly and periodically on account of fluctuations in weather conditions and animal populations – the fur traders could normally, but not always fall back on their European supplies, and it was the Cree and Ojibwa, having no fall-back option, who turned to the Company for help. In short, they all frequently relied on each other to avoid deprivation and escape starvation in a land that could be very unforgiving.

On September 10, 1817, several HBC servants left Rupert House, the Company’s main trade-post in south-eastern James Bay, and travelled upriver and inland. Led by John Greely, their mission was to investigate the feasibility of establishing a new fur-trade outpost in opposition to competing fur traders based out of Montreal. An early onset of cold weather, however, forced them to winter near present-day Lake Evans, some distance from their planned destination of Waswanipi. Hastily building a shelter, they set their nets and hooks, for they had been able to bring food for the outward journey alone. Supplies had been low in James Bay when they left, because the annual HBC supply ships had been forced by another early cold front to pass the winter of 1816-17 in James Bay.

A sudden November thaw led to the loss of some of their fishing supplies, but Greely’s letters – delivered to the coast by one of two Cree men who had been engaged to guide the expedition – exuded confidence. Alexander Christie, the Superintendent at Rupert House, moreover, was
“under no apprehension for their safety” for he had been told by the Cree that fish were abundant in that area, and he expected to be able to send sufficient supplies to get Greely and his companions through the winter and on to Waswanipi in the spring.

It took Christie some time to find a Cree hunter who knew the route and was available to bring supplies to Greely and his companions. On February 23, a Cree hunter named Stacimow and his wife left Rupert House with this very mission. Arriving at the camp, however, they found only one survivor: the wife of Henry Swanson, one of Greely’s companions. Her husband, as well as Greely and another man, had starved to death, and the remaining three were missing. Stacemow and his wife began the trip back with the woman, but he killed her before reaching Rupert House. Upon arrival, he reported to Christie that, being deranged, the woman had refused to eat the food he provided, and that he had killed her in self-defence. Christie later commented that he did not think the woman had been insane; yet knowing that the Cree would kill even their closest relatives “when they know of their having been reduced to the dreadful necessity of eating human flesh,” he did not pursue the matter further.

At the end of March, Christie sent several HBC servants with Stacimow’s brother Sheutickush to find the three missing members of Greely’s party: Peter White, his wife and William Laughton. They soon discovered that White – no mention is made of his wife’s fate – had starved to death and that Laughton had been killed by Amoshish, a Cree hunter with whom Laughton had been living. Laughton had left Amoshish’s camp earlier that month to get rum and tobacco from the Lake Evans camp, and when he did not return promptly, Amoshish had followed him. In the words of Christie, Amoshish had “found … Laughton by himself, at the same time observing that Laughton had been subsisting upon human flesh, he through a superstitious fear, unhappily deprived him of life.” Another Cree hunter named Camitchesit later told Christie that he had initially helped Greely with provisions and in mid-January attempted to convince him to be guided to the coast or to spend the rest of the winter at his own camp. Greely, however, had refused both offers.

The Cree who had come in contact with the starving HBC servants clearly attempted to help them as best they could. However, by subsisting on human flesh Laughton and Mrs. Swanson had become windigos in Amoshish and Stacimow’s eyes. Christie does not show signs of doubting their sincerity in either case. Retired HBC servant William Weigand, half-brother of Mrs. Swanson, later recalled that Stacimow’s wife had reported that “Mrs. Swanson, when unable to get rabbits, cut a slice of the flesh of [the] dead men.” “This accounts,” he explains, “for the Indian thinking she was dangerous.”

Almost seventy years later, in the winter of 1888, Stacimow’s younger brother, Peetawabano would die at the hands of his sons in another period of starvation. He, his wife, his five sons, their wives, and a number of children found themselves in a dire situation at their inland camp in 1888.
Peetawabano drew his own blood to feed his family, and only one member— a daughter-in-law— apparently refused to partake. Peetawabano was then killed by one of his sons and eaten. Subsequent acts of cannibalism apparently continued through the winter and into the following year. Peetawabano’s daughter-in-law, who had been hiding out and surviving some distance from the camp near a travel route where she hoped other Cree families would pass, finally fled to the HBC post at Eastmain in February of 1889, apparently carrying a young child.

One month later, Robert, the youngest of Peetawabano’s sons— about sixteen years of age at the time— showed up at the same post; he was the only other survivor. He claimed to have escaped, but his sister-in-law had already revealed quite a different story. And in contrast to her, he had been slow to eat regular food when he arrived (an indication he had resorted to cannibalism). He was held at Eastmain post for a while. According to W.K. Broughton, who was in charge of the HBC posts in that district, if he was turned loose again, “without giving him the means of subsistence ... he might either resort to his practices of last summer again, or he might be hunted down and shot by the other Indians.”

Eventually, Robert was brought south to Rupert’s House where he was interrogated and finally confessed to participating in the killing and consumption of his family members. He was not killed, however, but was sent far inland to an HBC post at Mistissini. According to Cree elder John Blackned, the HBC trader there “expected him to get crazy again and kill somebody. He stayed there for many years and never did anything bad... Some of the Mistassini Natives were scared of him at first ... because they heard the story. When he first tried to get a wife, the girl didn’t want to, she was scared that if she married him he would eat her!”

(Blackned’s grandfather had previously shared a camp with Peetawabano’s family.) Eventually, however, Robert Petawabano did get married, and apparently he later died trying to save the drowning daughter of an HBC trader. In the end, he was deemed cured from his windigo possession.

As mentioned already, not all cases of alleged windigo possession were manifested by cannibalism; this was the case of a very striking incident of ‘windigo-killing’ that occurred among the Ojibway of northwestern Ontario in the early 20th century.

In 1906, Jack and Joseph Fiddler— two Ojibwa leaders from the northwestern interior of the James Bay lowlands— were arrested by the North West Mounted Police (NWMP) for killing a woman alleged to be transforming into a windigo. She had not resorted to cannibalism, but was nonetheless exhibiting traits associated with windigo possession. Out of fear that she might become dangerous and uncontrollable, the Fiddler brothers had killed her. After their arrest, they were brought to Norway House, where they were held for trial. Jack Fiddler escaped into the woods, and hanged himself. Tried by NWMP Commissioner A. B. Perry, Joseph Fiddler was found guilty of murder and sentenced to death (the only penalty for such a crime at the time).
While Joseph Fiddler was in prison awaiting the imposition of the sentence, fur traders, missionaries and even a NWMP officer came to his defense and campaigned for his pardon. The Canadian authorities, in fact, had no intention of hanging him, but wanted to make an example of him. Commissioner Perry, at the trial, had rejected the argument that Joseph had acted according to customary law. Perry wanted to apply a harsh sentence in order to make an example of the accused. After the trial, however, he wrote privately to the Minister of Justice urging commutation of the sentence. Joseph Fiddler, he explained, “believed … that insane persons were dangerous to the well being of his tribe and that unless they were strangled they would turn into cannibals … It is clear that it has been the custom of the tribe from time immemorial to put to death members of their band, and other bands, who were thought by them to be insane or incurable.”

Joseph Fiddler’s sentence was commuted to life, and he was eventually transferred to the Stony Mountain Prison in 1908. In September of that year, the Governor General ordered his immediate release, but he had already died in prison, three days earlier.

These are very good examples of philosophy, religion, and the clash of cultures, but not necessarily in the way would be inclined to think. At the most profound level, the dividing line was not between those who believed in the windigo and those who did not, but between those who incarnated windigo traits (without necessarily believing in the windigo) and those who did not.

**WINDIGOS, PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION, AND CULTURE**

Imbued with a profound sense of interpersonal contingency, of dependence for survival on other persons – both human and non-human (animals and spiritual beings) – the Cree and Ojibwa traditionally saw their “environment” largely as a cluster of interpersonal relationships in which they are fully implicated. They thus gave paramount importance to personal virtues required for competence in interpersonal relationships, both to avoid and mitigate hardship, or for maintaining self-control in dire circumstances that defied control. In short, emotional, epistemic and ethical competence was more important than technical hunting competence.

The windigo, therefore, epitomized and embodied extreme emotional, epistemic, and ethical incompetence or perversion. The human being who was possessed by, or transformed into a windigo exhibited an extreme lack or loss of self-control (emotional incompetence); a disconnect with – or perversion of – reality, especially the distinction between edible animal persons and non-edible human persons (epistemic incompetence); and a rejection of relationships and their corresponding responsibilities (ethical incompetence). Dehumanizing the other and the self, the human-turned-windigo was the antithesis of the competent hunter: a cannibalistic monster of superhuman strength, uncontrollable, difficult to kill, provoking fear and evoking chaos.
The Algonquian understanding of the windigo was born out of their particular experiences, their environment, and from the drastic actions they were sometimes forced to take in order to protect themselves. In times of starvation or deprivation people might lose self-control and resort to cannibalism, or resort to cannibalism and then lose self-control, becoming dangerous. With no mental asylums or modern medical sciences, how else could they cope with the traumatic and monstrous transformation of a friend or relative, who could not be left with other family members while a hunter went to hunt? If necessity forced their hand, it was easier to kill a monster that had possessed a family member, than to kill a family member. If anyone manifested windigo-like traits (loss of self control, disconnect with reality, rejection of relationship) – even outside the context of famine and cannibalism – it provoked great fear of windigo possession, and called for drastic measures. On the other hand, cannibalism without windigo-traits could also occur. This explains why one man who ate his children – already dead of starvation – and saw his actions for what they were – showing no disconnect with reality and others, or loss of self-control – was not deemed to have become a windigo at all.

As noted already, the Algonquian understanding of the windigo and of the practical and ethical dilemmas provoked by starvation cannibalism was rooted in their particular historical circumstances. As R.G. Collingwood writes, in The Idea of History, “It is only by historical thinking that I can discover what I thought ten years ago, ... or five minutes ago ... In this sense, all knowledge of the mind is historical.” Similarly, John Lukacs points out that since “the present is no more than an illusion, a moment that is already past in an instant,” and since we cannot know the future, all knowledge is therefore knowledge of the past, however immediate that past may be. This point applies especially to our knowledge of the particular, but it also applies analogously or indirectly to our understanding of the abstract or the universal. In this sense, therefore, our understanding of ethics and other universal concepts are rooted – as they were for the Algonquian – in knowledge of the particular, and we are all – to some extent – historians.

Yet in drawing understanding of the universal from our experience of the particular, we are also all philosophers, and our philosophies all carry religious implications. If we allow a gross oversimplification, we could say that religion permits faith in other authorities as a bridge between our experience of the particular and our understanding of the universal, whereas philosophy systematically seeks to avoid acts of faith in any authority other than experience and reason. Both apply reason, even if sometimes in very different ways. Both also call on us in different ways to re-configure (re-bind or reconnect) our actions to our understandings of reality: to live according to what we believe to be true. In reality, the dividing line between philosophy and religion has long been hazy, certainly in Indigenous North American traditions, but also in Western traditions.

To reiterate, our philosophical and religious understandings are embedded in our historical knowledge or experience of the particular, but
our historical experiences of the particular also become embedded in our philosophical and religious understandings. The relationship between them is one of constant ideological dialogue in which they inform, form, and reform each other. Simply put, our understandings shape the way we experience reality at the same time as our experiences of reality shape our understandings of it. But what is meant by “ideological dialogue”? John Lye explains that:

Ideology is a term developed in the Marxist tradition to talk about how cultures are structured in ways that enable the group holding power to have the maximum control with the minimum of conflict. This is not a matter of groups deliberately planning to oppress people or alter their consciousness (although this can happen), but rather a matter of how the dominant institutions in society work through values, conceptions of the world, and symbol systems, in order to legitimize the current order. Briefly, this legitimation is managed through the widespread teaching (the social adoption) of ideas about the way things are, how the world “really” works and should work. These ideas (often embedded in symbols and cultural practices) orient people's thinking in such a way that they accept the current way of doing things, the current sense of what is “natural,” and the current understanding of their roles in society. ... ideological structures appear to be natural, “according to the order of things” (naturalization); ... the logical conclusion to an historical development (historicization); [and] ... there is an assumption that now that this (natural) state of affairs has been reached, things will be that way, barring regression (eternalization). 18

Ideology can certainly be all this, but there is another, more positive and indispensable form of ideology – regardless of what label we give it. Ἰδέα, the Greek word for “form,” comes from the verb εἰδω, which means “I see.” Yet the primary meaning of the perfect tense of this verb, οἴδα, is not “I have seen,” but rather “I know.” Implicit here is the notion that ideas or forms are the very means by which we know, the means by which we process our experiences of reality. Ideology – defined as a reasoning (λογος) of forms (ἰδεαί) – is necessary. Without a reasoning of forms, we cannot form reasons. If we acknowledge the existence of ideology in the Marxist sense, therefore, we must also acknowledge its indispensability in this other sense. Otherwise, we will fall into deconstructionism, the threat of which, writes Amy Gutmann, is “twofold: (1) it denies a priori that there are any reasonable answers to fundamental questions, and (2) it reduces every answer to an exercise of political power.” 19
T.S. Eliot wrote in 1942:

... History may be servitude
History may be freedom. See, now they vanish,
The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them,
To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern. 20

Ideology also may be servitude, or it may be freedom. How willing are we to allow the faces, places and self, all of which we love imperfectly, to become renewed, transfigured in another pattern? Ideology can be a way of formatting experience in an honest and demanding search for unity of understanding with reality. It can be fluid and dynamic in its constant interaction with experience, changing shape, like the eye, in order to focus and clarify one’s understanding. Ideology can also be like a distorted glass lens, used to impose an immutable and universal truth, or to deny the possibility of discovering any measure of immutable and universal truth. One form of ideology allows for mystery; the other does not permit it (fundamentalism), or permits nothing else (relativism). One allows for knowledge; the other obstructs it. One is living; the other is dead. One seeks unity of understanding with reality while recognizing our experiences of reality are limited and different; the other seeks uniformity of understanding. One recognizes complimentary understandings and seeks to resolve contradictory ones; the other is indifferent to contradictory understandings or attempts to resolve them by imposing its own.

Our ability to be competent (technologically, socially, economically, but above all ethically), is contingent on our ideological dialogue with reality and the understanding that it fosters. Yet competence is more than knowledge or understanding. Competence is understanding cum potentia – with the potency to live it, to re-ligare – to bind – our actions to our understanding.

CLASH OF CULTURES – QUESTS FOR UNITY VERSUS UNIFORMITY OF UNDERSTANDING

Within all our cultures we find both unity and tension among experience, understanding, and action – the constitutive elements of culture – and between them and extra-mental reality. Philip Salzman writes that “culture is [and needs to be, I would add] integrated into a whole that tends toward consistency” and conversely, Philip Rief writes that the “death of a culture begins when its normative institutions fail to communicate ideals in ways that remain inwardly compelling.” 21 Essentially, we and our cultures suffer if we cannot connect our understanding of reality to our experience of it, if we cannot connect our action to our understanding or do not act as we understand we should, or if we never experience the results realized and/or intended by our actions. In other words, our psychological well-being and competence (practical and ethical) are largely dependent on our ability and
willingness to seek unity between: our understanding of reality and our experience of it; our experience of reality and our action on it; and our action on reality and our understanding of it.

A competent relationship between understanding, experience and action, therefore, is circular and it revolves around reality. Reality, however, is permeated by mystery. Furthermore, as noted earlier, it is through imperfect understandings that incomplete experiences continue to inform and reform what remain imperfect understandings. No human being can understand, experience, or act upon reality in its fullness. This is why our quests for understanding lead us back to others, especially – in some cases – those whose very different understandings and experiences can help us address the limitations of our own.

Yet we do not choose merely to have recourse to others. Our actions, experiences, and understandings are not formed in isolation from – or in complete unity with – others, and it is in the formative years of our life that this is made most clear. Contact and contingency are at the origin of our being and remain a part of it. These words draw their root from the Latin contingere – literally “to touch together,” a meaning not so different from its homonym which means “to bathe together.” We come into being from contact between and with our parents. We are conceived and born from their relationship and in relationship to them. Insofar as we “bathe together” with them and others in the same river of reality, we form with them a common culture, a collection of shared understandings (from how to use a fork to the nature of divinity) based on shared experience and action.

Nevertheless, we always remain distinct. Even if we “bathe together” with others in the same river of reality, we are nevertheless cultured (formed and informed) distinctly. Culture lives in each of us, and it evolves as our understandings evolve. It is only to the extent to which we share understandings with others that we share a culture with them.

When we speak of “cultures” as independent entities, therefore, what we are referring to are clusters, held and renegotiated by persons-in-relationship, of shared understandings embodied and shaped by our experiences and actions. These clusters have mass, however, that exert gravitational pull. Within these cultural centres of gravity, therefore, some understandings are closer to the core and many others may be more peripheral. We can therefore participate in numerous cultural centres of gravity simultaneously, but some of those clusters of shared understandings define how we participate in others.

When contact with people of other cultures demands co-action, however, we need to form a common understanding. Yet in order to evaluate each other’s understandings we often need to comprehend (cum-prehendere, “to grasp together”) each other’s experiences. The less we have in common, the more sharing of “experience” (evidence) we require. However, when the record of such experience is framed and communicated in an understanding very different from our own – the very understanding we seek to verify – we can only evaluate its merit by somehow living new
experiences together or stepping into each other’s shoes. This was the challenge faced by those involved in the windigo killings. It can be very difficult to “learn to move,” as Charles Taylor suggests, “in a broader horizon, within which what we have formerly taken for granted as the background to valuation can be situated as one possibility alongside the different background of the formerly unfamiliar culture.”22 Cross-cultural credibility gaps are to a large extent inevitable and natural simply because of our epistemological limitations. It is our ethical choices and habits, however, that prevent us from closing these gaps and preventing them from turning into enduring clashes of culture.

Malice, egoism, and fear can lead us to seek unity of understanding with our actions rather than unity of understanding with reality, as we experience it. The result is a break with reality, where – like the windigo – we misconstrue or ignore our experience of it or avoid experiencing the results of our actions on it. The resulting culture loses its unity and may often be unethical, sometimes to the extreme. If we do not seek unity of understanding with reality in our own life, moreover, we will not seek it in our relations with others. Like the windigo, we may try to isolate ourselves from others, cutting off relations with those who expose our lack of unity of life. If we cannot live in such relative or complete isolation, however, we may instead demand uniformity of understanding or at least of action from those around us. We cannot bear to have anyone challenge explicitly or implicitly the skewed understanding of reality that we have adopted in conformity with our immoral or defective actions (often habitual) that we fear changing or, from malice or egoism, refuse to change. And if others do not conform (or simply are not in conformity) to ourselves, if we cannot assimilate them, we often completely “otherize” them, sometimes forcefully.

Extreme otherization is the de- or sub-humanization of people. It is the denial of our relationship of common humanity. Polarization and dichotomization are necessary prerequisites to such dehumanization, and unfortunately, our positivist legal frameworks facilitate such polarization, because they predispose us to think of society in terms of individuals and groups. As a result, we often lose sight of the fact that relationships between individuals are much more binding and complex, and that boundaries between groups much more permeable and fluid. What we call groups are intertwined and overlapping clusters of persons-in-relationship, and individuals only exist in relationship, multiple and fluid. We are persons-in-relationship; this conception of society – predominant in Cree culture – captures the reality of who we are much better. While some of our relationships are contextual, temporary and/or chosen, others, like our common humanity and filial ties, are not necessarily of our own making or choice; moreover, they are or become a permanent part of who we are. We can be healthy and competent if we acknowledge and seek to understand our relationships, but if we begin denying some of our relationships and the responsibilities that flow from them, our moral
grounding is lost. Unfortunately, the dominant rights-based discourse does not encourage us to think in terms of the responsibilities that flow from our relationships, and this has grave ramifications on how we address the moral dilemmas we face.

Some forms of otherization can be used as an effective means of deterring, punishing, and correcting illegitimate or immoral behaviour. Thus, the windigo becomes an unacceptable “other,” at least until he reforms or is reformed. The Algonquian did not always consider such “otherness” to be absolute; reform or recovery was often deemed possible. Within the mind of a human-turned-windigo, in fact, there might still be a degree of unity between experience, understanding and action, even if it was isolated from others and from reality. The perverse understanding (of human beings as edible) had been brought into unity with action (the loss of self-control in eating others) in a perverse reversal of the quest for unity of action with understanding, with the help of others; nevertheless, with the help of others, a windigo might regain unity of experience with reality – experiencing the results of one’s monstrous actions – or be force-fed human food, and this could overcome the windigo possession. Such was the case of one man, who after receiving such treatment, was cured and would often be heard crying lamentably over the loss of the wife and child he had killed and eaten.23

In Cree and Ojibwa cultures, the concept of madness, as something medically and scientifically definable and treatable, is only a relatively recent importation from Western culture. It was the concept of monster that was used to understand and cope with all forms of deviant behaviour that were harmful to society. The windigo was the monster that epitomized such behaviour. Windigo possession could imply culpability – if one wilfully engaged in actions that were wrong, but it could also be used to preserve the innocence and humanity of someone who committed a monstrous act. Imagine your loved one, a brother, sister, spouse, parent or child losing self-control, killing and eating someone, or eating dead human flesh and losing self-control. How would you understand and cope with the shocking transformation that has occurred? And how would you take the necessary measures to protect yourself and others from further violence in a society without institutions we take for granted? As a hunter, would you leave your possessed wife at camp with your children while you go to get food? As noted earlier, if necessity forced your hand, killing a windigo that had possessed your loved one would be easier than killing your loved one.

Those who killed the allegedly insane women in 1818 and 1906 thought they were killing windigos in order to protect themselves and their families. Those who disagreed did not condone these actions, but to the extent that they were seeking unity of understanding with reality, they recognized that the killings had been done without malice. They knew that beneath very significant differences of culture and understanding, there was a shared culture of epistemic honesty founded on a shared quest for unity of understanding with reality. In short, even though they were certain that the
Algonquian understanding was wrong, they recognized that their intentions were right. They did try to challenge the Algonquian view, however, both in 1889 and in 1906.

As a result of their interactions with Europeans, few, if any, Cree or Ojibwa today would reject what medical sciences have taught us about mental illness. If they did so contrary to their better judgment – for the sake of reintroducing old cultural practices in the name of cultural preservation or renewal – they would risk becoming windigos themselves. For although such cultural practices might appear similar to those practiced by their ancestors, beneath the appearance of cultural renewal and continuity there would open a deep chasm between their own culture – founded now on a quest for uniformity of understanding (across time) – and that of their ancestors – founded on a quest for unity of understanding with reality. In such a case, only an external cultural relativism could condone such an internal cultural fundamentalism, which highlights the insanity and monstrosity to which both relativism and fundamentalism can lead.

Monstrosity and madness appear to have in common an inability to seek unity between understanding, experience and action, and – more importantly – with extra-mental objective reality. However, in the case of madness, the inability stems from circumstances primarily beyond our control, in cases of desperation, and often has potential for treatment. In the case of monstrosity, the inability stems from a persistent epistemologically dishonest and willful break with reality – a lie insisted upon to the point that the ability to see the lie as a lie has been lost, and we have become monstrous.

Cree and Ojibwa cultures may no longer have or need quite the same notion of the windigo, and it may have incorporated the medical notion of madness, but the notion of the windigo and of the monstrous is perhaps still needed in their culture and especially in western culture, in which – as Rieff argues – the therapeutic has triumphed. In short, if we lie to ourselves enough about reality – especially on the ethical plane where it affects our relations with others and our ability to appreciate and fulfill the responsibilities that flow from these relationships – then we risk becoming monstrous windigos. And that is something we should fear no less than the Cree and Ojibwa feared windigo possession. In our twenty-first century society – no less than for the Cree father in the 1910s who, for fear of turning windigo, cut a hole in the lake ice to dispose of the dead body of his starved child – avoiding or curing windigo possession may require painful acts of detachment or painful reunifications of understanding with reality. This is perhaps why moral dilemmas such as abortion remain so intractable.

NOTES


3 *Wihtiko* is the Cree term; English has borrowed the closely-related Anishinabe (Ojibwa) term, ‘windigo,’ which is used here for simplicity’s sake. Other alternative transcriptions include “witiko,” “wendigo,” “witigo,” “wintiko,” “windigow,” “wihtiiko” and “witiko.” Other Cree terms include “atuush” and “ochiskwachiwak.” See C. Douglas Ellis (ed.), *Atulohkana nesta Tipachimovina: Cree Legends and Narratives from the West Coast of James Bay* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1995), p. 78.


8 For precise historical references for this incident see Cecil Chabot, “Merging Amerindian and Euroamerican Understandings of a Shared Past: the 1832 Washaw Conflict” (MA thesis, Université de Montréal, 2002), pp. 149-152. Some additional references not found in this source are provided as needed.

9 The main primary source for this second incident is an account from Cree elder John Blackned, recorded in Richard Preston’s *Cree Narrative: Expressing the Personal Meaning of Events, 2nd* ed. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), pp. 133-145.

10 Hudson Bay Company Archives (HBCA), B.135/e/28a, August 20, 1890.


12 Richard Preston, personal communication, August 8, 2009.


19 Gutmann, Multiculturalism, p. 20.
22 Taylor, Multiculturalism, p. 67.
24 Rieff, Triumph of the Therapeutic.
CHAPTER V

THE CLASH OF CULTURES IN CANADA: APOCALYPTIC FEAR AND CHRISTIAN/MUSLIM RELATIONS

MARTHA F. LEE

The existence of a clash of cultures in Canada – particularly as it pertains to religion – is frequently understood by the popular press to be a recent development. The starting point of this paper is that this supposed clash is certainly not new. Canadians have a history of intolerance towards non-Christian religious faiths, and the current ‘clash’ concerns Canadian majority reaction to the growth of the Canadian minority Muslim population. Typically, our early twenty-first century cultural conflicts between the majority and minority have been rooted in secular claims about the state and minority rights. While we might well be horrified at the intolerance that many of these cases suggest, as citizens of a liberal democratic society we can also be reasonably confident that they will be addressed by government and judicial institutions, and openly discussed.

Among the many recent clashes however, one stands out: the lecture series, “The Deadly Threat of Islam,” which took place in 2007, in the Canadian city of Windsor, Ontario, at Campbell Baptist Church. I argue here that this lecture series (in the end, terminated by public protest, with only one lecture on the original theme), differs from the majority of these types of events in Canada. Typically, the language used in these upheavals is rooted in political discourse, and framed in such a way as to argue against a supposed extension of minority rights. The Campbell Baptist lectures began with explicitly theological claims about the Muslim minority’s religious beliefs, and it was from this faith-based standpoint that their political argument emerged. The Campbell Baptist speaker’s millenarian faith, coupled with his adoption of a complex end-times conspiracy theory, facilitated this move. This type of clash is ultimately more problematic for the state than secular debates concerning minority religious rights. It directly involves conflicting truth claims and can potentially result in violence. These theologically-based claims can tell us much about the parameters of “cultural clash,” for they exist at the outer limits of Canadian political debate. Embedded within them is the very anti-democratic demand for an end to difference. It might well be the case that, as Canadian society continues to evolve, we will see more of these totalitarian-like events, which are described by Eric Voegelin as attempts to “immanentize the eschaton.”

Interestingly, this mode of understanding Canadian identity and the perception of threats to it resemble the architecture of Canadian anti-Semitism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
Today, as then, the majority of the Canadian population is Christian; in the 2001 census, seven out of ten Canadians reported that their religious faith was either Roman Catholic or Protestant. Canada’s Muslim population is a significantly smaller minority. In the same census, it constituted 2% of the entire population. At the same time, however, it is Canada’s fastest growing religious population, mostly due to immigration. Between 1991 and 2001, the number of Muslims in Canada increased almost 130%, from 253,265 to 579,640 individuals. Sixty-one percent of Canadian Muslims live in Ontario.

This rapid increase in the Canadian Muslim population mirrors the growth of the Jewish population in Canada in the late 1800s. Between 1871 and 1901, the Jewish population in Canada multiplied seven times over. In Ontario, a minority of 534 people in 1881 increased to over 3000 individuals by 1901. Despite this community’s significant contributions to Canadian society, anti-Semitism flourished during this period. Quebec’s La Verité, for example, published the conspiratorial myth that a well-organized cabal of “under-handed Jews” was working “for the abrogation of laws made by the goims [in order to]...dictate to the world, what it should believe, what it should honour.” A continuing theme of this rhetoric was the fear that Jews were trying to destroy Christianity, and that Jewish immigration to Canada should be stopped.

The rough parallels between these two religious minorities suggest that anti-Muslim sentiment in Canada might well be anticipated, and to some degree, this has been the case. In September 2006, for example, an arsonist set fire to an Islamic school in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and in January 2007, an Islamic school in Montreal was vandalized. Also in January 2007, the town councilors of Hérouxville, a small town outside of Montreal, published a list of “community standards” for new immigrants that included a prohibition on covering one’s face (except on Hallowe’en), as well as prohibitions on stoning, circumcision, and burning women alive. This declaration was widely interpreted to be an expression of ignorance and hostility towards Islam. More recently, a female Egyptian immigrant in Montreal twice refused to remove her niqab in French language class; this decision twice led to her expulsion from government-sponsored language classes, prompted her to file a human rights complaint, and led the government to review its policy on accommodation of minorities.

These relatively recent cases of anti-Muslim sentiment – certainly evidence of some type of “cultural clash” – have much to do with particular perceptions of Islam, and of the religious institution/state relationship in Canada. The results of an April 2009 Angus Reid Strategies poll suggest that these events should not surprise us. Surveying over one thousand Canadians, the poll found that of the major religious faiths in Canada, Islam had the lowest favorability ranking (28%, compared to 72% for Christianity and 57% for Buddhism, for example), and 45% of those surveyed believed that Islam encourages violence. There may therefore be an underlying religious bias in these recent events, but it is still rare to find an example of
the “clash of cultures,” wherein the clash originates from an openly religious perspective.

The January 2007 initiation of “The Deadly Threat of Islam” lecture series at Campbell Baptist Church, Windsor, Ontario, was, however, one such event. The Church’s pastor, Don McKay, advertised the series as featuring Zachariah Anani, a self-described “former terrorist.” McKay argued that the purpose of the series was to warn Canadians about Islam, a religious faith he characterized as “oppressive” and “vicious.” McKay told reporters that he had a responsibility to protect Canada and Canadians, and noted that the lectures were arranged to propagate what his church believes to be the “absolute truth.” Anani supported these assertions in his talk by claiming that Islamic doctrine teaches the “ambushing, seizing and slaying” of non-believers.

Statements such as this might be considered unusual in the 21st century Canadian public sphere, and commentators struggled to situate them in Baptist theology and Canadian politics. I will here argue that Anani’s and McKay’s belief systems are rooted in millenarian thinking, and that the lecture series was an expression of that theology. Both men anticipate the imminent end of the current world, and the imminent initiation of perfected Christian existence on earth. The dynamics of millenarian belief systems help to explain why they can be both positive and problematic for the larger political communities in which they exist. They also suggest how, when they have become problematic, they can most effectively and positively be transformed. Many of Windsor’s citizens recognized that the language used in the publicity for the lectures and the lectures themselves was problematic, and inappropriate public discourse. Their response – public protests outside the lectures, and a sustained campaign of complaints to the media – helped to bring a sudden end to the series.

MILLENIANISM

Millenarian doctrines typically interpret history as the site of increasing conflict, and anticipate a final battle between good and evil, following which God’s chosen people will enjoy a golden age in a world made perfect. Yonina Talmon argues that all millenarian belief systems share five characteristics. They are marked by the hope in a salvation that is: imminent, in that it will occur soon; ultimate, in that it will bring about the final stage of human history; collective, in that it will be shared by the community of believers; this-worldly, in that it will occur in this world, not some heavenly afterlife; and total, in that it will bring about the incarnation of perfection.

Millenarian beliefs are most commonly associated with religious groups. Indeed, the term itself is drawn from the Book of Revelation. It is a reference to the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth after the final confrontation between good and evil at Armageddon, “And I saw thrones, and they that sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them ... [and] ...
they shall be priests of God and Christ and shall reign with him for a thousand years.” Despite the distinctly Christian origins of this terminology, however, the millenarian belief structure can be found across the spectrum of religious belief systems. It can also be found in the political sphere. In these secular millenarian groups, believers anticipate that it is man, not God, who is capable of making the world perfect. James Rhodes, for example, argues that Germany’s National Socialism was one such millenarian movement. The Nazis understood themselves to be the protagonists in the most significant, ongoing, and escalating conflict in human history, and believed that they would triumph in an apocalyptic battle that would bring about the final stage of that history: the Third Reich. Marxist ideology can be understood in this way. Believers anticipate a revolution that will transform human existence and initiate an equitable and peaceful world.

While it is therefore possible to distinguish religious and political millenarians, however, it is also the case that religious groups will engage the political sphere. In preparing for the end of time, they engage in action that has a political impact. They understand themselves to be a chosen people, and anticipate that their hoped-for vision will be incarnated in this world. This is a political claim. Likewise political groups approach their goals with a quasi-religious fervor. Their vision is “total and all embracing, [and purports] to have solved the basic problems of meaning as well as tracing and interpreting the unfolding of world history.”

Millenarian ideologies are particularly appealing to the poor and politically oppressed, for they promise an idealized future. If you have little at stake in the present, an imminent and perfect future world is appealing. Michael Barkun states that millenarian ideologies develop when communities undergo disasters that threaten their existence: “(m)en cleave to hopes of imminent worldly salvation only when the hammer blows of disaster destroy the world they have known and render them susceptible to ideas which they would have earlier cast aside.” Scholarship also suggests that those who suffer relative deprivation (the inability to attain economic and social success when others achieve that success) can lead to millenarian faiths. In addition, individuals and groups searching for a cultural identity in the context of economic upheaval and rapid social change often adopt millenial beliefs. Anthony Wallace, in his classic article “Revitalization Movements,” argued that societies are a type of living entity, and that millenarian belief systems are part of a constant process of adaptation to changing circumstances. Millenarianism can develop as a community seeks to regain “...a sense of dignity and self respect.” In the process of defining a new self-identity, groups can easily adopt millenarian beliefs and come to understand themselves as a “chosen people.”

Millenarian beliefs therefore have the capacity to transform their adherents’ lives. Adherents may be poor, they may be politically vulnerable, they may have suffered natural or man-made disasters, but they come to understand themselves as God’s chosen people. With this new self-
understanding, they can develop a sense of identity, and with this, they can significantly improve their lives. In Malcolm X’s words, “when a man understands who he is, who god is, who the devil is ... then he can pick himself up out of the gutter; he can clean himself up and stand like a man should before his God.” In this way, millenarian belief systems can be a positive force for both individuals and society. Notably, millenarian movements in Canada have most significantly appeared in the prairie west and in Quebec, a geographic proliferation that supports this argument.

At the same time, however, millenarianism can be problematic. In his classic work, The Pursuit of the Millennium, historian Norman Cohn examined millenarian groups of the Middle Ages. He found that while millennial beliefs certainly brought meaning and self-fulfilment to the urban poor, they were also dangerous. Cohn argued that millenarianism fostered a myth of collective supremacy that was dangerous both to believers and to the society in which they existed. Cohn argues that the nature of the belief system itself means that adherents engage in a kind of self-divinization, and they believe that they are justified in taking any political action that is necessary to achieve their ends. Because they have a key role in the unfolding of history, they understand themselves as not just another political community, but as the only legitimate political community.

Thomas Flanagan further develops this argument. He points out that millenarians tend to view the current world in dualistic terms; they see the forces of good at battle with the forces of evil in almost every facet of existence. The world around them is the site of on-going and escalating conflict, which will only conclude in a final, ultimate, apocalyptic battle. The post-apocalyptic world, however, is a millennial age of perfect peace, where conflict does not exist. It is monist, “a society without war (external conflict) or class struggle (internal conflict), without hierarchy and oppression, without poverty or inequality.”

Our human community is diverse, and that diversity is reflected in political pluralism. Millennial thinkers, however, reject pluralism. They divide us first into those who are good and those who are evil, thus reducing that pluralism to a dualism that paints the world as either black or white. Their vision of the future is similarly problematic. They paint a beautiful picture of a conflict-free world. It is, however, a world where there is no human difference, no disagreement, and no politics. Such a vision is potentially totalitarian and therefore profoundly troubling. It is almost always problematic when it appears in the secular realm. The religious hope for such a world also becomes dangerous when it becomes a political platform (as in some forms of fundamentalist Christianity and radical Islam, for example). The lecture series at Windsor’s Campbell Baptist Church was of this type.
CAMPBELL BAPTIST CHURCH AND “THE DEADLY THREAT OF ISLAM”

Campbell Baptist Church has its origins in a community of Baptists who first gathered in Windsor in 1928; its members have worshiped at the current location on Wyandotte Street since the 1950s. At the time of the lecture series, the congregation’s pastor was Donald McKay (he had held that position since 1993); he has since left for a church in Bloomfield, Michigan, where he is pastor, and Director of Bloomfield Hills Institute of Theological Study. Pastor McKay describes himself as a “premillennial dispensationalist.” He understands God’s relationship with human beings to have taken place in a series of stages, which will culminate with the return of Christ prior to the great tribulation to gather the saints. Following the tribulation, Christ will return again to initiate the millennial kingdom. McKay is adamant that only God knows when Christ will return. While he states that the return of Christ is “imminent,” he defines this as meaning that it could happen at any time, from tomorrow to five hundred years from now. Nevertheless, he is preoccupied with this imminent end of time. Between June, 2006 and June, 2007 (the period preceding and following the lecture series), he preached from the book of Revelation thirty-three times.

Although McKay maintains that his decision to hold the “Deadly Threat of Islam” lecture series was not motivated by these apocalyptic concerns, in his view, Canada is at war. Christian Canadians must realize the crisis situation that exists, and end the spread of Islam in Canada. He argues that if this does not happen, in thirty years Canada will be a Muslim country. For him, this situation would be intolerable because the institution of Sharia law would likely make it impossible to preach the Christian gospel. Eventually, however, when the apocalypse and tribulation are set in motion, McKay argues that Islam will be the force that controls the world until the Battle of Armageddon. In a sermon thanking his congregation for their support during the series, he stated that “The Bible talks about one world government and one world religion ... people it is going to be Islam.”

Thus, while McKay, Anani, and Campbell Baptist’s other believers are not, strictly speaking, a millenarian movement (their theology does not identify a specific date for the apocalypse), the church and its leadership are predisposed to understand the world in millenarian terms. In that framework, Islam plays a significant role. In this light, the decisions to host a lecture series on the “Deadly Threat of Islam” and to hire ex-Muslim Christian evangelist Zachariah Anani as the keynote speaker make perfect sense. On January 11, 2007, Anani gave the first lecture in the series, “Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid: The Frightening Facts About Islam” to an audience of one hundred and thirty people. This first lecture resulted in a significant public outcry that included threats to challenge Anani’s Canadian citizenship. National and local media coverage ensured that the second lecture would be well attended. Indeed, over five hundred people showed up
at the second lecture, “Could Jihad Be Coming to Your Neighbourhood?” McKay, however, abruptly cancelled the lecture, explaining that he supported Anani and agreed with his arguments, but that he did not want him to jeopardize his citizenship. Instead of the promised lecture, Donald McKay gave a lengthy sermon on Christianity followed by a recitation of terrorist actions from the past twenty five years that he argued were linked to a militant form of jihad about which all Canadians “should be concerned.”

McKay did not provide an opportunity for questions following his talk, and quickly left the Church. Later, however, he defended his support of Anani and the series by arguing “As a Christian, I am also under a very heavy mandate to do my part in defending this great country of ours from any attacks, either overt or incipient.” Those who had come to protest the lecture expressed disappointment in the lack of dialogue, as did members of Windsor’s Muslim community, one of whom commented, “God knows what their intentions were from the beginning. I don’t think they accomplished what they wanted because the Windsor community is united. God knows best.” Later, McKay cancelled the third lecture in the series, “Why the Islamic Faith is Indefensible.”

Zachariah Anani was born in Lebanon, and recounts that he began Islamic school at the age of three. His grandfathers were Muslim imams, and he has stated that his parents expected he would follow in their footsteps. At the age of 13, however, he joined a militia group, and states that he was “trained to fight and kill Jews, and to hate Christians and Americans.” During his years as a combatant, Anani claims that in the name of Allah, he killed 223 people, “two thirds of them by daggers.” Security experts question Anani’s self-description as a terrorist, particularly the number of individuals that he claims to have murdered. In addition, it should be noted that in Lebanon, fighting did not begin until 1975, and religious-based terrorism did not occur until after 1979. Anani left Lebanon for Egypt in 1976. While still living in Lebanon, he converted to Christianity, and, since immigrating to Canada, has worked as a Christian evangelist. This has been primarily in the area of what he terms “Muslim outreach,” working to convert Muslims to Christianity.

Anani’s religious beliefs help to explain his reinterpretation of his own background, and the content of the controversial lecture he gave at Campbell Baptist Church on January 11, 2007. Anani’s dramatic conversion to Christianity eventually saw him drawn to Herbert Stollorz’s Faith in the Future Foundation, an organization that prophesied that the Apocalypse would begin in December of 2008, with the destruction of New York City by Islamic terrorists. At the time, Anani was a partner in the Faith in the Future Foundation, and today, he remains listed on the organization’s website as the individual responsible for translating Herbert Stollorz’s books into Arabic.

Stollorz argued that this terrorist act in New York would be the initial millennial event and would usher in a twelve stage “mini-apocalypse” in
which the major actors are the European Union, the U.N., Israel, and Islamic nations, and during which the Temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt.

In early 2015, he contends, the battle of Armageddon will take place in northern Israel, in a conflict involving 200 million demon-possessed soldiers, and it will kill 80% of the world’s population. The final, Great Apocalypse will take place on December 21, 2015. It will initiate God’s Kingdom on Earth, which Stollorz describes as the third civilization of humanity."34

Stollorz derived his “Road Map to the Apocalypse” through, in his words, detailed analytic comparisons with the Hebrew alphanumeric system and the Jewish religious calendar. Outside confirmation comes from other scientific disciplines and notably with the Aztec calendar and the Chinese zodiac/calendar.35 The nature of his apocalyptic predictions makes them compatible with a wide variety of Christian apocalyptic belief systems.

Stollorz’s vision of the future is clearly millenarian. He views the apocalypse as imminent (and even provides a date for its occurrence), initiating the final stage of human history, occurring on this earth, and bringing about perfected human existence. This understanding of religious and political history therefore identifies Christianity as the most significant truth of human life. The other major western religions, however, also play an important but subsidiary role in God’s plan. For Stollorz, Anani, and many other Christian fundamentalists, the Jewish people and the state of Israel are of particular importance. Their biblical literalism fosters a particular kind of sympathy for Zionism. Orthodox fundamentalist eschatology identifies Jews and Israel as necessary for the conclusion of history. They must undertake the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, and must exist in order to “serve as the primary objects of God’s wrath.”36 In this view, almost all Jews – except those who convert to Christianity – will die without redemption:

... the sole reason the Jewish people have endured and the state of Israel was established was that each was an essential component of the inexplicable means whereby an unavoidable, transcendentally ordained end will be achieved.37

Stollorz’s and Anani’s support for Israel is therefore rooted in their hope for the eventual destruction of the Jewish people.

In Stollorz’s understanding, the Jews and Israel are therefore important for the role they play in the initiation of the Christian eschaton. God has given them “divine protection and assurance.”38 As well, the Old Testament is a critical element in his mathematical calculation regarding the timing of the apocalypse.

Time is running out for this world system. That warning applies to everyone! Jewish people will perish who do not read the Christian Bible ... to find out what future events will
Islam also plays a role in the road to the apocalypse. As noted above, Stollorz asserted that in December of 2008 to February of 2009, Islamic terrorists would attack New York using atomic weapons, and he implores all who live in the city to leave, or at least “take a holiday down south” during this time. Muslims threaten and attack Jews and Christians. Stollorz writes,

When America was attacked on September 11, 2001, many citizens ended up in church praying. Even members of Congress attended a Christian memorial service at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC. An Islamic cleric was allowed to give the opening prayer. There he was representing a religion that inspires violence daily against hundreds of Christians and Jews worldwide. I am shocked that no one in the American government objected to a Muslim cleric’s pastoral equal presence with nationally known Christian leaders in a Christian church.

This is highest peak of hypocrisy. It reveals how little our political and religious leaders understand about world politics or Islam. Just think, we are daily exposed to bombings, death and kidnappings perpetrated by Islamic radicals – sometimes even young children are used. When these “martyrs” remains are mourned, the Moslem funeral rhetoric usually blames the Jews and Christians, Israelis and Americans.

Throughout the “roadmap,” Stollorz also identifies Islam as a problematic force for world order. He maintains that its adherents engage in violence related to the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, and play a critical role in the final battle of Armageddon. Notably, Stollorz argues that the Antichrist is not a Muslim, instead, he emerges from Europe and is identifiable because he “will proclaim all religions spiritually valid at their source. He will teach that all religions and mystical matters reflect partial revelations of the one universal god through many cultural traditions.”

In his lecture at Campbell Baptist Church, Anani built on McKay’s and Stollorz’s understanding of history. Like McKay, he argued that Canada was “at war” with Islam, and he maintained that Muslims worshiped a god that “fights and kills” and “strikes with terror,” and who allows no prisoners in battles against non-believers.

Anani’s perception of Islam’s “deadly threat” did not sit well with many Windsor citizens. Following the first lecture, the outcry against the series was significant. Initially, Campbell Baptist’s pastor did not back
[I]t’s simply not true that Muslims are peaceful people ... The Muslim is mandated to slay the infidels... Islam is committed to the domination and destruction of the West. There is no such thing as a moderate Muslim... Frankly, we are frightened to death. We are concerned about the Islamic threat to Canadian security. 

The reaction of the local community was swift. A member of the Windsor Police Services Board told the local press that, in his view, the lecture fell under the Criminal Code’s Hate Crime provision, and declared that those responsible should be charged, declaring “We will pursue it further until we feel we have our share of justice.” Likewise, local city councilors condemned the series, and Windsor Member of Parliament Joe Comartin remarked, 

Having a pastor who’s willing to spout that kind of bigotry is not something that any organized religion in this country should tolerate... At its base, it’s offensive... And for somebody like that to claim that they are speaking from a real Christian vantage point, I just reject that wholeheartedly. It’s really regrettable that people who are in a position of authority, like a pastor in a mainstream Christian religion, would do that.

McKay and Anani, however, were not advocating a mainstream faith; instead, they were promoting an apocalyptic religious faith augmented by secular conspiracy theories. Mainstream religious faiths have for the most part “de-eschatologized” their doctrines. If one anticipates the imminent end of this world, they are concerned with warning believers and non-believers of what they believe to be the truth. This is a matter of pressing religious importance. It is also, however, political. As noted above, millenarian beliefs always have political implications, for they make specific claims about the human community, and advocate the transformation of society.

In this case, Anani’s and McKay’s expectation that the end of time is near moved them to imbue day-to-day existence in Windsor with transcendent meaning. Windsorites are participants in the final and most important drama in human history, whether they know it or not. The characters in that drama are identified in dualistic terms. There are those who are good, and those who are evil. Those who are evil pose a “deadly threat.” Informing others of this threat is therefore a religious duty. The immediate implications of doing so – creating inter-religious conflict in the community – are therefore unimportant in the context of the larger, religious
picture. They might, in fact, be welcome (unrest and conflict will bring the millennium closer, sooner).

In the larger community, however, the kinds of statements that emerged from this theological conference are problematic. Windsor is a diverse, multi-cultural, multi-faith community. In this context, declaring one group to be a “deadly threat” is at the very least, inappropriate public discourse. We live in a democracy, and individuals are, however, within reasonable limits, entitled to free speech and freedom of religion.

Research into millenarian movements suggests first, that it is very difficult to dissuade those who hold intense apocalyptic beliefs. Even when the date they set for the apocalypse passes, they remain convinced they are right (perhaps they misinterpreted the date, or perhaps they were not pure enough). Direct and immediate confrontation is also unlikely to be successful. As noted above, vocal opposition is more likely to convince believers that they are correct than to show them the error of their ways. An extreme example of this is the confrontation that occurred between the American government (in the capacity of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) and the Branch Davidians at Waco, Texas. Groups that suspect the end of the world is near may become convinced it is upon them if they are attacked by federal agents with firearms.

The events at Campbell Baptist Church indicate that there is a perhaps significant minority of the Canadian population that understands Canadian politics and the world in these eschatological terms. They present an interesting problem for policymakers because they do not approach the clash of cultures with regret or concern (which might be said for those who address the issue from a more secular perspective), they look forward to it, and find hope for their future in it. This is not new for Canada. As noted at the beginning of this paper, religious arguments were made to support anti-Semitism in the early twentieth century.

Strongly held eschatological convictions cannot be changed by arguments located outside the believers’ discourse. As noted above, such provocation is more likely to convince believers they are correct, and reinforce their dualistic picture of the world. Likewise, they are unlikely to abandon their faith when date-specific prophecies for the end of the world are not realized. Again, these potentially disconfirming events instead reinforce the believers’ faith in the prophecy, and typically motivate them to work harder for their cause (as is what occurred in the case of Zachariah Anani and his prophet, Herbert Stollorz). As a veteran of many civic “inter-faith events,” personal experience suggests that even those occasions do not necessarily attract these outliers, and when they do, those individuals are not necessarily there to listen and learn about diversity. At one such recent event, an evangelical Christian took furious notes and accosted the Anglican host and a Muslim presenter about their “lies” that Islam and Canadian Muslims were peaceful. Not to be outdone, a Muslim attendee confided to a colleague that he attended interfaith events to search for potential converts. Perhaps the only way to transform a millenarian’s faith that the
world is not on the brink of the apocalypse is through the passage of time. As life continues, and history carries on, their dualistic picture of the world is less likely to hold firm: ambiguities emerge, and potentially a tolerance of others’ faiths can emerge.

In his introduction to *The New Science of Politics*, Eric Voegelin encourages political thinkers in their analyses to consider communities’ self-interpretation through “an exploration of the symbols by which [they] interpret themselves as representatives of a transcendent truth.” The study of millenarian beliefs is useful because even though they constitute an extremist minority, they mark the extremes of “cultural clash.” In the case of the Campbell Baptist speakers, Windsor community leaders and Windsorites themselves effectively terminated the outrageous lecture series by their vocal concern and protests at the event. This conclusion of the series did not, however, change McKay’s beliefs (it reconfirmed to him the dangers Muslims pose to unwitting Canadians). In the following year, however, Pastor McKay left Campbell Baptist for Bloomfield Baptist Church, in Bloomfield, Michigan. There he continues his attempts to bring attention to the Muslim community, and also to convert its members to Christianity.

The “Deadly Threat” lecture series was a particularly ugly expression of anti-Islam and anti-Muslim immigrant sentiment. In this, however, they were part of a long tradition in Canada; as noted at the beginning of this paper; similar fears were once publicly expressed about the Canadian Jewish population. The millennial architecture of these belief systems suggest that they will not be altered by deliberate attempts at re-education, public attack, or even by internal contradiction. What is left, then, besides the hope that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) can track such individuals and prevent violent harm? Research on millenarian movements suggests: not much. Extreme millennial movements (both secular and millennial) are perhaps an inevitable modern outcome of social change. What is reassuring about this case is that the Windsor Muslim population did not respond in kind, and instead joined with those who protested the events in a responsible way. In the end, reasonable liberal democratic urge overcame extremism in a way that left a lasting impression on Windsorites.

In his analysis of society and the representation of truth, Voegelin writes that Aristotle realized the importance of political friendship in the emergence of political community. He suggests to us that “[o]nly in so far as men are equal through the love of their noetic self is friendship possible.” If this is indeed the case, then it is clear from this level of analysis that it is likewise impossible to “make” extremists into good, moderate, citizens of a diverse nation. We cannot, of course, remake women and men through legislation or education, a project reminiscent of millenarianism itself. Instead, what we might best do is engage in what Jacques Maritain – and I hope I am not quoting him too far out of context – referred to as “a fraternal recognition of the dignity of man – in other words,
the terrestrial hope of men in the Gospel,” where here we are talking about individuals of a variety of religions, in specific relation to their own specific religious texts. Time and political friendship are our allies in this endeavour.

NOTES

6 Michael Brown, “Anti-Jewish sentiment in French Canada from Confederation to World War I,” in Davies, *Anti-Semitism in Canada*.
14 Revelation 20:4, 6.
16 Talmon, “Millenarism.”
19 Talmon, “Millenarism.”
22 Donald McKay, Interview, Windsor, Ontario, March 27, 2007.
24 (McKay 2007b)
35 Stollorz, “Road Map of the Apocalypse.”
37 Brasher, “When Your Friend is Your Enemy.”

39 Stollorz, “Questions and Closing Thoughts.”
41 Stollorz, “Questions and Closing Thoughts.”
42 Stollorz, “Questions and Closing Thoughts.”
44 Wilhelm and Chen, “Hate Crime or Free Speech?”
45 Wilhelm and Chen, “Hate Crime or Free Speech?”
46 Wilhelm and Chen, “Hate Crime or Free Speech?”
47 “Getting to the Heart of Interfaith” Forum (St. Mark’s By the Lake Church, Tecumseh, Ontario, 2010).
CHAPTER VI

METAPHYSICAL COMMITMENTS: A PRECONDITION OF CULTURAL CLASH IN EDUCATION AND SOCIETY

THOMAS PHILBECK

Comprised of thirty-three islands, the tiny Islamic Kingdom of Bahrain has a total landmass of seven hundred forty-one square kilometers, roughly the size of Micronesia or Singapore. Here, between the Saudi Arabian coastline and Qatar’s peninsula, approximately one million people from around the globe have come to live together and to do business, primarily in one of Bahrain’s over four hundred financial institutions. Finance is of such great import that on 1 September 2006, Bahrain changed its official weekend from Thursday and Friday, the traditional Islamic weekend, to Friday and Saturday, so that the banks would have more days to trade with the rest of the world. Almost half of the one million inhabitants of Bahrain are from the Subcontinent or South-East Asia. There are as many as two hundred forty thousand non-nationals that come from the United States, Europe, Africa, South East Asia, and other countries within the Middle East.1 Women wearing the traditional abaya (black gown), hejab (head covering), and niqab (face veil) are omnipresent as they shop in westernized malls at Saks Fifth Avenue or at the French Carrefour. Saudi, Kuwaiti, and Emirati families arrive in Bahrain on the weekends in huge SUVs such as Chevrolet Suburbans and Toyota Sequoias ready to park in multi-level garages built to smaller metric system standards, and little boys in thobs (traditional white gowns for males) run to eat at McDonald’s or Kentucky Fried Chicken while their parents can have coffee at Starbucks, Caribou, or Dunkin Donuts.

There is, in fact, much mingling of cultures and cultural products happening in the more liberal parts of the Middle East. Globalization is the milieu. Nevertheless, many people in the Middle East and in the West have received the message that Middle Eastern and Western cultures are antithetical to one another. The media coverage of international affairs concerning issues from Egypt to Afghanistan often overlook the continuing inter-development of Middle Eastern nations with Western ways of life when discussing “culture.” The media offers conflicting views of cultural discontinuity, such as the burning of girls’ schools in Pakistan and the abuse of Indian laborers in Dubai or Saudi Arabia, alongside the message that people are the same everywhere one goes. As these contrary messages simultaneously broadcast to readers and viewers alike, the modern Western Humanistic approach holds that all ways of life are equally justifiable in some respect, and that even if two or more cultures are fundamentally
irreconcilable, we must rely on education as a method of engendering the willingness toward compromise, especially on points of religious and political import. The cry of cultural clash, however, demands that one recognize that cultures and conflict arise from the fact that there are disparities in fundamental organization. In other words, the reason for diverse behaviors and values is a diverse set of foundational understandings about how the world is and should be organized.

From the Western perspective, a great deal of what occurs in the cultural clash between the Middle East and the West can be traced to education in some respect. Whether it is a lack of education about one another or simply a lack of educational opportunity in developing countries, education is looked upon as the primary solution for integrating what appear to be irreconcilable global regions. This is not simply a Western assessment. Nor is it a continuation of colonialism in some masked form. Rather, the leaders in the GCC (The Gulf Cooperation Council) and in other Middle Eastern countries have actively sought the incorporation of Western (or Western-style) education into their nations. The question we must ask is whether cultural clashes on the scale of twenty-first century global regions are truly solvable via education, given that what education means to a group of people varies widely and presupposes a set of metaphysical commitments and value systems contingent on these commitments. Education is, after all, not value neutral, and in the West, these values are integrated into the accreditation system. In the West, the Church and rules of scripture no longer primarily drive ethical practice and rule of law. Modern Western political philosophy, relying heavily on Humanistic academic views, calls upon the existential “human condition” for egalitarian ethical practice and political rule. The project of Western education is built upon Humanism; very often, even in private religiously-affiliated universities. In the Middle East, the Islamic political and theological hierarchies call into question and challenge the foundations of Western Humanism and its consequent values. In order to successfully incorporate Western education into the Middle East, it must be asked if other cultures need or should adopt Western views. Can Western Humanist values be separated from what education signifies? And how do the answers to these questions relate to the cultural entanglement presented in the opening paragraphs?

With these questions in mind, we may begin to discuss the building blocks behind cultures, and to expose the preconditions necessary for particular cultural values. The GCC countries, especially, have expressed interest in emulating the success and the opportunity that is synonymous with western education, though the concomitant values that accompany it are not always understood. By comparing the metaphysical commitments of the West and the Middle East, the foundations of these value systems should become somewhat clearer and should also provide some perspective on the worldviews of these societies. By examining what education means, and how it affects other areas of life, we will be able to discern how metaphysics
provides a more robust analytic for deconstructing and delineating cultural clash, both in the educational institution and in society in general. In addition, we will be able to explore whether or not there is any particular method that can be drawn upon in order to address cultural clashes, even at their most fundamental levels.

One elemental aspect of education and culture is a commitment to a metaphysical structure that governs how we make sense of reality. This topic has been at the core of historical research since Herodotus took interest in the *nomoi* of other peoples nearly two and a half millennia ago. A commitment to a metaphysical structure is part and parcel of the educational understanding within a society and is a taken-for-granted foundation for the production of knowledge and values within society. Metaphysical commitment can also be shown to be one of several denominators in the cultural clash between Middle Eastern societies and Western establishments. A metaphysical commitment is an acceptance or a belief in a structure of reality that undergirds all other decisions about such things as knowledge, justice, and ethical practice. It is a precondition for orientation within a universe. It is our abstract act of self-location. This metaphysical commitment needn’t be fully coherent to an individual, and indeed many people confuse and conflate their commitments frequently. (Even so, people are committed to them nonetheless.) For example, if one does not believe in a universe with a supernatural dimension, one needn’t buy ghost insurance, nor will one accept a claim of responsibility placed on a supernatural agent. What counts as true depends upon what type of universe one accepts as a foundation. If one accepts the sun and not the earth as the center of our planetary system, then Joshua certainly couldn’t have made the sun stand still, since it wasn’t moving in the first place. If one does not accept deity as the cause of the universe, then Cartesian innate ideas will not be credible. Metaphysical commitments determine much of how we organize ourselves and establish our systems of knowledge. A consideration of these within Western history is relevant to an understanding of the educational paradigm and the worldview being exported into and encountered by Middle Eastern societies.

**METAPHYSICAL PRECONDITIONS**

In a public lecture in 2008, Professor Fred Halliday, a twenty-five year veteran of the London School of Economics, claimed that the traditional historical analysis of the Middle East may not be necessary, since so much of modern Middle Eastern political history is intertwined with Western influence. His reasons were political and economic, however, rather than cultural. Not to consider the deep cultural roots of the Middle East when analyzing cultural clash between the West and the Middle East would forego an opportunity to better understand an important aspect of the fundamental relationship between the two. After all, cultures have preconditions. The ability to consider the preconditions concerning how one
thinks about one’s context is a skill that is uniquely challenging, precisely because it requires apprehending the structure by which one formulates one’s values. The interesting point to be made is that Western and Middle Eastern cultures share a significant metaphysical foundation stemming from Hellenism and the spread of Platonism. Both Christianity and Islam inherited a great deal of this understanding. The major contexts for value formation are always cosmological and, thus, metaphysical. These overarching structures are visible in the deconstruction of decisions, the formulation of opinions, and in the general approach to events in everyday life. As such, they are quite visible in the classroom and in much of the cultural clash found in the media, if one knows where to look.

The acceptance of a particular cosmology, and its rules, establishes one’s metaphysical commitments. In the west, metaphysics begins in ancient Greece as the first attempt at a non-superstitious understanding of nature, and is known to most as Natural Philosophy. This is the very line of tradition in which Nicolas Copernicus and Isaac Newton place their own later work on the structure of the cosmos and the laws of physics. Metaphysics also has a second connotation due to Plato’s impact, and roughly equates to that “beyond nature.” This metaphysics is concerned with coming to grips with a structure that allows and makes possible a world; everything from ideas and emotions, an explanation for color, the way the planets move, or why some objects animate themselves, such as animals and plants. Plato’s views on metaphysics, epistemology, aesthetics, and ethics influenced Aristotle and those coming after who had no method of epistemology testable beyond the deductive principles of which they were also the authors. While traditional versions of Western cultural history point, like Herodotus, to an almost primordial division between east and west, they are also often unaware of the earlier diffusion of cultural inheritance that radiated from the Middle East. To be sure, much of Mesopotamia’s impact on Greece, and subsequently the West, is very little advertised. Nevertheless, the Greeks transformed these metaphysical investigations into philosophical ones. Platonism, carried and disseminated by Aristotle under the expanding sphere of Alexander of Macedon’s reign, brought an amended and transformed metaphysics back to the Middle East where it was reincorporated with local knowledge and views that had helped shape Greek ideas centuries earlier. Though avenues of dissemination are not extremely well defined, they are somewhat discernable by contemporary researchers that now understand ancient Greece as a peripheral civilization to Mesopotamia rather than an Ursprung, or primordial font, of western civilization. For example, scholars of religion are well aware that the Hebrew creation story is patterned after that of the Babylonians and Sumerians, and that the Flood stories of Xisothros and Utnapishtim are the blueprint for those of Noah and Deucalion. The Greek gods and goddesses bear unmistakable resemblance to their Egyptian and Babylonian counterparts. Even the stories and symbols of these deities often share symbols and events. As an outlying province of the great center of
Mesopotamian civilization, the constitution of Greek traditions was heavily influenced by Middle Eastern cultures. Even the famed Greek god Dionysus arrived on a boat bearing winemaking from afar.\textsuperscript{15}

In Greece, this foundation of civilization and culture was influenced by their own Doric traditions, and the Greek independence from Persia marked the beginning of a reverse trend of influence back into the cradle of civilization from the western shores of the Aegean. Along with this influence came the new philosophical knowledge of Greece. And with Alexander in the late fourth century BCE, the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle, a worldview of mixed cultural origins with tides of Middle Eastern and Western influence, became the norm for both regions. Platonism became dominant, and Aristotle “the master of those who know.”\textsuperscript{16} The residue of Platonism is evident in Christianity and Islam, and students in the classroom quickly recognize the basic structure of a reality that is divided between the eternal, perfect, immaterial, and original reality wherein the soul resides and the imperfect, temporary, material world to which humans are subject while alive.\textsuperscript{17} Again, philosophy begins with cosmology. Religion is likewise grounded in a metaphysical explanation of cosmos. Or rather, a metaphysical viewpoint on the cosmos must be a precondition of any subsequent philosophy or religion. Whatever the religious system or ideological philosophy, it must take place within a cosmos that is so constructed as to permit the philosophy or the religion to function as claimed. Early Christians encountered this predicament in the eschatological questions about the Christian faith. While Jesus of Nazareth’s appeals to virtue were quite clear, he did not leave a detailed description of the process through which the soul should traverse the afterlife. Rather he claimed the Kingdom of God was within.\textsuperscript{18} Regardless of this fact, the following generations, especially the Gnostics, provided plenty of metaphysical systems by which this soul-traversing process should occur, often modeled after earlier Greek mythological examples.\textsuperscript{19} Such things as Plato’s references to metempsychosis do not survive in the residue of Christian and Islamic evangelism, but the basic constituent parts and qualities of the Platonist universe persist. At the advent of Islam in the Arab world, the metaphysical views of both the Middle East and the West were primarily on par with, and intelligible to, one another, as is attested to by their continued curiosity and rivalry well into the European Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The Renaissance, however, rekindled a Humanism that would begin to alter European history. During this time the metaphysical commitments that are responsible for the contemporary clash of cultures began to form.

What appears to be fundamentally in opposition to some may, in fact, be intelligible to a society in touch with the foundations of its own worldviews. What is necessary is an understanding of the development of these foundations within a history or genealogy of ideas that is traceable through political changes, cultural upheavals, artistic movements, etc. From an historical perspective, Middle Eastern cultures are much closer to
Western ones than are their Asian counterparts. The differences we see engrained in the modern relationship between these cultures are a sign of the divergences that followed these primary approaches to the contextual world. These divergences are foremost political and humanistic, and can be accounted for historically with internal and external variables affecting the direction of cultural evolution. Apprehending these differences will determine whether or not there is a way to resolve clash, or whether it is irreconcilable. How the metaphysical commitments and their consequences are handled is critically important to whether or not there is a continued divergence, or an emerging convergence, between two cultural arenas that share significant parts of a foundational gestalt of the world.

The shift in metaphysical commitment toward a humanistic and material world is essential to understanding the modern cultural clash for one uncompromising reason. Metaphysical decisions are necessary in order to establish an epistemological method. What counts as knowledge, how we know something to be true, whether certain knowledge is reliable, and the method for arriving at that knowledge are dependent upon how one believes the universe works. The Scientific Revolution followed shortly from the Renaissance and a *scientia nuova*, a ‘new science,’ challenged the older epistemological methods of relying upon the Court’s deductive philosophers or the Church’s religious/political authorities for the production of knowledge. Herein we see the importance of metaphysical commitments in how epistemology is formed and accepted by society. The new method of knowledge production that relied upon reason and observation upset the applecart of acceptable European epistemology. The acceptance of technology as a mediator and producer of knowledge, and faith in empirical evidence and inductive strategies, slowly separated the West’s metaphysical understandings from those of the Middle East. The West began to look toward empirical testimony and material evidence, while the Middle East remained committed to preserving traditional hierarchies of divine authority. By the late nineteenth century, Nietzsche clearly recognized that Europeans had “killed” their traditional god. In other words, they had slowly shifted their worldview toward a paradigm wherein deity could no longer be supported according to earlier metaphysical understandings. The epistemological method of European civilization was no longer based on an older metaphysical model, but upon the understanding that “existence precedes essence,” an idea later expressed in the twentieth century by Jean Paul Sartre. Science and industry, especially the influence of technology, opened up a new method of knowing about the world, though it meant that individuals had to prioritize an epistemology that was not hierarchically based on the residue of Platonism but on the evidence provided by observation of the material world. The old metaphysics was inverted. The material world came first and truth came from observation and experience, often mediated by technology. It did not originate primarily from deduction, interpretation, and assent. The West had shifted its metaphysical
commitments, and the eighteenth and nineteenth-century philosophical tradition of Idealism concluded the lengthy cul-de-sac of Platonic dualism.\textsuperscript{23}

The Humanist paradigm grounds modern Western conceptions of human rights and scientific epistemology. Humans are all equal because they share a common condition,\textsuperscript{24} not because they are all physically or intellectually as capable as others. This human condition provides a foundation for egalitarian principles. Humans do not have essential attributes or characteristics as understood in a Platonic scheme. A child one generation out of Africa can be President of the United States. Neither “noble blood” nor anything else metaphysical required. The essential notions that drove class distinctions such as “noble blood” (that upheld monarchical power) and the “savage spirit” (that inhabited the Native Americans and African tribesmen) are no more, as far as the West is concerned. It is quite a different story in the Middle East, however, and especially in the Gulf. The continued commitment to a metaphysical view that prioritizes the divine, immaterial, perfect world as a foundation for the justification of political and religious power distinguishes the members of these societies. It should go without saying that neither Western education nor Middle Eastern societal values are absolute, nor does each member of any society follow or believe in his or her society’s rules one hundred percent. There is a vast mixing of cultures from the West and the Middle East, each individual choosing his or her level of acceptance or differentiation from the norm.

What we are discussing here are observations and general guidelines toward an understanding of a basic characteristic that underlies the current cultural clash between the two. Not to say that this is a clear division, since some Muslims interpret Islam in a moderate fashion and have a sense of the historical hermeneutic of religion, not to mention citizens of the Middle East who are not Muslim and follow their own worldviews. Conversely, there are westerners who struggle daily against secular Humanism and advocate a return to older metaphysical commitments, such as the Amish of Pennsylvania or the groups of evangelical Christians who would like to see creationism taught in school. The situation is fluid, and should not be considered as a stereotype but, rather, as one that describes a traditional and inculcated understanding within a large part of Middle Eastern society. The Middle East is becoming as materially and institutionally modern as any other part of the world, and its metaphysical commitments are at stake, provoking a great deal of conflict. Placed in jeopardy is not just the understanding of epistemology that counts authority as a reasonable justification for knowledge claims, but also the dedication to the notion that authority is the origin of knowledge, with God as the official authority. An “appeal to authority” is the most common fallacy in the philosophical classroom and God is the most common authority cited.
THE CLASSROOM UNDER THE PRESSURE OF AUTHORITY

While the Bahraini classroom is an example of national diversity, including students from throughout the GCC as well as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Iran, and the United States, most of the students are from the Middle East and are Muslim. There are also atheist, Christian, Jewish, and Hindu students. Local students often describe their pre-university education as one where they are required to retrieve, report, and repeat information. They are asked to memorize information, but they are not frequently, if ever, asked to investigate, critique, or dissect knowledge claims that they encounter. The vast majority have not been trained or compelled to produce knowledge reliant upon their own voice based on individual investigation and critique. The end result is a collective of students whose tools and strategies for this type of basic Western educational requirement is left lacking. Once again, this phenomenon is not one that exists simply because of a lack of teaching the methods, but one that is connected to the basic inculcated system that relies on authority for information; information that is accepted, not investigated. Reports are confused with research; the presentation of facts with the actual knowledge they represent. Plagiarism can be a problem as students confuse research with retrieval, rather than analysis. In the philosophical classroom, students often lean on God as the authority until they can recognize the difference between authority and the reason of authority. Nevertheless, students frequently turn in essays that deride the attempt to reason about the human condition, rather than accept the authority of a religious source. Such a metaphysical commitment to a universe of centralized authority is connected to identity and cultural context. To educate by placing the authority, text or otherwise, under the microscope is uncomfortable for many students, and resistance is palpable as such questioning is generally not present in their society nor the censored media. The clash with Western education is clearly a metaphysical commitment to a worldview that allows for epistemology, politics, justice, and ethics to be rooted in authority. In this light, the censorship in the Middle East reported by Western media as well as the perceived persecution of religious tradition and sanctity that is also reported as a cause for cultural clash is more easily comprehended.

Furthermore, conflict arises when Western education explicitly considers, as a fundamental value of what it means to become “educated,” the erasure of the metaphysical commitments, and with it the foundation of a value system, that is fundamental to the populations asked to participate in this education. Western education values the critique of authority, both political and theological, full stop. This begs the question as to whether or not Western education is ultimately feasible in other parts of the world or whether the West must consider altering its understanding of education, which would mean altering all of its concomitant systems as well, such as accreditation. The seeming paradox residing here is that cultural clashes are often determined to be issues that can be solved through better education.
But given that education presumes a specific cultural value system, what happens when the educational values of the West are in conflict with what are considered basic values elsewhere? One strategy has been to use notions of inter-subjectivity from pragmatic philosophy and phenomenology to help students see how the world is made available to them, and others, through social compromise as an object of meaning, and thus how meaning is derived. Once again, this is about a basic understanding of how context is constructed, not simply given. Regardless, the metaphysical commitments of the Middle East should not strike Westerners as odd, since they are also part of Western history. It is history that is responsible for their divergence.

In eighteenth-century Europe, Rousseau rejected institutionalized religion for a religion of the heart, championing the individual’s ability to produce knowledge in contradiction of the mandate of the institution and the authority. Even prior to this, Luther had done as much for theological knowledge in the face of the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, four centuries later, battles between secularism and religious authority are still prevalent in Western society. The crossover to the Humanist paradigm required centuries as well as social commitment to governmental systems that recognized no explicitly religious authority. In this, the earlier Western metaphysical commitments to a worldview were stricken in favor of a new experiment. Secular Humanism required an epistemological method that was as trustworthy, or even more so, than the previous system. Knowledge became dependent upon reason and evidence, both for the affairs of science and for the affairs of public governance. Authority qua decree was emptied of its power. There is perhaps no one moment that defines the change of an era in the West, but the publication of *The Origin of Species* is perhaps a most visible signpost of the change of the times. Humans became part of the natural world in the same way as the rest of the animals, and the very structure of the divine creation story fell under the scrutiny of reason rather than a “conviction of things not seen,” a statement apropos of the metaphysics of Paul, a Greek-speaking inhabitant of a Platonic world. Darwin, like the scientific minds before him, let the problematic metaphysical foundation of older epistemological methods fade away and replaced them with a firm return to what can best be described as a materialist natural philosophy. Indeed, Nietzsche hoped to bracket Plato out of history and to begin again with a messier Heraclitean worldview, wherein an amoral universe of constant change and struggle undergirds the phenomena of existence. Evolution by natural selection, the atomic physics of the late nineteenth century, an increasing awareness of the muddle of politics, and the coming of world war seemed to bear out this assessment. From the Renaissance forward, Europe underwent the changes of humanism, industrialization, scientific (epistemological) revolution, a return to the belle arts and political upheaval with *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* as the watchwords of the people. Such changes could not help but impact the metaphysical views of old, to the effect of all but eradicating any serious consideration of such a religiously-ordered universal structure. Such
commitments evolved into personal ones, no longer belonging to public institutions.

The Middle East also had its upheavals, though they were primarily political and dynastic. After the inception of Islam, there were a number of different movements and challenges to power, but none that attempted to dislocate ultimate power and divine authority from the metaphysical base built upon the older Platonic dualisms. In the Middle East, Islam is the authority of both political and religious practice, at least in theory. Many countries now have hybrid, or Westernized, aspects of government, primarily enforced by international treaty as a method for gaining a foothold in the region and as a condition for continued support and trade. The school systems in many parts of the Middle East are representative of the metaphysical commitment to this sustained worldview wherein essentialist models for understanding one’s environment come into play. The separation of the sexes is one highly visible example, but the most important concern the methods of teaching. Perhaps, the longest lasting aspect of Louis Althusser’s critique of ideological state apparatuses is his consideration of the rules of behavior learned in the classroom. Long after the content of the classroom is forgotten, the rules of behavior between authority and the social learning process are carried on, ingrained in behavioral norms and reflective of social values. Classrooms that require rote memorization, that do not encourage individual expression, that are required to have politico-religious allegiance to the state, and that are under the authority of such ministries of governance, pass on the metaphysical message that information and knowledge are autochthonous products of authority, not objects for critical analysis. In the Middle East, this message is repeated in the social sphere of religious worship that is so tightly woven to national identity, political structures, and the law.

What is most glaring upon the entry into the Middle Eastern university classroom, not only from the author’s vantage point but from that of many other educators, is the lack of prior training in the ability to question and challenge authority, to properly interrogate texts, or to employ hermeneutic strategies. Once again, a metaphysical commitment to an ultimate reality, wherein authority disseminates from a single source and is not to be questioned except by those who have politico-religious power, is inculcated into the behavioral training of the students. This occurs inside and outside the classroom and is especially noticeable in the scientific fields, precisely because public law is tied to the metaphysical commitments that are quite visible in the epistemology of Islam. On the other hand, Western scientific epistemology is predicated upon European post-Enlightenment metaphysical commitments. Consequently, it contradicts local values that place knowledge in the hands of religious authority. For this reason, Saudi Arabia is under constant strain concerning the teaching of evolution, and thus history in a very real sense. Currently, Saudi religious authorities consider it haram, abhorrent to Islam, and it is a forbidden topic in educational institutions.
CONCLUSION

Upon arrival in the Middle East, and Bahrain specifically, the convergence of cultural signals and the ubiquitous signs of globalization promote a positive and optimistic view toward the possibility of cultural integration between Middle Eastern and Western ways of life. In terms of education, it also appears to be moving in the direction of a transition toward a Western educational paradigm, not only at the university level, but also at many of the privately run primary and secondary schools. The state-run schools are another story. And despite this appearance of integration in what is well known as the most liberal nation in the GCC, the increasing disparity of values within the societies of the West and the Middle East portrayed by the media requires an explanation. Too often it is left to rhetoric and stereotyping, as well as finger wagging toward Islam. There has been no apparent recognition that other factors are at work. One of these factors is the metaphysical commitment recognizable in value formation, which assists in phenomena as diverse as Islamic banking and the lack of a reading culture. Islamic nations must make some very important decisions about their behaviors, since it is through these behaviors that individuals either affirm or reject certain aspects or interpretations of Islam. In other words, the Middle East must deal not only with the influx of Western businesses and economic pressures referred to in the opening paragraphs, it must also deal with the arrival of the value system at the source of these businesses and pressures. Part of this value system clearly conflicts with the authoritarian hierarchies of Islamic political and religious structures. Thus, the students who come from local primary educational facilities and enter into Western higher education institutions often find themselves at odds with the requirements of the Western classroom. Likewise, the very same metaphysical commitments are visible in the ways that many find themselves at odds with Western societal values of secularism.

In the last century, financial success has become a great motivator in the Middle East, especially for the GCC. Bahrain is the financial hub of the GCC and integration with the rest of the world’s trading markets and systems is a priority. Continued success requires a skilled workforce, and so Bahrain, like the other GCC members, seeks an education paradigm with which to do it. In the United States, the university system has predominantly shifted to a business model, which makes the Middle East attractive and it appears that this could be a well-made match. Nevertheless, the Western university system is arriving as a business that promotes a very specific set of European Enlightenment values. The Enlightenment values are reflected in the fact that, at least in the United States, the core requirement for establishing a university is to have a College of Arts and Sciences, even if there are no degrees offered by the College. Students must encounter literature and take up the practice of interpretation themselves. They must research and provide their own opinions about the nature of justice and political philosophy. We can quite easily see the conflict that would arise if
one were to teach John Locke’s political philosophy that derides monarchy in a classroom filled with proud and nationalistic students of a monarchical country. Naivety in the West might make some declare that the students would simply be learning “another option” or simply the facts about Locke’s philosophy, but one cannot responsibly put something that powerful forward without understanding and anticipating its effects on the identities of students. It either says to the students that their country is backward, or it says that the teacher wishes to educate them in a subject subversive to the established government. The responses of the universities to such conflicts should be noted. The West is accustomed to this freedom, and critique is part of daily life, but in the Middle East it is quite the opposite. Indeed, one may ask which European monarchies freely applauded the teaching of anti-monarchical philosophies in their educational institutions? Theological and political hierarchies are firmly established in the Middle East as they once were in Europe. The authority they carry is more than one of Law. It is one of the mind and of behavior. This triangular and hierarchical structure is found in the school systems of the Middle East and has been identified as part of the reason for poor performance in global testing.

In magazines about the Middle East, comparisons are often made to the Enlightenment trials of Europe, the overcoming of monarchy, class systems, and religious authority as a way of framing the Middle East’s introduction to Western modernity. The topics are the usual human rights abuses and political corruption. The call of Western Enlightenment ideals is for the people to take the power of authority into their own hands via education. One only needs to recount Rousseau. Through education, individuals can make their own decisions and create genuine knowledge that rests on epistemological method rather than authority. In effect, the individual has the right, ordained by Reason rather than God, to wrest power from the incumbent elite through the facilities gained by education. Education is no longer vocation, the learning of a trade, nor indoctrination, the wholesale acceptance and affirmation of ideology based on rote practice associated with religion, but a defense against tyranny, specifically the tyranny of religious and political authority. This project is at the core of Western education, exemplified by its protected sinecures for professors to ensure the state cannot fire dissenters even from state-funded institutions.

The exposition of the metaphysical commitments of the West and the Middle East, including their historical divergence, is one historical analytic that provides some insight into the foundation of cultural clash between these two regions. It allows us to see what is at stake when these cultures compete for space in educational, social, and political arenas. It also allows us to posit questions about the project of Western education and its ethical responsibilities as it impacts other cultures and political sovereignties. Acknowledging the metaphysical commitments of diverse societies also provides an opportunity for the mutual understanding of value systems, even if reconciliation is unlikely. Beyond these important applications of
this analytic, it also provides a pragmatic example of how a great deal of cultural entanglement can occur at a level of business and production without a clear regard for the elements of culture that accompany them. A quick look at these commitments also makes clear that education, and what it means to be an educated person, can be significantly different from one culture to the next. In a certain way, it reveals that education is a unique type of product that relies specifically on how we orient ourselves within a universe and how we assume that universe operates. It is a system that represents a history of value development, is intimately involved in personal development, and relies upon cultural norms and expectations. How Western education is integrated into the Middle East may require greater circumspection than the rest of Western cultural products.

NOTES

1 Though I will refer to the ancient Near East in parts of this essay, I will continue to use the term Middle East for the sake of clarity since these refer to generally the same land area and are only terminologically different due to field of study and political significance.

There has long been debate over the population of Bahrain. Some censuses take into account short-term labor forces and the weekend population swell from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, while others do not. Estimates range from 740,000 to 1.1 million. Therefore, the number one million is only an approximate figure.

2 In this sense, education amounts to a form of habituation and awareness of one another and is infused with a very specific set of values. This however, is not education in its strict sense, but more a statement about the value of compromise as a virtue associated with education. This is not to say the West has the market on tolerance, by any means, but is simply a statement of the Humanistic position.

3 Arguably, mutual non-interaction and respectful avoidance could put an end to conflict, but this would not lead to integration, nor is it likely given the state of world affairs.

4 Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Oman.


6 See Herodotus, The Histories.


8 Public Lecture Series 2008, London School of Economics “Social Science and the Middle East: Myths, Pitfalls, and Opportunities.”

9 Platonism here is understood as the basic metaphysical system, modified and elucidated by Aristotle, which ultimately became the primary philosophical model for interrogating nature and cosmology from ancient Rome to Persepolis. This cosmological metaphysical stance is enfolded in Christian and Islamic conceptions of the universe and how it is governed. See Maha Elkaisy-Friemuth

10 See Nicholas Copernicus, *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Bodies* (1543). He directly challenges Aristotle’s reasoning about the nature and possibilities of motion. In Newton’s *Principia*, he explicitly places himself in the tradition: “Since the ancients (as we are told by Pappus), made great account of the science of mechanics in the investigation of natural things: and the moderns, laying aside substantial forms and occult qualities, have endeavoured to subject the phenomena of nature to the laws of mathematics, I have in this treatise cultivated mathematics so far as it regards philosophy,” (Newton, *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687; later editions in 1713 and 1726), Preface).

11 Self-authorship is the greatest weakness of deductive principles, because the validity of the deductive premises ultimately relies on the assent of others rather than empirical data. This reduces deduction to an appeal to majority, which is dubious.

12 The Greeks were keenly unaware of their own genealogical relations to the people of the Near East, whose culture was so influential on Greek tradition and mythology. A good modern text that demonstrates the level of entanglement is M.L. West’s *The East Face of Helicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).


15 In the Epic of Gilgamesh, Utnapishtim plants the first vineyard after the great flood. This is echoed in the story of Noah. See *Genesis* 9:20.

16 Dante. *Inferno*. 4.131 “l maestro di color che sanno.” [“The masters of those who know”].

17 See Plato’s *Timaeus* as an example of Platonic cosmological-metaphysical dualism. Also, Plato’s notion of epistemology is connected to a form of metempsychosis that also relies on this metaphysical structure. See Plato’s *Meno*.


21 This position is explicitly articulated at the beginning of Sartre’s *Existentialism and Human Emotions*. 
22 John Locke’s notable rejection of universal assent occurs in his critique of Cartesian innate ideas in his *Essay on Human Understanding*. In Islam, knowledge of the world is validated by religious authority and is produced by discussion, interpretation, and assent, usually by Imams or ultimately, the Ulama.

23 Nietzsche’s view, though it seems appropriate considering acceptable contemporary epistemology.

24 See John Locke’s discussions of natural law and divine law, and his views on the state of nature in his *Two Treatises on Government*.

25 This comes from personal experience speaking and working with students when they are required to do research and to produce knowledge via analysis and synthesis.

26 The corollary between students’ K-12 educational experiences and their comparative skills deserves greater scientific study, as does the methodology of local school systems.

27 See Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education* [*Émile ou De l’éducation*].

28 Hebrews 11:1-3: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.” The attribution to Paul is traditional but unlikely.


32 In meetings with journalists, educational consultants, and faculty from many of the GCC countries, this topic continually surfaced as a challenge to teachers and to curricular development.


34 See http://archive.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=103938&d=24&m=11&y=2007 The anecdote by Iman Kurdi closely resembles the anecdotes of many students who frequently relate that books are not considered priorities of education in the same way as prayer and focus on the Qur’an. Many express that college is their first experience reading texts, especially fiction. Again, divine authority supersedes humanistic exploration. See her note on the Abu Dhabi Culture and Heritage Kalima project.

Everything from *The Economist* to *The Gulf Insider* is sold openly in Bahrain and the articles are often very critical. This is another example of a paradoxical state of open policy but closed government.

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CHAPTER VII
LIBERALISM, COMMUNITARIANISM, AND THE CLASH OF CULTURES
DAVID LEA

INTRODUCTION

In the following paper we will be discussing some examples of the ‘clash’ of cultures thesis and the role communitarian discourse has played in legitimizing political issues that have perhaps contributed to cultural-based conflict. We demonstrate that communitarian discourse has played an intellectual role in certain political oppositions, as we will see when we discuss ‘libertarian-universalistic’ versus ‘communitarian-traditionalist’ and the perceived individualistic West versus the socially determined Islamic traditions. We argue especially with regard to the latter that the opposition is less substantive than often believed and moreover is often based on an essentialist notion of community and culture. Although communitarians reject liberal universalism, we argue that ‘Kantian principles’ can provide a response to communitarianism and also to alleged cultural clash, and should not be abandoned.

COMMUNITARIANISM

We begin this paper by noting that a significant shift in political philosophy occurred in the 1980s with the communitarian critique of liberal theory.\(^1\) Through the 1970s, the liberal political philosophies of people such as Ronald Dworkin and John Rawls dominated academia, and were widely regarded as authoritative and convincing presentations of the superior justice of liberal democratic societies.\(^2\) They cogently argued that policies based on universal rights protected individuals against the interests and politics of the collective. In fact, during the Vietnam conflict, Dworkin went so far as to contrast America’s liberal principles that tolerated free expression and dissent with those of her totalitarian enemies who were prepared to sacrifice individual liberties in favor of utilitarian ends and self-interest and security.\(^3\) However communitarian critiques questioned the liberal’s reliance on presumed universal principles that were supposed to act as constraints on public policy. Communitarians argued that liberals had ignored the importance of particular cultural values, which provide the moral context for personal existence in a given community. Moreover, they argued that ethical and political norms only have meaning within a given community and cultural context, and cannot be abstracted beyond that community and given a universal application. On this basis it was claimed
that the liberal preference for a set of abstract principles based on individual freedom cannot be supposed to have universal application and in itself provides an incomplete account of individual and collective moral decision making (i.e., the so-called ‘thin view’ self).

However, it can be demonstrated that communitarianism and communitarian theory, in alleging the cultural basis of liberal freedoms, have undermined the case for the universal and impartial application of such principles, and thereby vitiated their normative force. We will argue that this has contributed to the acceptance of repressive policies that threaten individual freedoms and rights. Secondly, these arguments have tended to support a reading of social developments based on ‘cultural essentialism’ that has given support to the reification of cultural differences, not to mention policies that are often indistinguishable from those that have a racist agenda.

These developments can be best seen in the relatively recent discourse that sees the ideological and military threat of global communism replaced by the cultural and military menace from Islamic communities. Moreover, the response to this threat has been one marked by increasing authoritarian measures which trench upon fundamental freedoms involving, \textit{inter alia}, increased powers of search and seizure, unlawful detention and incarceration without trial contrary to the conventions of war or the rule of habeas corpus, thereby denying the very principles which are supposed to distinguish liberal democratic regimes. I argue that Kantian principles, which form the basis of the liberal ideology, can both provide answers to communitarian criticism and offer constraints on communitarian discourse where such discourse threatens to endorse authoritarian policies that may undermine personal freedom and relations between different cultural groups.

Essentially, the fault line between the communitarians and liberals would focus on the opposition between the particular and the universal. Communitarians represented and emphasized the importance of the particular unique cultural context as the defining component of the ethical experience, whereas the liberals referred to universal principles associated with traditional liberal ideals accessible to all rational individuals regardless of particulars and singular collective affiliations. But to arrive at the universal, the individual must be abstracted from cultural, environmental, and communal contingencies that create a known human identity. Rawls formulated a thought experiment to strip away these contingencies and arrive at the universal. He hypothesized a decision-making procedure in the context of an imagined “veil of ignorance,” whereby one is denied self knowledge including awareness of one’s collective associations or cultural identity. From this position of ignorance, the decision-making procedure is said to direct us to principles of fairness or justice that have this universal application.

Michael Sandel, however, in his critique, argued that liberal ethical principles are merely consistent with the ‘thin view’ of self, an empty
abstraction without ontic import or significance, stripped of the essential components of human identity because cultural and community affiliations have been excised. This deficiency in liberal ontology was thus argued as too weak to support any substantive normative conclusions. Indeed, normative principles and normative force, it was claimed, could only be found in the ‘thick view’ of the self, the thorough-going concrete actuality of human identity, the lived experience, which is socially situated within a defining membership in a specific and living cultural society. This can be the only solid basis for constructing a substantive ethical system that would support an appropriate political philosophy.

But what of the political agenda that could be said to follow from this critical analysis? Sandel recommended a return to a period when individuals enjoyed a greater integration with the community, before it had been undermined by big government and big business – a sense of community that had been lost in a modern America of transmogrified by enlarged corporate enterprise and Kafkaesque government bureaucracy.⁴ The sociologist Amitai Etzioni advocated less stress on individual values and rights in favor of greater emphasis on obligations, especially those owed to the community. Etzioni saw the communitarian critique (with its emphasis on commitment and social obligation, rather than individual rights) as an antidote to an American individualism that had become consumed by greed, egoism, and self interest, but said little on matters of political reorganization beyond the emphasis on recovery of traditional values.⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre urged the rediscovery of a classical Aristotelian ethics grounded in the cultivation of virtues. MacIntyre emphasized the disconnection with the earlier historical narratives that had inspired moral commitment, without providing a practical agenda that might effectively recapture those past traditions.⁶

**A KANTIAN DEFENSE OF COMMUNITARIAN CRITICISM**

But liberalism, one might argue, could still utilize the resources of the tradition to defend against these issues. After all, liberals regard themselves as inheritors of the Kantian deontological tradition which underlined the intrinsic value of the autonomous individual will but, with equal vigor, promoted an austere program of obligation and duty over self-interested heteronomy. Willful self-interest was far from consistent with Kantian virtue. As the Kantian will was governed by the iron law of self-imposed duty, individual gratification and complete self-satisfaction could only be attained, if possible, with the attainment of the *summum bonum* in the next life.

Although it has been argued that personal autonomy promoted by contemporary personal autonomy theorists, such as Rawls, is distinct from Kantian notions of moral autonomy, it can be convincingly argued that Kantian notions of duty found in Kant’s doctrine of virtue unite both the ethical with the freedom to fashion one’s own plan of life.⁷ These duties
provide architectonic principles for a virtuous life, including a duty of beneficence that requires us to promote the happiness of others by making their permitted ends our ends and then acting to advance those ends.\(^8\) Equally, the Kantian tradition includes a social dimension that also includes social virtues such as beneficence, and these are resources that could be used to defend liberalism against the communitarian challenge.

Moreover, liberals could point to obvious shortcomings in communitarian thought, which liberalism more than adequately addresses. Onora O’Neill, for example, points out that “not all reasoning about justice can be based on the rich conceptual resources of a tradition or community.”\(^9\) Communitarianism, she notes, is equally hospitable to substantive norms that are excluding, separatist, or even imperial; and this is something which we will further demonstrate in the following pages. She proposes that Kantian moral philosophy offers us a better foundation for the realization of justice including the realization of justice between states. Indeed, to attempt to found ethics on tradition is problematic because it involves the private use of reason. According to Kant, the appeal to contingently available authorities amounts to the introduction of some arbitrary premise asserting the claims of authority.\(^10\) In this regard, Kant favors public reasoning whose structure cannot be derived from existing institutions and practices. Kant states: “Freedom in thinking signifies the subjection of reason to no laws except those which it gives itself.”\(^11\) Thus, autonomy or self-legislation is involved. According to this understanding, any principle we use to structure thought or action must be law-like. Kant explains that this means that, on reflection, we would find it feasible to make the assumed rule into a universal principle.\(^12\) The possibility of universalizing the principle renders it fully public, so that it does not invoke arbitrary authority and can be adopted by all without presupposing a common ideology, agreement, or religion. It follows that Kant’s so-called “Universal Principle of Justice” requires the rejection of those basic maxims for structuring the domain of the external use of freedom, or the public sphere that could not be adopted by all.\(^13\) The point is that Kant’s universal principle does not convey any specific content but, rather, offers a modal criterion which must be realized by the structure of our thought, discourse, or action. In this respect, Kant’s philosophy avoids the communitarian criticism that liberal universalism offers empty abstractions lacking any directional guidance and, at the same time, both the ethical relativism and the amoral exclusivism of the communitarian approach.

Moreover, Kantian ethics specifically addresses the problematic issue of relations between collectives, especially nation states. Kant states, “The greatest problem for the human species … is that of attaining a civil society that can administer justice universally.”\(^14\) To effect this result, one must establish law-governed external relationships with other states.\(^15\) Moral improvement of the individual state is not possible without consideration of the international implications of policies and actions. At the same time,
individuals must think of themselves as members of a society that transcends the individual state.\textsuperscript{16}

Despite the richness of the Kantian tradition, Rawls perhaps unnecessarily equivocated on the issue of universal values and their application, and backed away from the apparent earlier claim that liberal principles were universally appropriate, arguing that his major work on political liberalism is merely a contextual defense of the coherence of modern Western constitutional democracy.\textsuperscript{17} Thus, liberal principles have an internal coherence within the Western cultural context rather than a universal application beyond that cultural context. However, he rejected the idea that his political philosophy embodied a form of radical individualism which left no room for group rights, claiming that his principles of fairness were far from antithetical to group values because they provided a neutral framework for the harmonious co-existence of diverse cultural entities within a unified political organization. Certainly, the work of Will Kymlicka demonstrated that it was possible to maintain liberal allegiance while incorporating communitarian insights without contradiction. Kymlicka’s formulation tied together two concepts—autonomy with respect to individual agency, and autonomy as applied to the group. He argued that the latter is necessary and supportive of the former. Kymlicka claimed further that, in underlining individual autonomy as the central value of liberal society, a viable community was essential for providing a cultural context of choice in which autonomy is possible, arguing that autonomy depends upon a range of choices, and that these choices are embedded in a particular cultural context.

However, it was perhaps Charles Taylor’s communitarianism that closed off the possibility of reconciliation by striking at the heart of liberal axiology. He argued that the survival and flourishing of a distinct culture becomes a good, like a species of intrinsic value, which should be preserved, and the survival of the culture of ‘ancestors’ represents a ‘collective good’ in relation to which political society cannot remain ‘neutral.’\textsuperscript{18} While liberals were accused of designing untenable social structures based on the dubious metaphysics of deracinated human personality, Taylor equally introduces his own questionable ontology with his reference to the distinct soul of the \textit{volk} or the people, followed by the imperative that the \textit{volk} must be true to itself.\textsuperscript{19} Taylor appeared at the same time to make the right of cultural survival also derive from the right accorded to the citizens in a liberal state to pursue actively their conceptions of the good life, while emphasizing the need to avoid spurious universalism.\textsuperscript{20} However, by endowing the cultural community with intrinsic value, Taylor was moving beyond Kymlicka’s position in which the community has derivative worth as instrumental value in maintaining viable individual autonomy. Following Kymlicka’s line of thought, one could still maintain that the central value was the autonomous will. Taylor’s formulation ineluctably weights the ordering of values in favor of the community, such that the intrinsic value of the collective is positioned to
undermine any further allegiance to the Kantian inheritance that affirms the primacy of the autonomous will. Thus, the importance of Taylor’s thought is to found in the denial of the liberal belief in the central value of the self-determined will – i.e., belief in the individual’s freedom to choose and construct his own values and vision of the good life in accordance with the will’s essential autonomy.

Without the primacy of the individual will, which theoretically can be independent of the encumbering collective, it is difficult to support an argument for universal values given the ineluctable ties with a relative and particularistic cultural context. Moreover, affirmation of the intrinsic value of the particular collective has problematic implications for intergroup relations both between and within political organizations.

The problematic of intergroup relations is evidenced in Taylor’s political conclusions concerning Quebec. Having emphasized the intrinsic values of cultural collectives, he goes on to argue that the irreducible cultural distinctness of the Quebec community entitled it to special and unique political rights within the Canadian federation of provinces. Taylor thus endorsed an identifiable course of political action, i.e., the transformation of Quebec into a state in the framework of a federation with Canada or even into an entirely sovereign state. Secession, of course, is always problematic, and it has always been a great fomenter of civil conflict, not to mention, specifically, that it gives rise to the problematic status of the rights and interests of minorities within Quebec such as those of the indigenous peoples. But, in any case, Quebec’s independence has been a long-standing Canadian issue, and Taylor was merely adding to the many voices that have endorsed such a solution. The greater part of the rest of this paper will focus on the use of communitarian discourse in justifying and even galvanizing cultural oppositions elsewhere, especially in international and global relations between the so-called West and the Islamic world.

COMMUNITARIAN CRITICS AND THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND ETIOLOGICAL PROBLEMS WITH CULTURAL IDENTITY

Even though communitarians had made some apposite observations concerning liberalism’s failure to give sufficient weight to the role of the community in ethical decision making, their own position was far from unassailable. Some argued that the emphasis on culture and the cultural community led to an overshadowing of the heterogeneous aspects of lived experience both within and among groups. Cultural identity is by no means the sole or even dominant influence on individual values and even normative orientation. It needs to be recognized that many other groups and associations, not usually regarded as cultural artifacts, shape habits, interpretations, goals, and motivational preoccupations. An individual’s identification through some of these classifications – for example, one’s nationality – is demographically fixed; others are voluntary, such as jobs
and even religious affiliation; some remain irrevocably fixed, like race; and others, like age, change over one’s lifetime. Although many often regard political and economic association as distinct categories of human interaction independent of cultural meaning, they may also be integral to cultural identity. It has been argued that identifying a cultural association as opposed to an economic and social group has led to a discredited form of ‘essentialism’ that characterizes cultures as sets of fixed ideas or idealized essences. Moreover, this denial of the complexity of intra and intercultural relations among individuals and groups engaged in a dynamic response to common economic and social forces, at the same time results in the reification of “communality, constancy and permanence of group beliefs and values.” This is all to say that it is a mistake to attempt to understand cultural association independently of the dynamics of political and economic organization. Economic and political dysfunction often works to change the cultural expression. It has been suggested that the economic failings of Middle East states during the 1980s had a profound influence on the growth of extreme Islamist groups, an important factor that has nothing to do with the essential core of Muslim culture or teaching.

However, not only is cultural identity often a weak determinant of individual behaviour, the cultural community itself often resists identification through reference to behavioural characteristics based on some consensus over a specific code or set of values. Even relatively homogeneous cultural communities, for example, Muslims in Egypt or Jews in Israel, espouse very diverse views as to which practices and principles should govern conduct. Muslim communities can consist of Sunnis, Shiites or Ismailis, with great divisions in doctrines and principles, while Jewish communities may often be split by controversy between orthodox and the non-orthodox. Thus, it would be a grave error to believe that particular articulations of given ethical codes are the essential component of that particular cultural community, because cultural communities are rarely distinguishable by any consensus on a set of unifying principles.

COMMUNITARIANISM AND EUROPEAN RIGHT-WING MOVEMENTS

However, despite criticism of communitarian analysis, communitarian thought can be seen to resonate within right-wing movements that have grown to prominence, particularly in Europe – which partially confirms O’Neill’s observation that communitarianism is equally hospitable to norms that are excluding, separatist, and even imperial. The latter has, as some authors explain, provided an organizational principle to justify diverse policies that might otherwise be labeled as racist. The latter possibilities certainly came to fruition in the writing of Alain de Benoist, who relied on the communitarian writings of people like Taylor and Sandel to defend the policies of the New French Right against both the internal cultural minority of Arabs and Berbers and a global reaching homogeneous
American culture. Led by de Benoist and Guillaume Faye, this group associated with GRECE (Groupement de recherche et d’études pour la civilisation européenne), which consisted of journalists, publicists and philosophers, and also drew upon the philosophies of such people as Wittgenstein, Gramsci, Nietzsche and Spengler as well as Taylor and Sandel. Unlike Kymlicka, the focus of the New French Right has not been the fragile identity of the human being dependent on cultural affiliation, but a rather thoroughgoing return to community with an emphasis on the rights of people rather than the rights of individuals.

The idea that French culture needs strong protections against a globalizing American universalism and an internal erosion through the emergence of Arab and Berber cultural communities, may be understandable. However, others accused the group of simply re-labeling positions, so that the policies resulting from this form of culturalism are extensionally equivalent to those which would result from racist ideology stripped of communitarian baggage.

As we said, de Benoist carefully avoided racist discourse and, as one commentator has pointed out, he sought to transform the concept of racist superiority into a cultural theory of right-wing anti-imperialism based on “differentialism” rather than racial superiority. While promoting the idea of respect for other cultures, he also stressed that we must respect the organic path of our own culture. Thus interpreted, Europe possessed unique technological virtues that could not be copied by other cultures, and so other cultures could not follow the ‘path of liberal modernity.’ However, this does not license a hegemonic role for Europe through an imperialistic relationship with other cultures. Rather Europe and the third world must assert their unique cultural identities, which entails that Europe must reject and resist the universalizing domination of American culture while the third world must also be emancipated from all forms of Western cultural hegemony, including the American. The liberal belief in universal rights, principles, and mores across cultures and within cultural collectives is jettisoned because each culture is distinct. We must substitute group rights for individual rights in recognition of the fact that the former are founded on the right to difference or the right to collective difference. The concept of universal liberal values is regarded as a Trojan Horse, which threatens people with the homogenization of all cultures and the fundamental denial of difference. At the same time, multiculturalism is also unacceptable because the collective must maintain its cultural purity and thus immigration must be discouraged because members of different cultures must remain within their collectives where their true identity resides. There is, therefore, no room for democratic community under which different cultures share a common political identity.

One critic has pointed out that leaders within this rediscovered communitarian tradition have paid insufficient attention to problematic external relations between communities, including parochialist closure and power asymmetries involving domination and oppression. Nevertheless,
the anti-imperialist message of the New French Right is meant to carry the clear implication that the rediscovery of the collective cultural identity does not mean renewed struggles for domination and self-assertion that would lead to conflict.

However, Samuel Huntington most definitely took another view of the renewed recognition of cultural identity. He identified the cultural entity with a civilization differentiated by history, language, culture, tradition, and religion. For Huntington, cultural identities are the product of centuries, and are far more enduring than differences among political ideologies and political regimes. The decline of the nation state, the rediscovery of religious identities, and the end of ideologically-defined states in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, *inter alia*, have meant that political movements are less able to mobilize support and form coalitions on the basis of ideology and increasingly seek to mobilize support by appealing to identities based on common religion and civilization. At the micro level, he maintains that adjacent groups will clash violently over control of territory and each other, whereas at the macro level, states from different civilizations will compete for military and economic power, including control of international institutions while promoting their specific political / religious values.

While Huntington has made these generalized forecasts on impending global developments, Simon Bornschier of the University of Zurich has noted specific trends within the recent European context. Bornschier traces the rise of the European populist right, whose policies include anti-immigration, the rejection of the multicultural model, as well as universal values in general. Bornschier’s study concentrates on four extreme right populist parties: the French *Front National*, the Austrian Freedom Party, the Swiss People’s Party and the Dutch *List Pim Fortuyn*. Bornschier comments on the fact that the philosophical currents of the European New Right have borrowed from the communitarian conception of community. This is not to say the success of such movements is based on the insights and persuasiveness of communitarian thought, but rather these ideas have had a dual function in justifying such policies and in providing a communitarian exclusionist discourse in a “(deliberate) attempt at collective identity formation.” Bornschier mentions the importance of political campaigns that work to construct new coalitions from latent identity categories. Political agency therefore plays an important role in shaping and even creating collective identities. Every political organization has a bias towards mobilizing a response towards a particular set of issues; when the established lines of division no longer mobilize, new issues can then ascend. Bornschier argues that the loss of effectiveness of national economic and social policy in Europe, due to globalization and the policies of supranational organizations such as the EU and the WTO, has diminished the intensity of the labor/capital conflict. Thus, although individuals may have multiple group identities, Bornschier argues that the withering of working class and religious identities in Europe has allowed other perhaps
even older identities based on community and culture to gain salience. This has catalyzed the right-wing populist parties’ mobilization of the traditionalist-communitarian potential. The right’s struggle for recognition is manifest, not in the generation of new issues, but in attempts to resurface older identity categories such national identity and culture – as he says, “…even if they appear in new disguise as in the case of the ‘differentialist nativist’ discourse.”

Bornschi argues that right-wing populist parties are the furthest away from cultural liberalism, which promotes universalistic positions and free choice lifestyles as manifested by the fact that in France, Austria, and Switzerland, they are the strongest opponents of immigration.

It is significant that the right-wing populist parties’ communitarian discourse is successful because it is conducive to the formation of an exclusionist collective identity. In contrast, appeal to universalist principles we associate with morality can only present the “weak force of rational motivation.”

Bornschier argues that social groups provide members with social identities, which have importance in maintaining the individual’s positive self-esteem. Furthermore, he refers to studies that support the view that groups not only favor their in-group in the distribution of resources, but strive to maximize allocations even if there is no personal gain at stake. He states that social theory argues that the self-esteem that individuals receive from positively evaluating their in-group, and thus perceiving themselves positively in relation to the out-group, is enough to drive prejudice and intergroup discrimination.

The success of identity politics, he claims, is the result of the mobilization around new social issues that have replaced economic issues on the political agenda. Accordingly, the new political issues have more to do with values and life styles than conflict over materialistic issues.

Extrapolating beyond Bornschier’s arena of European politics to a more global context, it is easy to see Huntington’s clash of civilizations thesis as having a certain prescience in so far as it depicts a post cold war period which shifts away from the economic ideology which drove that conflict, toward cultural identity issues that have become the source of the emerging political conflict. In this context, it is perhaps not unsurprising that Muslim peoples would become the out-group which become ‘deserving’ of prejudice and discrimination. Given also the natural competition for resources, especially natural resources between groups or groups of nations promoting their particular interests, the Middle East with its vast oil reserves and overwhelming Muslim population would become the natural flashpoint for violent confrontation, as it seems to be now.

**THE “LIBERTARIAN-UNIVERSALISTIC” VERSUS THE “TRADITIONALIST-COMMUNITARIAN”**

The opposition of values is particularly interesting in so far as it mirrors an intellectual shift which parallels the political re-orientation in the lines of conflict. The older opposition was one between the state and the
market, and represents the old axis of values, according to Bornschier; the new so-called cultural axis opposes universalistic positions advocating autonomy and free choice of lifestyles against an emphasis on tradition. Referring to work of Kitschelt, Bornschier states that the latter distinction has its basis in different conceptions of the community, where one pole represents the values of equality and liberty in a self-organized community and, at the other pole, the conception of a community structured by the values of paternalism and corporatism. The latter emergent opposition is termed by Bornschier as the “libertarian-universalistic” as distinct from the “traditionalist-communitarian” position. In so far as the political issues which have arisen relatively recently are ones of values and life-styles, the polarizing opposition is interpreted as between libertarian and authoritarian values. One observes that, with the movement towards the traditionalist-communitarian position, values lose their universal character and become the possession of a particular group. For example, “freedom” no longer has universal application, but becomes something which some groups possess and others do not have. Thus, former U.S. President G.W. Bush famously explained the motivation of the Iraqi insurgency in the statement: “They envy our freedoms.” Given that the former President’s policies were seen to symbolize and exacerbate intergroup conflict between the Western and the Islamic world, we perceive an alignment close to the traditionalist-communitarian pole which, in contradiction to the rhetoric of personal liberty, meant a suppression of personal freedom through increased surveillance and the suspension of traditional liberties, thus confirming the more authoritarian orientation that characterizes the “traditionalist-communitarian” position.

To summarize, the traditional opposition that existed during the cold war period, in which the ideological conflict was emphasized in differences of economic theory and policy, has now – after the fall of the Soviet Union – been replaced, certainly in Europe, by the politics of identity in opposition to what Bornschier calls the libertarian-universalistic position that encompasses the right to difference, societal permissiveness and support for supra-national integration in the European Union. One can also see elements of this polar opposition in the United States. Certainly the recent Republican administration in the U.S. achieved its electoral success through heavy reliance on the politics of identity, with its emphasis on values which had a moral, religious, and family orientation. Bornschier notes that one can assume that European electors voted for right-wing populist parties despite the parties’ economic profile, i.e., their market liberal stance. Similarly, the Republican Party in the United States was able to align a working class electorate along lines describing a collective national identity through these identity issues, despite promoting economic policies that were antithetical to working class interests, such as greater tax breaks for the wealthy and the rolling back of social welfare programs. Under the influence of such leadership groupings as the Project for the New American Century, the assumed goal was to promote American hegemony throughout the world, in
their words, “extending an international order friendly to our security, our prosperity, and our principles.” Certainly this was an invitation to individual citizens to discover their self-esteem through membership in a national collective identity that would lead the world through its principles, security and prosperity. It is not surprising to find that such an agenda leads to provocation and, eventually, international conflict, as it easily provided a justification for the promotion of unprincipled national self-interest.

**INDIVIDUALISTIC WESTERN CULTURE VERSUS SOCIALLY-DETERMINED ISLAMIC CULTURE**

Universalist principles and institutions of democracy require democratic cultures, habits, and virtues which are indistinguishable from a particular history and tradition. At the same time, reference to particular histories can be used and is used as a criterion of exclusion. The problem is to maintain strong commitments to universalist principles while deemphasizing ascriptive traditions, loyalties, collective identities, and national culture. Unfortunately, the danger is that focus on the latter promotes exclusionary policies, which then undermines universalist principles such as equality, equal liberty, and tolerance. To be more specific, descriptions of Muslim character and culture with reference to the democratic tradition have tended to designate that culture as unreceptive to democratic traditions and, therefore, alien and unacceptable.

Thus, while the West was drawing itself along cultural identity lines and assuming a more authoritative posture while constraining individual rights in the name of national security, the rhetoric continued to proclaim liberal freedoms and individual autonomy as intrinsic to the Western cultural experience. Although we have argued the inadequacy of behavioural explanations based on reified notions of culture, communitarian critiques provided a language and vocabulary that continued to be used to support facile explanations based on cultural essentialism, thus providing a discourse that could implicitly justify conflict between the civilizations. A discourse that found its application in critiques of liberal political theory was strangely reformulated to provide pejorative contrasts of Islamic communities with Western liberal states. M. M. Slaughter, for example, writing in the *Virginia Law Review*, contended that in Islam “there is no *a priori* self as such, but only self as expressed in, and realized through constitutive attachments and relations.” Thus, a reference to the theoretical construct employed in liberal theory which critics parodied as the ‘thin view’ of self – a self, disembodied from any earthly attachments – is incredibly taken to be the reality of Western civilized man. The notion of the *a priori* deracinated self was originally intended as a criticism of liberal theory that presupposed normative neutrality with respect to the ends and purposes of social existence. The same notion as employed by Slaughter becomes ontically descriptive and a form of normative disapprobation. In contrast, the idea of an *a priori* ‘thin’ view of self, detached from
community and cultural attachments, was also meant to highlight the unreality of liberal theory since, even in liberal societies, individuals have to be defined by their constitutive relationships. Slaughter, somehow, manages to miss the point, and proclaims the a priori, thin view of self, originally conceived as a discredited theoretical construct without ontic signification, as an actual description of individuals in Western liberal regimes, and contrasts these hypothetical beings with individuals in Muslim societies, whose identities are said to be a concatenation of relationships, affiliations, memberships, and the like.

However, despite the hyperbolic contrasts between Western and Islamic society, the simple idea conveyed is that the Muslim lacks individuality and autonomous existence. Muslims are thus seen as a group who cannot escape the social forces that militate against individual expression and the individual freedoms exercised in liberal democratic states. Slaughter argues that the intense focus on the law based on the Koran, but supplemented by Sunna or practices and sayings of the Prophet, is an expression of the ummah or community, so that it even replaces the boundaries of corporate identity such as family, tribe, and nation. The Muslim individual is entirely determined by context and cannot do otherwise, contrasted with the Westerner who is capable of thinking and associating freely and creating his or her society on this basis. The notion of the Muslim individual as over-determined by social forces appears in other recent essentialist readings of Islam. Relatively recently, so-called neo-Orientalism has joined classical Orientalism to portray Islamic society as a social entity whose ‘essential’ core is immune to change by historical influences. Most Western scholars, who regard Islam as a unique phenomenon, adhere to this viewpoint. One author argues that the Classical or old Orientalist view portrayed Islamic states as anti-democratic, because of the autocratic authoritarian nature of Muslim culture and political structures; neo-Orientalism portrays these societies as anti-democratic because of an essential core with its obstreperous assertive civil organizations that render the state paralyzed and weak. According to these thinkers, Muslim efforts to build durable states from the 14th century of Ibn Khaldun, through the 17th century Ottoman tax reformers, to the Islamist revolutionaries of today, can never succeed because of the essential anti-state and therefore anti-modern core of Islamic dogma. What emerges in the Islamic world are ‘transitory predatory’ states lacking the cooperation of society, and antithetical to the development of capitalism and democracy.

Many of these theorists were not just writing for a narrow audience of Middle East studies specialists, but for a wider international debate. Huntington, who had perhaps the widest audience, wrote that, in Islamic countries, especially in the Middle East, “the prospects for democratic development seem low.” Leading neo-Orientalist Daniel Pipes wrote in the National Review that “…Muslim countries have the most terrorists and the fewest democracies in the world.” Moreover, they always would, because of their essential characteristics. These and similar views have also
been purveyed beyond academia in the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New Republic*. Political scientist Masoud Kazemzadeh, however, noting the inherent agenda, rejects the term ‘neo-Orientalist’ in favour of the more culturally-neutral term ‘neo-Cold Warriors,’ because they see an ahistorical and essentialist Islam as the major threat to Western interests in the post-Cold War period.

In reality, although the West has chosen to contrast itself with the Muslim world in terms of its greater individual liberty and autonomy (while the Muslim reality is supposedly either authoritarian or impervious to individual responsibility because of local social attachments), it in fact embodies the same contrasts within its political polarization. As we have seen, within much of the West there is this shift towards the authoritarian-communitarian collective position, opposed to a more libertarian position in which individual liberty is promoted. This has meant that those most antagonistic towards Islam and the political realities of the Middle East have been those who have stressed group and national identity issues, including group security issues, and whose policies, despite the rhetoric, have suppressed the freedoms that are supposed to distinguish the Western states from the totalitarian, not to mention the majority of Islamic states.

But even if one can identify Western civilization as more receptive to some set of rules and values relating to individual autonomy, it still would be a fundamental error to assume that this is an essential feature of Western civilization. Certainly one can assert that ideas of freedom of conscience, interconnected with the principle of toleration and disestablishment, can be associated with Western culture and traditions. But in reality, if one suspends belief in the dubious ontology of cultural essentialism, this statement only means that these ideas first became accepted in England, Western Europe, and the societies of North America. This is also the case with Mendel’s laws and the natural law of gravity, principles initially accepted in the West but now having universal acceptance.

The fact that certain ideas may first appear in a given cultural context does not mean that these ideas remain the exclusive property of that culture. The ideas of Mendel and Newton and Einstein are no doubt universally accepted and no one regards them as belonging to a particular Western provenance. Ultimately, there is a certain tiresomeness if not disingenuousness in the repeated assertion that individual rights and personal freedoms are unique Western values that allegedly qualify the non-Western world for instruction if not dominance. Moreover, a cursory investigation of Western history indicates that autonomy and freedom of conscience are not more indigenous to the West than the East or emanate from an inherently occidental culture as per Huntington. Western liberal values, such as autonomy and individual human rights, are not some inherent component of the English and North American traditions, but a recent repudiation of practices that characterized these societies for centuries and, thus, freedom of thought, expression and conscience are really recent constructs of the Western ideology. This recent ascendancy has
only been won after centuries of struggle against entrenched forces of political and other forms of orthodoxy, intent on enforcing conscientious conformity against the spirit of personal inquiry.\textsuperscript{53} It has been argued that Kant’s moral autonomy was a concept invented by Kant.\textsuperscript{54} It is argued that the idea of self-governing autonomous will was in part a response to a socio-political context characterized by religious wars and the collapse of traditional religious authorities. It is in this context that we see the rise of notions of self-governance and the secularization of moral thought. Ultimately, although the Kantian formulation of the universal principle of justice may be the product of a given historical period, it has the advantage of offering a modal criterion for the evaluation of action and policy that stands as a formula which can be applied universally and independently of cultural context.

Moreover, there is a great danger of moral complacency engendered by cultural essentialist arguments. In America post 9/11, the passage of the \textit{Patriot Act}, which severely compromises rights of privacy and relaxes rules governing search and seizure, together with other executive decisions authorizing the detainment of foreign combatants and others indefinitely without \textit{habeas corpus}, indicates that the struggle to protect individual liberties against restrictions and potential violations, whether religious or politically based, is ongoing. Moreover, these developments have been mirrored in England where, since passage of the \textit{Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act} of 2001, fourteen suspected foreign terrorists have been held without charge or trial – six since 2001.\textsuperscript{55} The belief in a form of cultural essentialism that sees personal freedom as a necessary component of the Western way of life, blinds one to the reality in which it is dangerous to assume individual freedom as a given.

\textbf{COMMUNITARIANISM AND GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS IN THE POST COLD WAR}

We have argued that, as the Eastern Block crumbled and the ideological conflict between liberal democracy and communism also withered away, we initially found ourselves with one uncontested unchallenged dominant ideology. But rather than being an ideology with universal application, i.e., theoretically accessible to all human beings, according to communitarianism it was simply the property of the Western cultural tradition. This meant that the identification of a given moral system and conception of justice began to serve only as markers to distinguish one cultural community from another, rather than principles with universal application. The struggle between the free world and the communist world had been viewed, in part, as a normative struggle that involved the identification of the universal transcultural moral order with universal implication for just governance. By identifying liberal values closely with the Western cultural community, antipathy for Western regimes and the Western cultural community could be predicated simply on the rationale of
cultural difference, without the presence of ideological hostility, as evidenced by the absence of liberal democratic institutions. When ideas and values are seen as culturally bound and valid only for a given cultural domain, ideas, values, and principles would no longer clash in meaningful debate; rather, it would be the cultures that would clash.

Thus, given the emphasis on the social norm with its basis in communitarian values, coupled with an explanatory reliance on cultural essentialism, it is therefore entirely unsurprising that the post cold war political thinker no longer forecasts the future in terms of ideological struggle. Francis Fukuyama, for example, spoke of the end of history as a political development, enfolded into one dominant ideology. But this did not mean an end to conflict. Samuel Huntington famously stated in his 1993 article, “The Clash of Civilizations,” that “It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among mankind and dominating source of conflict will be cultural.” The culture that he had in mind was primarily Islamic culture, apparently transmogrifying de Benoist’s ruminations on the internal Islamic threat to French culture, to create a transnational anti-Western menace, and an emergent geopolitical antagonism between the West and militant Islam. Inevitably, as the interpretation took hold, the bi-polar antagonism between the West and East or the ‘Free world’ and Communism, was replaced by the newly-discovered collision of civilizations – in this case, Islam and the West.

For those who follow Huntington’s lead, this collision was not interpreted to involve a vital ideological component, and thereby a normative component that distinguishes preferred futures for political organization. There is a simple acceptance of a dominant political culture, Western liberalism, threatened not by a competing ideology but by an atavistic non-democratic cultural movement characterized as ‘Militant Islam.’ The end of history does not mean that the ideals of the Enlightenment have realized a projected universalism, given the thesis that Western values are a unique cultural endowment. The accepted interpretation understands that, for the West, under a hegemonic American tutelage, the ‘unipolar moment’ has arrived, and the challenge is to project power successfully against potential challenges to the new world order. At the moment, the principal challenge is interpreted to be terrorism in the guise of Muslim and Arab extremism.

Conflict that has its basis in cultural difference would be unremitting and of indeterminate duration because it can be terminated only through the transformation of different cultures by acceptance of American hegemony and the imposition of appropriate norms and values. In broad terms, this can mean that cultures that cannot reach consensus on a given set of values can be viewed as potential antagonists even if there is no articulated policy stating violent opposition. Indeed, one can read the so-called ‘war on terror’ as an extension of the clash of cultures thesis because, as Ronald Dworkin pointed out, “… the danger it cites as justification will last not for
a few years, as other real or supposed crises did, but at least for a generation and perhaps longer.” Indeed, former President G.W. Bush himself has defined the 21st century in terms of the war on terrorism. In the clash of cultures, violent conflict is seen as a simple consequence of cultural difference, even in the absence of an ideology, set of principles, or statements that prescribe violent confrontation. In contrast to Islam, the Marxist communism espoused by the so-called East Block was committed to the violent overthrow of the Western capitalist states. In other words, the ideology unambiguously stated that communist states and citizens of communist states must be committed to the transformation of capitalist states by violent means. Quite naturally, Western and communist states were ideologically drawn into both hot and cold wars.

Certainly there are groups within the Muslim world, such as al Qaeda and Ansar al-Islam, that preach violence and jihad against the Western world and the United States. Daniel Pipes, a presidentially-appointed member of the board of United States Institute of Peace, a federal think tank established by Congress to promote the resolving of world conflicts, states that “Islamism is a radical, utopian movement that has much in common with fascism and Marxism Leninism” but no current Muslim state has publicly subscribed to this program. Moreover, there is absolutely no evidence that this is more than a minority view in Muslim communities or that it has any basis in the accepted teachings of Islam. Just as there are left-leaning communist groups in South America who continue to hold to the ethic of violent struggle against the North, this does not mean that Latin America and its nation states subscribe to this bellicose program or that it is an expression of Latin American Roman Catholicism — indeed, the ideology was originally formulated in the British Museum. On the other hand, as we have said, to make cultural difference a basis for armed opposition only multiplies enemies, because it does not require evidence of violent intent. The by now familiar logic of regime change fits nicely into the new formula, as it appears to justify wars on the grounds that democratization or liberalization of a given culture (and thereby the removal of potential antagonism to the West) must be achieved through a war which removes the leaders and the guardians of this culture of autocracy. In the case of Iraq, for example, the country was targeted for invasion and regime change even though the leadership and Saddam Hussein ran a secular state, and had repeatedly renounced any intentions of attacking Western states or Western interests.

CULTURAL VALUES PROVIDE A RATIONALE FOR ISRAELI ETHNIC HEGEMONY

Likewise, the cultural discourse that sees a clash of civilizations also appears to act as a justification for promoting the Jewish state to a position of dominance and control in the Middle East. The Islamic cultural world is identified as the defined cultural ‘other’ (regressively anti-democratic and
devoid of individual liberties). The logic of the communitarian critique, combined with the clash of cultures thesis, can easily be utilized to support the argument that one ought to identify with the interests of other nation states that possess common values and traditions that are also confronted by this Muslim menace. Just as cultural difference alone can serve as the basis for hostility, cultural likeness becomes the basis for alliance. In this vein, it is argued by Israeli supporters that “The U.S.-Israel relationship is based on the twin pillars of shared values and shared interests.” As evidence of this commonality of values, it is pointed out that, despite the fact that Israelis “live in a region characterized by autocracies, Israelis have a commitment to democracy no less passionate than that of Americans.” On the grounds of this alleged commonality of interests and beliefs, it is asserted that support for Israel is one of the most pronounced and consistent foreign policy values of the American people.

According to this logic, it becomes the duty of the dominant American state to extend support and protection to this community. In this vein, Israel, a community that is said to be committed to traditional values and freedoms, must receive special aid and military support in order to preserve itself from the threat posed by the proximate Islamic countries of the Middle East.

A striking embodiment of this logic is to be found in the 2003 response of then-U.S. Democratic Party presidential candidate Joe Lieberman to Howard Dean’s (a rival candidate) statement that the U.S. should try to be “evenhanded” in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and that “it’s not our place to take sides.” Lieberman argued that such a policy would “break a 50-year record in which presidents, Republican and Democrat, and members of Congress of both parties have supported our relationship with Israel, based on shared values and common strategic interests.” Thus, the U.S. is not obliged to apply universal principles of justice or fairness impartially but, rather, is licensed to suppress the ideal of impartiality in unconstrained support for societies that allegedly embody our traditions and way of life and our common interests, whatever they may be. Lieberman obviously believes that it is sufficient to appeal to what Kant calls ‘contingently available authority,’ i.e., the tradition of a 50-year record. Kant would label this the invocation of “arbitrary authority,” which fails the test of the “universal principle of justice.” Whereas the principle of impartiality and fairness can be universalized, disregarding principles of justice in favor of a special relationship based on shared interests cannot. These policies clearly mark a rejection of the Enlightenment project and the Kantian emphasis on the impartial application of universalized principles. Thus, we distance ourselves from the constraints of liberal principles, which it used to be said we should not abandon regardless of perceived self-interest, and embrace partisan policies based on shared ‘interests’ and an imagined international community (civilization?) of like-minded societies.
CONCLUSION

Of course, it would be foolish to attribute these developments to challenges posed by communitarian thinkers in their attacks on traditional liberal political thought as expressed in the writings of Rawls and Dworkin. However, by de-universalizing liberal principles and making them cultural rather than transcultural realities, one easily slips into a discourse that claims these values as a cultural inheritance that must be protected rather than principles that one must apply. They are seen as part of our way of life – ‘our freedoms’ that are resented by others who seek to destroy them. This has been the favorite interpretation of the events of 9/11 by American officials.

According to this interpretation, it is then not contradictory to suspend liberal principles in order to protect liberty, because these values are not normative constraints with transcultural application but rather dispositions that are the provenance of an essentialist Western culture. If, on this view, they are a natural extension of a distinct Western cultural community, then it is of primary importance to protect that cultural community even if this means the suspension of liberal principles. Thus, the discourse of the ‘liberal or democratic cultural community’ provides a powerful rationale for abandoning principles and returning to old authoritarianism when it is expedient to do so, and it can always be expedient because there will always be perceived threats. When the language of individual freedom is framed in communitarian or culturist discourse, it becomes much more difficult to move to the earlier conclusions of Dworkin, and argue that Western society so values the dignity and liberty of the individual that it is willing to follow and protect these principles even when to do otherwise would contribute to the welfare and utilitarian concerns of the community. In other words, it is much more difficult to make the unqualified statement that the definition of a liberal community entails a distinct form of toleration of dissent, which means that under no circumstances will the state violate the basic freedoms such as the right to trial and other essential personal liberties. By extension, we have recently seen, in the name of national security, the eroding of the freedoms of Arab minorities, the disregard for privacy rights in the expansion of search and surveillance authority, the imprisonment of foreign nationals without trial and contrary to the conventions of war, and even the violation of the basic rights of the accused. As Dworkin has stated, these are policies that “violate people’s fundamental rights – rights at the foundation of the international moral order that nations must respect even when under threat.”

Ultimately, political philosophers and political theorists need to rediscover liberalism and re-emphasize its universal application. This move will help to abnegate the thinking that liberalism is a unique cultural attribute of Western civilization, by promoting the understanding that these principles possess a universality that may be accessed and recognized by other non-Western communities. Dame Rosalyn Higgins, member of the
International Court of Justice and former member of the Human Rights Commission that covers national implementation of the Universal Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, stated that “Third world members have taken the lead in insisting that human rights are not a set of Western-imposed ideas, but are of universal application speaking to the human condition.”

It is ultimately important to point out that the resources of the liberal tradition can avoid the ethical relativism and the exclusivist dangers of the communitarian approach while promoting a universalism which is more than an empty abstraction entirely lacking in directional content. Kant’s approach, as we have seen, promotes an interpretation of universal justice that cannot be confused with the traditions or inheritance of a particular cultural collective. Onora O’Neill, in her interpretation of Kant’s thought, points out that Kantian moral philosophy offers us a better foundation for the realization of justice, including the realization of justice between states. As we have argued, the attempt to found ethics on tradition is problematic because it involves the use of private reason. According to Kant, the appeal to contingently-available authorities amounts to the introduction of some arbitrary premise asserting the claims of authority. The point is that Kant’s universal principle does not convey any specific content, but rather offers a modal criterion which must be realized by the structure of our thought, discourse, or action. Ultimately, this means that liberal universalism is not some cultural feature or value possessed by some but unavailable to others for whatever reason, but a habit of reasoning involving the reflective assessment of alternatives.

This understanding guards against easy complacency and double standards that can be fatal to the protection of personal freedom and the realization of justice between states and political groups. If one really respects individual autonomy and liberty, this means one has to be prepared to constrain self-interest, national and otherwise, in order to fulfill the commitment to freedom. Western states need to acknowledge that they, too, are not immune to the temptation to put interests above principle. A recognition of the universal application of liberal principles means that these principles must also constrain the policies of the governments of those Western states in which the liberal ideology initially developed. At the same time, respect for the rule of law and individual autonomy should not serve as a basis for notions of cultural superiority, which define the other as culturally and even racially inferior. For example, one respected legal analyst in a comparative study of number of Western and non-Western states noted that the shift to personal autonomy and increased individual liberty appears to be powered by economics, technology and communication, rather than some inherent trait of a given culture.

NOTES

Liberalism, Communitarianism, and the Clash of Cultures


3 See Dworkin, Taking Rights Seriously.

4 See Sandel, Liberalism and the Limits of Justice.


6 See MacIntyre, After Virtue.


12 Kant, “What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking,” p. 8, 146n.


26 Wedeen, “Why Huntington and Bin Laden are Wrong,” p. 56.


28 Taguieff, “From Race to Culture.”


32 Bornschier, “Do Right-Wing Populist Parties Constitute a European Party Family?”


45 See Sadowsky, “The New Orientalism and the Democratic Debate,” p. 20, for a summary of the works that have built on this thesis.


55 *The Gulf Today* 13/12/03, p. 9.


60 “All citizens of Israel, regardless of race, religion or sex, are guaranteed equality before the law and full democratic rights. Freedom of speech, assembly and press is embodied in the country’s laws and traditions, upheld by an independent judiciary.” Of course, equality before the law and most of these other rights really only fully extend to those belonging to the Jewish cultural group; the defined “other” possess a much more attenuated set of rights.


65 Interview with Joseph Fitchett, International Herald Tribune (Nov. 29, 1996), p. 4. For example, the former President of Sri Lanka, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, expressed the view that “the free market has become universal and implies democracy and human rights.” She also stated that “When people talk of a clash of values, I think it is an excuse that can be used to cover a multitude of sins.”


67 However, James Tully, Public Philosophy in a New Key, Number II: Imperialism and Civic Freedom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) argues that Kantian universalism fails in so far as Kant assumes that European societies with their independent nation states and republican constitutions represent a stage, which is universal and cosmopolitan. Following Edward Said, he says that this is the vocabulary of classic nineteenth-century imperial culture. Although these are doubtless Kant’s sentiments, it is arguable that the universal principle in itself does not convey any specific content, but rather is simply a modal criterion which must be realized by the structure of our thought, discourse, or action. It may well be the case that Kant was not always consistent in applying his own principle.

68 Tully, Public Philosophy in a New Key, p. 54.

In the twentieth century many people thought that religion would go away. Some thought it would be made unnecessary by the classless society and an imagined universal escape from poverty.\(^1\) Others, as psychoanalysis progressed, thought it would be seen as an infantile fantasy.\(^2\) Logical positivists saw it as meaningless babble. Few people expect any of this now, though those who see religious belief as incompatible with a scientific understanding of the world nurture hopes of a disappearance.\(^3\)

Some who believed that religion would survive thought that the great religions – those “major religions” associated with the great civilisations – would converge into one tolerant body, not relativist, but pluralist all the same. “Civilisation” was a French invention which remains somewhat uncertain in meaning, and religions were determined to be “major” mainly by counting their adherents, but the partisans of this idea included Arnold Toynbee,\(^4\) surely one of the most imaginative historians of this period, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (who went from being King George V Professor of Mental and Moral Science at the University of Calcutta to being Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford\(^5\) and then went on to be the much-loved president of India), and Frederick Copleston, the author of what remains the standard history of philosophy whose many volumes are still regarded as scripture by many students. These claims were historical, but metaphysical claims to the same end were made by a number of process philosophers, Alfred North Whitehead,\(^6\) John Elof Boodin,\(^7\) Samuel Alexander,\(^8\) Pierre Teilhard de Chardin,\(^9\) and Sri Aurobindo Ghose.\(^10\) Very many of them combined a related metaphysics with their own views of history.

None of them, of course, denied that the religions that we know and that they wrote about, clash, or that, as Anthony Kenny recently noted, the one thing we can be sure of, if we focus on doctrines as they are currently proclaimed, is that most of them must be false.\(^11\) Rather, those who believed in convergence thought some process or processes now at work in the world would result in a transformation. Yet we live in a world where clashes blamed on religion involve kinds of violence that were almost unimaginable two hundred years ago. Some of them are global in scope and are hourly at the top of the news.

The thinkers who looked toward unity had a case to make, however. Teilhard de Chardin’s popularity, like that of the others, has waned, and yet in *The Future of Man*\(^12\) he argued persuasively that the notion that religions
are static runs counter to the major changes in human thought since the sixteenth century. First, we saw that the stars change, then that earth has changed and finally that life has evolved. Boorin also argued that evolutionary change should be understood as all pervasive, involving the whole cosmos, a thesis which has gained some strength from recent debates about changes in the laws of nature themselves. But he also argued that the changes that would bring about religious convergence would come about from the speed of education and above all, perhaps, from the transformation of work through technology which would both free people from drudgery and require for its working a more rational appraisal of the world. To an extent Teilhard was obviously right: for the most part, where technology and education have worked together to transform daily life, tolerance has increased. The uprush in American fundamentalist intolerance in recent decades has its roots not just in parts of the South and in the hillbilly counties which had long been breeding grounds for sentiments that led to lynchings and laws against teaching evolution, but wherever the poor, oppressed, and uneducated have found themselves herded together. Admittedly Yale University graduates led the country into two disastrous wars and a Harvard graduate presided over the most disastrous war of all. They did so in the name of something like a civic religion based on free market “democracy” and a currency which has “in God We Trust” printed on it. But it is not usually Ivy League graduates and the computer-driven numerologists of Wall Street who preach exclusive salvation and see the devil in other people’s religions.

Nevertheless, Boorin and the others, of course, missed the problem of cultural lag – our knowledge of the hard sciences so far outstrips our social understanding that we are often left feeling powerless in the face of what seem to be quite simple human problems, like providing Americans with the kind of health care Britons and Canadians and millions more take as the minimum human beings should expect.

It is this, I will argue, that is at the heart of the paradox I want to discuss in this paper. Yet we must start with the fact that, for the most part, the major religions have remained fixed on the notion that a revelation received in a rather distant past was sufficient. Never mind that it was given to people in very different cultures with very different notions of what constitutes knowledge and very different expectations about evidence and argument.

This is distinctly odd. One might think that an infinite God would have an infinity of things to reveal as circumstances demanded and in fact most religions think that revelations did not occur all at once. Christians believe that the ancient Jewish religion has not been superseded but absorbed into a better revelation. Muslims accept that Jesus added to the religions of the book but maintain that Mohammed added something too. For most of them the story ends there. The followers of Joseph Smith, who think that celestial beings brought news to him in upstate New York, believe that Mormonism is nearly complete although they have allowed that
successive presidents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints have received some significant news since. Baha'is, who seem to be the most hated believers in Iran these days, suppose there was yet another prophet. Their direct descent is through the older “religions of the book, though they also claim to be the heirs of Zoroaster, Krishna, and the Buddha. Buddhism has undergone continuous changes, though some Buddhists swear by the oldest brand. Somewhat exceptionally, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was willing to see Hinduism as a work in progress. Still, in The Hindu View of Life, he does not mention the caste system and much else that impedes change and figures in disputes in which people are thrown out of train windows.

Despite all this, the partisans of convergence are generally right about the logical implications of the historical processes that interested them, both in their own terms and in the light of what seem to be persuasive philosophical reasons. Polytheisms have tended to be replaced by monotheisms or by belief in some great Absolute like the Hindu Brahman entwined with Atman which is expressed in the human spirit. Buddhists went beyond all gods, though the gods have tended to sneak back, most richly in the immensely popular Pure Land version in China which holds, like the followers of Joseph Smith, that each human being might become a god. One might think that the God of the Christian mystics is not very far from the Hindu Brahman and that the perfectly unified Allah of the Koran would find little strangeness in either. But one must remember the fierce old woman I found waving a Bible in Petticoat Lane Market in London one Sunday morning. She shouted “Allah is not God” while a cluster of stall holders, clearly friends of Allah, shouted back “Yes, he is.” I know what the stall holders were thinking. I wonder what the old lady with the Bible was thinking.

I think one can easily enough see what impedes the realisation of the hopes that major thinkers and a good many market stall holders share. To know if anything comes of what we see, we first need to think about the nature of religion.

ORIENTATION AND THE NATURE OF RELIGION

Religious practices and rituals have been – and are – put to many uses: few people now believe they can make it rain or cause their enemies to break out in boils. Roman Catholics who go to mass believe that the bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Jesus. Hindus sometimes refer to Christianity as the “cannibal religion,” but I suspect that relatively few Catholics are now simple literalists about the transformation into flesh and blood. They think, no doubt, that the sacraments unite them with a spiritual reality and with each other, and so the Church authorities often express concern about outsiders who take part in the communion. The joint participation in a reality not evident to outsiders brings partakers together – and so it is very generally with religious rituals. The dark side of
this is that it is an occasion of separation – to be bound together against all others is to invite confrontation.

The heart of the event, though, is a sense of orientation – one declares oneself bound to a reality which provides directions to one’s life. If this is not to lead to disaster, the bonding must be to a reality which is potentially inclusive. Orientation is the basic concern of religion, bonding is an outcome which can be used for good and ill. And so one must look at orientation carefully. Its aim is to give one a goal and a direction. It can only take place without bonding oneself to others if the goal is one that can be reached alone. The center of many strands of the Protestant Reformation was a shift from a collective responsibility to spiritual reality through the church, to an individual relationship with a God precisely defined and quite separate from other spiritual realities. The effect of Protestantism, however, was to stimulate the urge to be bonded through the state or other institutions. The result was often a disorientation which resulted from loyalties to potentially conflicting realities.

The immediate questions which occur when one asks about such things are: Do people really need orientation? What could satisfy the need? Will what satisfies the need be something which unites everyone as that wide swath of thinkers from Arnold Toynbee to Teilhard de Chardin thought, or will it more likely be something which binds people together in confrontational groups? What, indeed, counts as a source of orientation and could any orientation work adequately for human beings?

Aristotle noticed that we are not like the bees and Marx observed that we are not like the beavers. We do not come equipped with a genetic plan which adequately shapes our lives. We have to be educated in order to survive. In reality, we are faced daily with indefinitely many choices. Our lives can be mapped in terms of “life chances” as Ralf Dahrendorf explained. Not everything is open to everyone all the time, but in the narrowest life there remain indefinitely many choices in the course of a day.

So, yes, we do need orientation; we look for some aim. Finding food, staying warm, keeping a mate, staying alive, coping with one’s children, doing one’s daily job, seeking entertainment, fill one’s day. But somehow these activities need to be co-ordinated and priorities set. If there is no overall orientation, life becomes full of frustrations and one seems to drift with the tide. It seems unlikely that anyone has ever gone for long without attempting some broader orientation.

Whatever this determining structure turns out to be, it is likely to be something which has some of the properties of a religion. We hear it said that some people turn money-making into a religion, and this is not quite a joke. Others seem dominated by the search for some bearable state of mind. We do not know how many people who are “addicted” to drugs, gambling, and sex are in fact searching for a state of mind in which things will fall into place. Mind and body tend to work together, of course. Some things may be addicting because they involve a chemical change in the body, others may be addicting because the body becomes used to what the mind finds
The Idea of Religion

What does emerge, however, is that most kinds of overall orientation would have a tendency to self-destruction if they were pursued widely. One needs possessions to live, but the unobstructed pursuit of possessions must, if successful, lead to social division. The capitalist who tries to master the whole world would, if he succeeded, possess all the wealth and everyone else would be bereft. At some point he must tame his possessiveness in order to maintain his customers. The search for special states of mind — whether by drug taking or whatever — leads to an inward focus which eventually cuts one off from the community while leaving one dependent on it. As a mainly mental exercise it has been recommended for saints, but is absurd for everyone. Solitary sainthood as much as drug induced states of mind tend eventually to separate one from the commonly perceived reality. Solitary saints may seek this but such solitude has never been pursued widely. The widespread pursuit of drug-induced states of mind leads communities to call for more policemen.

Of course there are more promising projects. The modest programme traditionally offered by hedonists is one, and the pursuit of general wisdom is another. But the minimisation of pain and maximisation of pleasure turns out, as F. H. Bradley noticed, to be logically absurd. Pleasures cannot be aggregated like piles of coal, for one tends to crowd out another. Nor does the maximisation of pleasure amount to anything. Just as there is no largest possible pile of coal so there is no maximum of pleasure.

The pursuit of a generalised wisdom sounds much better. But it merely begs the question. The wisdom would be, after all, an understanding of the universe. But that is a statement of a necessary condition for genuine orientation, not an account of orientation.

At any rate, every functioning and functional orientation is both objective and tied to decision-making states of mind, even if these change from time to time and even if their objective is something pedestrian like balancing pleasure and pain. Such an orientation is tied to the mind that it directs and it does not hold sway over other minds unless others make the same choice.

Grasping the way in which orientation bears upon, indeed shades into and becomes central for, religion may show us the essential point of religious tolerance. It may also help us to understand why our religious discourse needs to be shaped so that we can try to share our grounds of conviction with others — and yet, equally, why it is that organised religions tend to be fissiparous. Where orthodoxy is demanded, there is always a struggle to maintain it.

This suggests a deeper enquiry into the idea of an ultimate orientation. An obvious example of an orienting notion is the concept of God. I shall argue that this, understood in a certain way, has a good deal in common with any ultimate orientation which is likely to succeed. It is, that is, connected to successful orientation if the notion of God is taken to
include the idea of an infinite mind, capable of infinite goodness, capable of entering into a direct relation with finite minds such as ours and capable of facilitating, through a shared experience, the optimization of goodness in any actually possible world.¹⁹

The reason is that whatever serves as orientation must be morally acceptable, intelligible, have some relation with us, and must, at the same time be capable of being regarded objectively and not just as a wholly internal, hence subjective, reality. It must also not suffer from the limitations which each of us, as individuals, face. These properties surely suggest an infinite mind. The God of the ‘religions of the book’ is one specimen. Hinduism offers one or more accounts of infinite mind. The gods of Pure Land Buddhism – or some of them – are also infinite minds, though Buddhists of older traditions reject them all. So there is a useful beginning here.

If human beings need orientation to live a fully human life that meets the demands of morality then we should somehow accept the idea of an infinite mind. To say this is to offer a specimen of what Kant called “pure practical reason.” But, though Kant thought such reasonings led to something “as good as knowledge,”²⁰ and they surely help sustain Pascal’s wager,²¹ they nonetheless make people itch a little.

Peter Byrne asks whether the concept of God should be regarded as something which has instantiation only within our own minds, or as something objectively in the world. There is something wrong with this, for I think he poses an impossible dichotomy.²² Anselm said that we have – in some sense – an idea of God, but it is not obvious without an argument that God exists in the world of things.²³ Many versions of the “ontological argument” have followed, but the point really is about what sense Anselm (who found the idea in intellectu) or Peter Byrne (who finds it in our minds) have of “idea” or “location.” Our minds are clearly finite in some sense: we can have only a limited number of integers “in mind” at any one time and even politicians cannot memorize all the names in the Central London telephone directories. But our minds reach out. We cannot do mathematics and physics without a notion of the infinite. Mathematical infinities are perfectly real and not in our minds. You cannot dispose of the number two, however much you dislike it. It is just there like the infinity of other integers and the richer infinities of numbers in general. They are not in physical space either. They give us a relation to something which extends beyond us.

There are more prosaic accounts of our connection to infinity. If you look at a page of a book and try to list everything “visible” there is no end. You can always make more distinctions. Infinity is on the horizon. Furthermore, our sciences are based on the assumption that reality is intelligible and what we know about it is in the end based on mathematical formulae.

We reach out to the source of this intelligibility. This is part of the collective orientation which makes science possible. In reaching toward it we form communities. Indeed, there are many things we know collectively, like how to build a Boeing 747, that none of us knows singly.
In mathematics it becomes impossible to distinguish finally between what we discover and what we create. We create new mathematical formulae, but, as we prove them, the facts they organise emerge as objective reality. The extension of this community of knowledge suggests contact with an infinite mind. It is this orientation which the religious notions I have been talking about seem to aim for.

If there exists a divine mind and it is infinite, it could not be distinct from finite minds. For if it were there would be a limitation on it, and it would not, by definition, be infinite. All of our thoughts would be included in its thoughts and some of its thoughts would have to be identical with some of our thoughts.

There is a long tradition in most monotheistic religions of regarding God as absolutely distinct and unlike us. But in most such religions, there is a counter tradition of insisting on “the God within” and of insisting on our participation in the divine life. These are paradoxical attempts to cope with an infinity which has to be self-contained and has to be manifest within every mind. A God who is really independent is also one on whom we can turn our backs, and then we will need another principle to determine our orientation. The dichotomy between us and the infinite mind cannot really be sustained.

One can put all this more poetically and perhaps one should. Thomas Aquinas thought people are so constructed that only the beatific vision will satisfy us. Dante would have agreed with him. Matthew Arnold put it a little differently: Human beings search for the best. We seek the moral law and “an eternal not ourselves” moves us toward the good. Young composers are not content to imitate the fashions of the hour but insist on breaking new ground even though, like their painter colleagues, they may suffer for it. Most people, no doubt, are driven to compromise in order to survive and feed their families, but even among politicians there is a distinct uneasiness which troubles the party whips.

AN EXAMPLE: INFINITE MINDS, THE TRINITY, AND RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION IN ENGLAND

Orientation to an infinite mind suggests a unifying community through which it emerges as knowledge progresses. But it also suggests a radical pluralism. Infinity cannot be exhausted by any finite concept. And it emerges into the world of awareness through many different finite minds.

Yet there may well be a way of reconciling unity with diversity. At the end of the seventeenth century, London publishers produced a flurry of books that stirred up and responded to a heated controversy about the Trinity. The centre of the storm was William Sherlock, the newly-appointed Dean of St. Paul’s, in his *Vindication of the Doctrine of the Holy and Ever-Blessed Trinity and the Incarnation of the Son of God*. Sherlock urged his readers to understand the Trinity as a community of three infinite minds, distinct in point of view but one and identical in the substantial content of
those minds. He tried to show that only in this way could the central
doctrine of Christianity be understood without obscurity, obfuscation, or
contradiction. But it is important to realize that his constant concern was to
keep the church together as a unity while conceding – even welcoming – the
possibility of a variety of points of view. Plurality of perspective and unity
of truth were not opposed but must necessarily go together. He tended to
advocate his doctrine of the Trinity and his religious accommodationism in
different works, but it would not have required a genius to see the
connection.

Sherlock is credited with being the first philosopher to identify
personal identity with consciousness. Locke was aware of his work and,
though some people have thought that he learned from Locke, it seems most
likely that Locke was influenced by him. Locke distinguished personal
identity – which is derived from consciousness – from human identity
which he associated with bodies, the sorts of identities that policemen and
coroners use but which tell us nothing about the person.

Sherlock tells us that the persons of the Trinity know each other in a
direct shared consciousness, whereas Sherlock knew his colleagues and
opponents only by observing their bodily actions. But the persons of the
Trinity do not have bodies, or at least not bodies like ours. Two presumably
have no bodies at all. One has a very unusual body, human at a time in the
past, subsequently able to walk through closed doors, and now said to be
somehow very closely associated with the bread and wine of the
communion. How then do the persons of the Trinity remain three? The
answer seems to be that they share the same content but from different
perspectives. Sherlock quotes John10:38 “The Father is in me and I am in
him.” Jesus is clearly speaking from a perspective which is not that of the
Father. One sees the whole from a moment of time and can feel the isolation
of that moment as Jesus’ last words on the cross suggest. The other, the
Father, grasps the world sub specie aeternitatis. The perspective of the Holy
Spirit is that of the immanent idea of an unfolding universe. One should
notice that “the world” is thus as essential to the Trinity on such an account
as are bodies to us in our own dealings with one another. Jesus cannot see
the world from a point or successive points in time without there being a
world to be ordered. The Spirit cannot be immanent in nothing.

Sherlock’s argument is that only an infinite spirit can overcome the
separations between minds and thus bring men together. And we can see
that only a perfectly inter-related set of infinite minds can do justice to a
world in which there is necessarily a plurality of perspectives.

The picture he gives of the world is that it is like a story or a
painting. It can be understood from many points of view without losing its
perfection. Perhaps we can imagine that God the Father views it in its origin
from all eternity and, looking forward, grasps all the truths except those that
stem from human free actions, for Sherlock will have nothing of
predestination. The second person of the Trinity sees the world in time from
a place – no doubt a succession of places – for He will return. The Holy
Spirit sees it as principle in development. Yet they fully grasp and share in one another’s infinite minds. Human beings have finite minds and must choose their perspectives. They cannot be expected to see it from every perspective and there can and need be no final unanimity so long as they understand the basis of their plurality.

Sherlock’s book caused no little alarm in the theological community. But his detractors did not stop to think that an infinite mind must indeed, if it is really infinite, contain a variety of points of view. Christianity, as Sherlock explained, exploited three of them. If it occurred to him that there must be infinitely many more, he kept the thought to himself.

He believed that civil peace and good government required unity, but it had to be achieved within freedom. The issue in his thought becomes the direction of history. The important question is about what Providence expects of human beings as such. God does not have to ensure that every human being carries out exactly the role intended in the divine plan, but God is able indeed to plant thoughts in people’s minds. Sherlock is aware of the Biblical occasions when people got ideas in their heads directly from God. But one must suppose that this is a rather perilous line to take. How are we to distinguish between the fanatics? Sherlock was living, if not alongside, then at least just a few streets west in the same town as Lodowick Muggleton, the journeyman tailor, who, along with his friend and fellow-tradesman John Reeve, claimed in 1651 to be the recipient of the last and final revelation and proclaimed everyone who did not recognize it damned.29

Sherlock therefore offered a test: When we are at peace with others and with God our minds are “at ease.”30 Notice that the test is not the Quaker appeal to the “inner light” but an appeal to a community. It is not enough to feel you are right. You must find a community agreeing with you. Nor is it enough to start your own rabble and indulge in nationalist violence. The aim is for everyone to have ease of mind and if it fails – as it usually does – then one must find out why. Sherlock is pleased that God turned the heart of Esau “when he came out in great rage.”31 Universal agreement is not necessary, but until all disputants are feeling this ease the struggle to find a solution must go on.

This is the essence of Sherlock’s view of the Church of England and of the country in which he lived. The Church should be an instrument of God to secure this agreement around things that God can approve. However much he disagreed with him, Lodowick Muggleton’s injunction against men taking the sword against one another would have been agreeable to him.

Sherlock hoped to persuade people by metaphysical arguments that they could live together in a unity which did not threaten the state and yet preserve their freedom and avoid being coerced into a single perspective. His was one of several visions which had roots in the work of the Cambridge Platonists and what might be called the “second wave” of them – Edward Fowler, Edward Stillingfleet and Thomas Tenison. All of them became powerful figures in the Anglican Church. All participated in
schemes for toleration. In England, it worked fairly well, especially at Cambridge from which they all emerged, and an ethos slowly developed which allowed for an “umbrella” church in which there were and are many different views. These days the “umbrella” church is not so peaceful. I suspect the theses of Sherlock, Fowler, and Stillingfleet have been forgotten.

Still, the idea of a plurality of points of view develops naturally from the search for orientation and the acceptance of an infinity at the base of things. Hinduism has many strands and gods, Buddhism runs the gamut from the rather austere godless original version to the world filled with gods envisaged in the Pure Land Buddhism which became popular in China. The *li* of the neo-Confucianism which emerged at the same time as the great theological movements of our later middle ages, is similarly accommodating to a plurality of ideas.

The logic of the case seems to drive such things. Only, perhaps Judaism and Islam are hold outs, but Islam from the time of Ibn Sina to the modern reformist Islam of M. M. Sharif in Pakistan suggests something different.

ANOTHER STORY: THE ISLAMIC TRADITION

One can find views much like Sherlock's in the Islamic tradition. M. M. Sharif (1893-1965) was one of the two most influential Muslim philosophers of the twentieth century. Only Muhammad Iqbal, perhaps, equalled him. Sharif created an original philosophical system, edited the most impressive collection of studies on the history of Muslim philosophy, and founded the Pakistan Philosophical Congress.

His message was that Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are intertwined. He did not think there was any ultimate clash of values, though he would have admitted that, when each religion is driven back on itself and denies the need for philosophical interpretation, or when any of the religions presses its thought forms to irrational extremes, clashes appear.

Sharif believed that Muslim thought had gone through a long period of sterility provoked by extremes – extremes of mysticism on the one hand and of arid scholastic rationalism on the other. And yet its basic ideas had continued, even when unrecognised, to influence philosophy in the West. The western philosophies which attracted him most, those of Leibniz, Hegel, and Sharif's Cambridge teacher J.M.E. McTaggart, all depended on ideas *some* of whose roots could be found in Islamic thought. But they all sought a kind of balance.

In *Muslim Thought: Its Origin and Achievements*, Sharif laid out a view of Islam and of Muslim philosophy that many people will now find surprising. Islamic fundamentalism he regarded as a perversion: “To be a Muslim it was enough to be monotheistic, whatever the details of one's conception of monotheism.” The Qur'an, he insisted, offered a “new ethics, [and] a democratic politics.”
The basis of his claims was, once again, the notion that the central strand of Islamic philosophy pointed to an infinite which required an infinity of points of view. He expressed it through a combination of Leibnizian monadism and Hegelian dialectic, for he did not think it could be reduced to a simple structure but only to one in which an analysis of any of the parts led to an account of all the others – to unity which does not obliterate the plurality.

Much of what he said intertwined with what the great philosopher-poet Muhammad Iqbal was saying at the same time. Iqbal drew heavily on Persian sources and indeed much of what each of them said had roots in Ibn Sina. Ibn Sina concedes that an infinite God filled with infinite goodness will create an infinity of souls. He disposes of the paradoxes that an infinity of souls suggests in a simple way: Such an infinity of souls is possible because souls form no order. The importance of this real infinity – a reality like Cantor's “Absolute” which surpasses all orders and does not even form a set – and of the belief that souls do not have an order, is very great. It allows us to think in a precise way of what is beyond the space and time in which things are individuated, and it also of course provides a profound theological argument for democracy. It attracted much attention over the centuries.

Ibn Sina explored the issues further in a fragment which remains, unpublished and untranslated, in the British Library. It has been summarised by Shlomo Pines, one of the great Arabists of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The manuscript deals specifically with questions about infinity and the beginnings of the world. This whole treatise appears aimed at refuting the claim that the past must be finite. We think of the past as forming a single natural order in space and time. And this order cannot form an infinite sequence, for then we could never have come from the beginning to the present. But one may imagine, he says, the creation of an infinity of religious communities before the creation of our world. They are then not part of the same order. Such thoughts about infinity have a marvellous way of putting an end to narrow-minded religious fundamentalism.

But there is more to Ibn Sina that is relevant to our concerns here. Another crucial element is contained in a fragment that seems to exist only in copies in the British Library and in St. Petersburg. It was finally published in Leiden in 1894, and then analyzed by another Jewish philosopher, Emil Fackenheim, in Toronto in 1945.

The question that Ibn Sina asks in it is why there should be a plurality of souls and what role they play in the unfolding of reality. The view that he takes is a Platonic one, developed in part from the Symposium: it is love that drives the world. But love requires distinctness and plurality. Love moves us toward beauty and thence to goodness and truth.

Fackenheim notices something else in this fragment. He says that the Aristotelian concept of “a harmonious hierarchical order” has replaced the Platonic doctrine of “suppression of the lower parts of the soul.” Love as an emotion now plays an important part, not just as something to be replaced
as we grow more rational but as a central force in the universe. This is a natural outcome, I think, of Ibn Sina’s insistence that what the intellect gains from the body it keeps with it even after death.

**OVERCOMING THE CLASH OF CULTURES**

These historical notes surely confirm the likelihood that the logic of the basic issues suggests a convergence. The search for an orientation that could be defended with reasons intelligible to everyone tends to bring the apparently competing religions together. You will have noticed how important the idea of infinity seems to be.

One answer to some of the world’s problems is indeed to emphasise such notions. But something pulls people into confrontations. Great scholars at the Hebrew and Arab universities of Jerusalem may well derive strength from Ibn Sina, but in the street outside their co-religionists may throw rocks and worse at one another. We must now try to understand how it is that the great abstract unities come to take root in concrete particulars and how religious ideas get used so often in a way which runs counter to the arguments I have been developing.

Certainly, some religions are more prone to confrontation than others. The ‘religions of the book’ – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam along with their modern developments like Mormonism (though perhaps not Baha’i) – tend to be exclusive. One cannot belong to two of them at once. They all have a common root which they recognize when looking backward, but they do not see their unity when they look forward. Muslims recognize Jesus as a prophet and are happy to recognize Abraham and Moses. Christians add the Old Testament to the New with so little embellishment that many are alarmed by it. But Jews do not recognize Jesus and Christians do not recognize Mohammed. Neither group recognizes Joseph Smith. Even if they are joined by some very general ideas, they are separated by the texts that are special to each group.

Part of the reason for the confrontation is that these are religions based on texts. When all is going well, it is usually admitted that the texts need interpretation, that understanding of them grows and even that much can be learned from other people’s texts. But when people feel frightened, or oppressed, or generally feel themselves to be the underdogs, they cling tightly to the texts.

Some of the recent manifestations of Islamic fundamentalism are the result of historical accident. When the Ottoman Empire broke up, a small fundamentalist sect in what is now Saudi Arabia acquired the land in which there proved to be oil. It took another thirty years for it to pay off, but when it did the Wahhabis were very rich and could fund schools and movements throughout the Islamic world. They did so for reasons which are political as well as religious, but they did it. The liberal Islamic movement which produced Sharif and Iqbal grew out of the Muslim university at Aligarh, in India. Its ideas came from the liberal intellectual tradition which was
The Idea of Religion

Growing - albeit with difficulty - in the late Ottoman Empire. It was orphaned by the fall of that empire, but the university itself survived well. Others were not so lucky.

There was always someone with money and resources to fuel the fires, but the fires were set in the heat of anger at dispossession. So long as the Ottoman Empire was visible and vast, even if it was beginning to crumble, students at Aligarh and their instructors could hold their heads up in the presence of the British and the Hindu majority. Even if their university survived, the orphan feeling was there, and men like Iqbal played an important role in the attempt to create an independent Pakistan. It is ironic that if their ideas come back to life it will most likely be in India.

The Arab world has had its share of riches and to these were added bribes from the contending Cold War powers. But it is impossible to overestimate the horror which Muslims everywhere felt and continue to feel at the destruction of Fallujah, the ruins of Gaza, and the dead bodies at wedding parties in Afghanistan. The anger does not always turn into fundamentalism. Many Palestinians, for instance, are quite resistant to that. But it often does. It is true that, all along the crescent from West Africa, through North Africa, across the Middle East, the southern tier of the old Soviet Union, a western slice of China, Malaysia and into Indonesia, there is tension between the Muslim world and others as well as tensions within Islamic communities. But it is a mistake to attribute all the troubles to a militant tendency in some versions of Islamic theology. The quite vicious dispute in Northern Nigeria, for instance, is really about land. It was certainly worsened by the Anglican Bishop Peter Akinola who said "May we at this stage remind our Muslim brothers that they do not have the monopoly of violence in this nation."

One must, however, dig deeper. Many of the horrors have their origins in a religious dispute of quite a different kind.

There have always been two views of evil. One is that evil is a positive thing, embodied in the devil or even in matter itself, scattered through the world, and needing to be stamped out. The other is that evil is a lack, something missing that one must try to fix by constructive action. On this view every finite manifestation of the infinite is necessarily lacking something; but there is an infinite resource within which that lack can be made up.

On one view, democracy springs into existence when one has bombed Iraq and Afghanistan into ruins. The evil will somehow be turned to dust. On the other view, one builds a decent society slowly finding its place in a greater cosmic whole. Perhaps such a society really was coming into being in Iraq, where education had prospered and women were beginning to find their way in the world. Palestinians are divided between those who would like to blow the Israelis into the sea if only they could, and those - I think far more numerous - who want to build something of their own which the Israelis will recognize as valuable and likable and, of course,
safe. One can understand that the Israelis do not want to be pushed into the sea, but too many Israelis want to resist both options.

The two views of evil have their roots in the same religious histories. The God of wrath roaring out through hellfire Calvinist preachers, and the kindly helpful God envisaged by Ralph Cudworth can both be found in the Scriptures. Only reason can tell us which view of evil to take.

Religion, however, is very often used as a cover. Most Israelis, I think, do not really believe that God gave them the whole Holy Land or even Jerusalem in a sense which would preclude the Arabs from having a holy place there along with the Christians. They can see the unfairness of having a “law of return” which allows Jews but not Palestinians to come back. But their fears make them chary of what they can see. They were faced with extinction in Germany. They want a place to be safe. They can see that a Palestinian return might swamp them. Religion serves as a kind of answer against the charge of unfairness, but it is a feeble answer because religions do not need to be exclusive. The notion that God is in the real estate business is fostered but not necessitated by the idea of a God who created the world ex nihilo and who would therefore bestow it as he pleased. But one would have thought it more natural to think, like John Locke, that we are allowed to use the world only so long as we leave “enough, and as good” for others. Parts of the Old Testament show the cultural roots of the land-loving god, for they describe the sweep of a nomadic people across the lands of a settled agricultural people, and portray with shocking glee the destruction of Jericho and Aix in one of the earliest fully recorded genocides.

Historically, religions in China were seen very differently. If Confucianism is a religion, it mixed easily with Daoism, and what is called “neo-Confucianism,” the religious philosophy which attracted Malebranche and Leibniz in the west, was clearly a Daoist philosophy. Buddhism was early on banned in China as a dangerous alien influence, and when it re-emerged it was tinged with Tantric Hinduism. It came with a multitude of gods. It did not seem to be a scandal that its gods would likely have been rejected by earlier Buddhists. Hinduism has many strands and no single settled philosophical backup – something Amartya Sen has urged us to remember as conducive to democracy. Its many strands are not usually taken as mutually exclusive.

Things however are not so easy as they might look. One may be a Hindu and an Oxford professor without thinking too much about caste, but it is much more difficult in India. Muslim-Hindu relations have rarely and only locally been peaceful. Even M. M. Sharif was usually discreetly silent about Hinduism. The violence at Indian partition has rarely been matched. Setting religious fires and throwing people out of train windows are not unknown even now.

But all this, too, is for the most part driven by fear without very much actual religious underpinning. The practitioners of violence are those who want to confront evil as a thing to be stamped out and not as a lack to be
made up. These views are deeply entrenched in individual cultures in which ideas have been shaped by great evils, some recent and some too old to be identified with clarity.

The difficulty of eradicating the tendency to add to our own disasters has another set of roots, however. Religion has somehow to be made concrete for it to have a hold on most people’s imaginations. Most people think the Greek gods and their Roman successors have lost their power. Not so. It is true that I am almost alone in thinking of St. Paul’s cathedral in London as a temple of Diana which usurpers have hijacked. But in fact the old gods are not gone. They have new names as Christian saints, and, although the Vatican has done a little housecleaning, most have many of their old functions, and Catholics are not forbidden to pray to saints. The Anglican church gave up making saints for a long time but lately has created new ones although I think they are optional for believers.

Men and women still risk their lives for holy ground in Jerusalem. Some lose. People need visible concrete signs, and one person’s valid sign is another horror. Not all Hindus are joking when they say Christianity is a cannibal religion.

Mohammed seems to have tried his best to strip all the imagery, pagan culture, and implicit polytheism to the bone. But there are still holy places, and Sunnis and Shiites all too often to put bombs in places beloved by their religious factional rivals.

We have two hopes. One is education. We can create and sustain institutions which call attention to and promote the main thrusts of a common truth.

The other hope is to undermine the violence by persuading people that evil is best dealt with by making up for what is lacking – promoting genuine communities in which people care for and look after one another. The central part of this is removing the fear that generates the hate.

For this, focusing on infinity and the plurality it entails is our best hope.

NOTES

1 Marx tended to see religion as “the opium of the people” (specifically in *On Religion*, a work he wrote with Friedrich Engels [Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1957]). He also called it “the sigh of the oppressed creature”, a substitute for what capitalism denied to the workers. *The German Ideology* portrayed an idealized picture of the free man in the new society. (*The German Ideology* was written between the fall of 1845 and the middle of 1846, but it was first published in full only in 1932. It appears in the Foreign Languages Publishing House, *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Volume 5.) The perfection of human life became the goal, and when it became obvious that the ideal life would not be available to everyone for a long time, the perfect
life for the party elite came to be quietly substituted, making gods of men as had rarely been done since the Roman Empire.

2 If Freud often saw religion in the light of the infantile but endless churnings of the Id, the Ego, and the Super-Ego (personified character-forces not too far from St. Thomas's angels), it is also true that he realized it had a life of its own, as he showed in Moses and Monotheism.

3 Especially, of course, Richard Dawkins, The God Delusion (London: Bantam, 2006) and A. C. Grayling, To Set Prometheus Free (London: Oberon, 2009). Christopher Hitchens, lumped together by Terry Eagleton with Dawkins as ‘Ditches,’ also figures in this list. See God is Not Great (New York: Twelve Books, 2007). One must be careful not to confuse people who generally want to abolish religion in the name of “science” conceived in a very general way, with those who think that specific religious doctrines conflict with specific scientific theses or theories. The latter disputes sometimes involve very specific issues such as the bodily assumption of the Virgin Mary and sometimes involve questions about “miracles”. But they have little to do with the continuity of religion. More complex are rival claims to the effect that some specific branches of science, usually Neo-Darwinism, have themselves been turned into religions. See Mary Midgley, Evolution as a Religion: Strange Hopes and Stranger Fears (London & New York: Routledge, 2002).

4 See especially An Historian’s Approach to Religion (London: Oxford University Press, 1956). Toynbee had coals of fire heaped on his head for saying in A Study of History that Zoroastrianism and Judaism were “fossil” religions which had not escaped the limits of their special and restricted cultures, but he later noted that the founding of Israel had changed the prospects of Judaism.

5 “Moral science” was a Cambridge term to make philosophy seem more up to date. Radhakrishnan was a philosopher, but Oxford has always kept “philosophy” from a too-dangerous proximity to “Eastern” thought.


7 See The Religion of Tomorrow (New York: Philosophical Library; London: Frederick Muller, 1943).


10 For a careful study of Aurobindo and his relation to Teilhard, see J. Chetany, The Future of Man according to Teilhard de Chardin and Aurobindo Ghose (New Delhi: Oriental, 1978).

11 Anthony Kenny “But Julian was Good”, Times Literary Supplement, February 19, 2010 (a discussion of David Bentley Hart).


News that polygamy was not after all acceptable arrived in time to calm
down the U.S. Army, and news that black people were wholly acceptable came
in time to deflect the U. S. Attorney General.

This is actually an example of religious convergence. It was founded by
Hui Yuan (333-416), a Daoist monk who was taken by Buddhist ideas, and it
spread across China into Korea and Japan where it became known as Jodo.
There is a brief account in Geoffrey Parrinder, *Asian Religions* (London:
Sheldon, 1957).

Such people might be hard put to defend themselves, but they are in a
very old tradition. St. Paul did not expect the “risen body” to be like our present
ones. In 1 Cor. 15:42-46, Paul says what is sown as a physical body is raised as
a spiritual one. The bread and the wine are presumably transformed into the
spiritual body.

Life Chances: Approaches to Social and Political Theory (Chicago: The
University Press, 1980). Dahrendorf measured “life chances” in terms of
individuals’ abilities to realise their full potential. Our measures of human
potential of course are not very good, but we can tell the difference between
what is open to an Eton and Oxford graduate whose father owns a bank, and
what is open to a poor child, disgusted with his state school, who goes to work
at 16.

Ethical Studies, 2nd ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1927), Chapter
III: “Pleasure for Pleasure's Sake.”

Many other properties associated with the Christian God may not be
necessary for orientation. Being the creator of the world *ex nihilo* may be one.
An infinite being must have existed always – otherwise it would be limited by
a beginning – and if it is associated with goodness and it is good to have a
world, there will always have been *some* world, though not necessarily *ours.

The concept of “world” is in any case not simple. Our “worlds” cross the lines
between subjectivity and objectivity and we are part creators of our own worlds.
Is there any such thing as the *world*? The property of knowing from all eternity
what each of us will do is not essential for orientation and, indeed, creates
problems for the idea of orientation as well as for logic. The power to determine
single handed the eternal fate of other persons, minds, and intelligences is also
certain to be troublesome. Generally, “creator gods” have been outside the
various Buddhist theses as has the Hindu notion of a “destroyer” God. Whether
such a god who destroys has a place in the Judeo-Christian tradition is a subject
of argument.

The Gabriele Rabel translation of “What Does it Mean: To Orient
169 reads “As regards the degree of certainty, it is not inferior to any
knowledge.” For the German text see *Werke*, German Academy of Sciences,
Vol. VIII, pp. 127 ff.. Kant wrote this little work in 1786 between the editions of
the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In *The Critique of Practical Reason* itself, tr.
Lewis White Beck (New York; Liberal Arts Press, 1956), Kant seems to go
further still. On p. 126 he says “in the combination of pure speculative with
pure practical reason in one cognition, the latter has primacy...”


At least in the *Proslogion* Anselm insists that we can conceive of God, and his argument hinges on the claim that something exists whether it is only “*in intellectu*” or also “*in res*”. He did not mean an idea in the sense usually ascribed to Descartes and Locke, an entity found “in the mind” and somewhat like the “phantasms” spoken of by mediaeval philosophers, or the large pink talking rabbits said to be seen by children at Easter and by drunks at less propitious times. He thought the idea was *in intellectu* and the intellect was itself an entity to which many people might have access. But not all Platonic entities are “actualized”. What is “*in intellectu*” is evidently, however, in some sense an idea. There is an extended discussion of his terminology in Jasper Hopkins’ *Companion to the Study of St. Anselm* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), Chapter III.

John Leslie has explored these questions at length. See his *Infinite Minds* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001) and my discussion: “Infinite Minds, Determinism and Evil,” *Laval Théologique et Philosophique*, vol. 58, no. 3 (octobre 2002), pp. 597-603.


London: W. Rogers, over against St. Dunstan’s Church in Fleet Street, 1691, second edition, 1694.

Locke also thought we knew ourselves directly in consciousness and others through their bodies.

Someone who annotated British Library copy C.16.f.1 objected to Sherlock’s account of transubstantiation and of its impossibility. On p.4 of the text, the annotator said that transubstantiation was certainly not the worst account of the matter. Coleridge’s editors think these are Coleridge’s notes, but the two involved here are in pencil unlike the other annotations and were surely written at a different time. The handwriting looks slightly different. They are somewhat odd if they are Coleridge’s. Coleridge was no friend of transubstantiation.

The Quaker William Penn was one of those known to be clearly hell-bound, but he had committed the additional sin of having Muggleton arrested. Muggleton wanted nothing of souls and the non-bodily after-life which preoccupied Sherlock. In the *Transcendent Spiritual Treatise Upon Several Heavenly Doctrines* (written with John Reeves), he insisted that soul and body are all of the same stuff (p. 41). Muggleton, who was born in 1609, lived on to 1698 through Sherlock’s controversies. In the same neighbourhood, ranging from near the Petticoat Lane market up into Clerkenwell, the radical antinomian Laurence Clarkson or Claxton (1615-1667) who sometimes denied the
possibility of sin, had plied his trade, sometimes in opposition to, sometimes in
league with, Muggleton and Reeves.

30 Sherlock, Divine Providence, p. 51.
31 Sherlock, Divine Providence, p. 53.
32 Hereafter Muslim Thought (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1951).
33 Sharif, Muslim Thought, p. 10.
34 Sharif, Muslim Thought, p. 9. Islamic democracy is not a notion that we
hear much about. The belief that Islam and human rights do not mix well has
much to do with the legal system of the Sharia – not itself, of course, a part of
the Qur'an – and above all with the treatment of women. William R. Polk, a
distinguished American Arabist, has noted, however, that when the Arab
Muslims arrived in Baghdad they did not originally insist that women cover
their heads nor, indeed, generally sequester women. The wealthy Persians did
cover and sequester their women, and Arabs seeking to emulate them took up
the practice. In Iraq it never really caught on fully, however, and women
participated in all walks of life up to the time of Saddam Hussein. It is only now
when the prospect of a Shiite hegemony over the country looms darkly that the
position of women is deteriorating. See William R. Polk, Understanding Iraq
Tauris edition.
of it is translated in F. Rahman's Avicenna's Psychology (London: Oxford
University Press, 1952). This consists of Book II, Chapter VI of the Kitab al-
Najat. The most relevant portion for this discussion is pp. 56-62.
36 al-Ghazali mentions it in his Tahafut al Falasifah ("The Incoherence of
the Philosophers") tr. Sabi Ahmad Kamali (Lahore: Pakistan Philosophical
Congress, 1958), p. 22. In this passage al-Ghazali says that the number of
departed souls is neither odd nor even and is infinite. This position he says was
held by Ibn Sina and may have been held by Aristotle. He does not here seek to
refute it. He discusses it again on p. 95, presenting it as a difficulty. Here he
denies that there can be “spherical revolutions which are infinite in number”
though he does not pronounce upon the soul as conceived by Ibn Sina.
Maimonides raises the same issue in the Guide to the Perplexed, 1.74, 7th
argument. (In the translation of the Guide by M. Friedlander [London: Trubner,
1885], vol. I, p. 352.) Thomas Aquinas remarks on it in the Summa Theologica
(Part I Question 46, article 2, objection 8 & reply). Aquinas is uncertain about
Ibn Sina's argument, but insists that we know by revelation that the world has a
beginning. He says he will say more in Part I Question 75 article 6, and
Question 76 article 2, and Question 118 article 6. In Question 75 article 6, he
agrees that the human soul is incorruptible and, generally, of course, he agrees
with Ibn Sina that the intellect is individuated and retains many of its properties
after death. The world that revelation shows to have a beginning is our world,
and since Aquinas's God is also infinite he may have created other worlds, a
doctrine that landed Aquinas's co-religionist Giordano Bruno in trouble. See
also Richard Sorabji, Time, Creation & the Continuum (London: Duckworth,
The original manuscript is bound with a collection of “Scientific Treatises in Arabic,” originally numbered when Pines saw it as “British Museum Add. Or. 7473.” It is now stored in the Oriental Office collection of the British Library where it still bears the number Add. 7473 and is found in the Oriental Manuscripts catalogue. The summary is in Collected Works of Shlomo Pines, Vol. II (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, and Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), pp. 321-326. Pines is referred to by Sari Nusseibeh as a great scholar whom he much admires. Evidently such ideas have actually played a role in bringing Arabs and Jews together.

The British Library copy is part of a collection of 52 treatises of Ibn Sina in Arabic and Persian, Add. Ms. 16659. Unlike the ms. referred to by Pines (above), this one is part of the main British Library collection.


Official statement as President of the Christian Association of Nigeria, February 21, 2006. This statement was followed by an upsurge of violence, yet the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, originally suggested he didn’t really mean to encourage violence. On October 7, 2007, through the Archbishop's official spokesman, Canon James M. Rosenthal at the Anglican Communion Office in London, Dr. Williams issued a statement about another of Peter Akinola’s remarks, saying that the church is deeply concerned about the safety of gay and lesbian people. There is no move to remove Akinola from office. All this must cast doubt on my implied suggestion that Anglicanism was civilized by the seventeenth century philosopher-theologians. The explanation is complex. The missionaries who went to Africa tended to be firm believers from the evangelical wing of the church. There were many exceptions including Francis Newman, the brother of John Henry (who eventually left the church by the opposite door to that chosen by his brother), a host of medical missionaries, and others who hoped to turn the colonial experiment to good. But the trend was fundamentalist. It is also true that the missionaries didn’t come to preach Oxbridge theology but to impart simple Gospel truths to people imagined, wrongly, to be quite simple. The Church sowed the wind and now reaps the whirlwind.

University College, London, and chairman of the British Institute for the Study of Iraq, confirms the veracity of these reports.

44 *Two Treatises of Government* (London: Awnsham Churchill, 1690), Second Treatise, Chapter V, Section 33, p. 251. The surrounding Sections 32-35 provide the context for this remark.

45 Neo-Confucianism is, of course, a philosophical development and dates from our eleventh century.

There are ostensibly only two ways – both deeply contested – by which human beings can stake a reasonably strong claim to having a unique status in the world – a status almost in the nature of an all-encompassing endowment conferring upon them all those matters which normally go under the name of rights or privileges. One is God – that is, to say that human beings enjoy the special status they claim to enjoy by virtue of being God’s special creatures. This claim, needless to say, rests on at least two separate assumptions, one being that God exists and the other that He in fact has singled out human beings for being endowed with that special status. The other way – besides God, that is – to claim uniqueness is to appeal to an absolute or universal value or set of values, uniquely or primarily ascribable to human beings simply by virtue of their being human, such as natural rights, or human rights, or some moral principle from which the supposedly special human endowments proceed – endowments such as the right to life, or to freedom, or to education, or suchlike.

Typically – or, more concisely, historically – the appeal to God has taken religious forms. In other words, it is through God’s Word, prophets, messengers, and their interpreters and spokesmen, that human beings have displayed or claimed to possess their special status in the world. In the monotheistic tradition, this display or claim evolved in stages, divine grace first being claimed for one ethnic tribe or blood-line, but eventually gaining wider applicability through the further messages contained in the successive “revelations” associated with the later religions of Christianity and Islam. Thus in theory, at least, God’s grace comes eventually to be extended as to cover the entire human race. I say “in theory” because those different religions have come to be so construed as to make that grace conditional upon the fulfillment of a variety of requirements other than that of simply being human; and also because those additional requirements have often been a cause for bloody and cruel conflict between human beings – even within the supposedly same religions – rather than being a common and unifying divine denominator.

The appeal to a source outside of religion for a special human status has also and over time come under sustained criticism, the argument for which for our present purposes can perhaps be subsumed under the general heading of there being no evidence whatsoever to support the claim for the independent existence of absolute values or moral principles or truths, akin to the truths supposed to exist of mathematics or the natural sciences. Few
have questioned the basis of this supposed solidity of scientific principles and truths, and the derivative wishy-washiness of the moral principles and judgements consequent upon it. But some philosophers of real consequence have indeed done so – and I am thinking particularly here of the late W.V.O. Quine, to whose image of the various “truths” in the sciences and the moral spheres I shall return. Even so, the dominant intellectual fashion has been to continue to hold onto this generic distinction between two kinds of basic truths or principles, a fact which has encouraged (or driven) more and more moral philosophers to adopt one or another version of moral positivism, where values are construed in consequentialist terms of one kind or another; but where, significantly and unfortunately also, such positivism has invariably and almost automatically been construed in relativist or culture-specific terms, creating the sense that in this world, each culture is unto its own, and the best that the best of us can do is to keep the peace with or among those cultures whose values approximate most to our own. Here, the prominent philosopher who most comes to mind as a protagonist of such a thesis is that other Harvardian giant, the late John Rawls.

A historical middle course – for some time now quite discredited – steering between religionists and relativists has been what we can perhaps describe as the approach of the metaphysical philosophers. By these I mean such disparate thinkers as quite apart from each other as Aristotle or Plato, Avicenna or Alfarabi, and Spinoza or Leibniz, not to forget Kant with his special dint for our purposes on human dignity as an un-exchangeable and therefore intrinsic human value, to give but some examples. In many ways, these metaphysicians, more than anyone else, can be credited with having consistently held up the torch of a universal humanism, admittedly as an inseparable part of their metaphysical systems, systems in which a variantly defined God or Metaphysical Source is the centerpiece, but in which as a consequence a special status is accorded to human beings on account simply of their being human beings, and not as followers of a particular religion or creed or ethnic group. And even were one to be reminded that many of these metaphysicians, especially the early ones – and contrary to how their philosophical languages were articulated – did not see the privileged class of human beings as extending beyond the circles of their immediate cities or national groups, exactly in an analogous manner to how some of the monotheistic prophets carried out their discourse, yet it could be retorted that these parochial idiosyncrasies of the metaphysicians were hardly or never a cause for bloody conflicts among their followers on that account, as the case has been, and continues to threaten to be, among the followers of the monotheistic religions. Indeed, quite the contrary, it is in the writings of these metaphysicians, more than anywhere else, that we can hope to find a lasting common language in which human beings are accorded a special status, celebrating them for being endowed with special values not dependent on race, color, religions, gender, economic class, or contingent social status. It is, in other words, in the language of these metaphysicians, rather than in the languages of religionists or relativists, that we can hope to
find a solid basis for human harmony instead of the seeds, intentional or otherwise, of discord.

I have chosen as examples of my metaphysicians men belonging to different races, religions, cultures and times. Yet they shared between them, if we abstract from such contingent matters as their tastes, attires, social habits, languages, cultures, and religious beliefs, a deep respect for a fairly common conception of what being a human being is all about. I might well have drawn on another, not dissimilar list of universalist metaphysicians cited by the Renaissance religious philosopher, Pico della Mirandola, in his famous *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, whose analogous gallery of famous men highlights sources picked significantly indiscriminately from Chaldean, Hebrew, Greek, Arab, as well as Latin cultures and times. Indeed, some of these – such as the Andalusian Ibn Bajjah or Avempace – even believed that, at some ontic level or another, not only did all of these intellectual giants share a timeless virtual community with one another apart from the spatio-temporal locales defined by their material existences, but that, incredibly, they even shared a common identity, a cerebral oneness, having conjoined themselves through their intellectual and moral efforts to an ever-existing Active Intellect!

What I would like to highlight here is not so much what must sound to the modern ear like a weird metaphysical system, as what the implications are on how, informed by such systems, human beings have been viewed in spite of what must have been even more seriously varied cultural perspectives than exist now. Highlighting these implications might well encourage us once again to pursue this genre of philosophy, and thus to contribute to our being able to fashion the best possible status for human beings in a future world. If religions and religious philosophers conditioned the conception of the highly-prized human being on the fulfilment of certain requirements, such as the adherence to a set of beliefs and acts; and if relativist moral philosophers sought to define that uniqueness through strictly subjectivist, and eventually culture-specific means, our metaphysicians defined the respect due to human beings simply in terms of their being human. It is not in these humanist systems, or from them, then, that a justification or a rationalization can be found – like it can from the other world-views I mentioned – for so-called cultural or civilizational clashes. Quite the opposite. It is only in or from such perspectives that a universal philosophy of peace and of justice, can emerge, extending its moral principles across humanity. I assure you, speaking now as a non-Jew living in what I consider home, and in a threateningly turbulent political environment, that I have become extremely sensitized to the urgent human need, and the redemptive value, for uncovering within ourselves, beneath our religious or ethnic specificities, our common identity as human beings, in the pursuit of such peace and justice.

But how, it can be asked, should one be able to reconcile between such a philosophy of “emergence,” according to which, in some manner, we would have to allow the human condition to become transformed by human
acts, with a philosophy of transfixed values and absolute moral truths, which one must presume to be presupposed by a metaphysical system in which the special status of a human being is already a priori defined and assured? We can look for one answer in Pico’s Oration: a human being’s very essence, for which he is exalted above and apart from all other beings, is precisely his possession of that rational will through which, like a chameleon, he can change, and through which, by changing, he can change the world. Therein lies the secret of human dignity.

But doesn’t such a view, again one might ask, not make the metaphysician a positivist of sorts, in whose view moral truths come to be imprinted on the world by act of will, rather than be discovered? The answer, of course, is yes, but then such a positivism needn’t mean that ultimate moral truths or principles will be as proliferate as there are different cultures, or will be as divergent and conflictual. Here I would like to invoke the sphere image of our “body of knowledge” that Quine uses to explain his own theory of the “truths” we take the world to be made up of. Think of these “truths” as pieces or blocks from which the sphere is made up, he tells us. None of them is intrinsically sacrosanct, and each of them can in theory be changed or be different. At the center, lie all those basic logico-mathematical principles on which all of our other knowledge-claims are based. Moving outwards, we encounter what we consider to be our indubitable truths of basic science. At the outer edges we encounter those belief and observation statements whose validity we are generally prepared to regard as being less solid or permanent or established. Were we to consider or to decide to change or to replace one of those truth-items lying at the center of the sphere, we could in theory do so, but we would then be compelled to make a readjustment to almost all of the other pieces, by way of seeking to make the sphere “whole” again, so to speak. The extent of adjustment to our body of knowledge which would be needed as a result of instituting any change to any one item of knowledge or “truth” will decrease the closer we get to the periphery of the sphere, and indeed, many of these peripheral truths are by their nature time-sensitive.

Quine’s general point, expressed as a scientist, is that we should be constantly ready to modify our theories as we try to account for our observations, but that we should also be aware that our theories could, on the whole and consistently with our observations, be entirely different from what they are, so long as their separate pieces cohered with one another, while at the same time accounting for all those observations. There are two lessons I would like to draw from this account of Quine, one being the empiricist quest for a general theory, and the other being the ultimately foundational, but never independently objective status of the logico-mathematical truths lying at the center of the sphere.

A moralist being challenged with the moral/mathematical truths distinction mentioned earlier can draw comfort from the second lesson: even the very principles of logic can be argued to be posits rather than independent facts. But such a moralist can also draw inspiration from the
first, or empirical lesson of the positivist scientist: if the empiricist’s quest, through scientific observation, is to develop a coherent and complete body of knowledge with which to understand the natural world and to manipulate it to man’s advantage, cannot the moralist quest, analogously, through human interaction, be to construct a similarly coherent and complete moral system with which to advance Man’s human condition? Assuming that Man’s scientific quest, right from its amebic origins, in spite of its instantiation in its various sequential and haphazard forms, whether in proximate or in disconnected geographic locations and times, converges through observation on weaving this so-called body of knowledge around some basic denominator of thought, cannot we also imagine an analogous quest on the moral plane, weaving through experience a body of values ultimately centered around some basic denominator-informing action? Or are we condemned to believe that human groups are so (morally, if not naturally) different from one another as to have or to be predisposed to construct entirely different ultimate moral values that are never likely to converge? And are indeed, likely to lead them to conflict instead?

This latter viewpoint indeed has many adherents. Translated into the world of political reality, it helps accept and rationalize gaping disparities in the distribution of wealth and resources between nations as earlier theories rationalized their existence between classes, sects, or ethnic groups in the same society. And yet it is perfectly sensible to submit, contrary to such a viewpoint, that enriched rather than dispersed by the different experiences different peoples around the world have had, a historical process of moral weaving has indeed been in the making, where various moral judgments and value statements have through time and tests either been adopted or discarded, with some coming to be regarded as being more central or basic than others, but all always yet being subject to readjustment in accordance with actual experience. One could cite the convergence on drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments as recent examples of this slow process of convergence. How such a proposal would differ from that of the relativist would simply be in this quest being a reflection of an all-encompassing human experience rather than being confined to one social group or line of history; and how it would differ from the religionists would simply be in the quest itself being the distinctive or dignifying mark of humanity.
CHAPTER X

AUTHENTICITY AND COMMUNITY:
AN INQUIRY CONCERNING
THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIANITY

WALTER J. SCHULTZ

Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands.
– Charles Taylor, The Ethics of Authenticity

More than half way through A Secular Age, his monumental historical analysis of secularism and prospectus for spirituality in the 21st century, Charles Taylor introduces “minimal religion,” a concept developed by Mikhaïl Epstein during the final years of the Soviet Union. Simply stated, Epstein suggests that, in a “post-atheist” Russia, a new form of spirituality will emerge, one that is local, centered in the family and small community, and decidedly less concerned with the institutionalized authority and doctrine that previously defined the traditional faiths. Taylor raises the possibility that a similar transformation of spirituality may occur in a “post-secular” Europe. In both cases, Soviet atheism and European secularism, the eclipse of overt spirituality may have prepared a shift away from the eradication and dismissal of religiosity toward a new wave of spirituality.¹

Jacques Maritain, the public voice of Thomism in Europe and America throughout much of the 20th century, suggested before the Second World War the import of what was perceived by Epstein and Taylor only after the collapse of the Stalinist era in the Soviet Union. In his Integral Humanism: Temporal and Spiritual Problems of a New Christendom, Maritain observes that the travail of Christianity in Russia during the Soviet era may not, as some have suggested, produce a new Christendom, but that [w]hat one can, however, think with more probability is that unexpected possibilities of expansion and of heroic spiritual struggle will open there for a Christian renaissance – conscious of its human and divine integralism – if it has representatives sufficiently enlightened, and free of everything except God.²

Such a “Christian renaissance” would not entail the re-organization of Christendom within a new institutional framework; but, “conscious of its human and divine integralism,” it would thrive only through representatives “sufficiently enlightened” and “free of everything except God.” Not only is there agreement in acclaiming the Soviet experience as the point d’appui of
a Christian renaissance (in the sense that it serves as the paradigm for what Epstein detects as apophatic and unconscious spirituality simmering within the secular), but it appears that Maritain, Epstein, and Taylor may share some common ground concerning what Epstein conceptualizes as “minimal religion.” Certainly this is not to minimize the vast complexity of Christian formation throughout the centuries and in our own global age, a vast array of opportunities and possible directions so ably documented and analyzed in the works of Philip Jenkins. What is significant here is the convergence of three prominent thinkers who are concerned with the return of the sacred in our time. Maritain’s social and political philosophy, with its talk of “human” as well as “divine integralism” in those “sufficiently enlightened,” delivers a prescription for a new era or age, anticipating Taylor’s formulation of “the age of authenticity” and his extension of Epstein’s “minimal religion” in a “post-atheist” Russia to include European civilization in the aftermath of secularism.

If nothing else, this paper should indicate the urgent need to clarify and contextualize authenticity and community within the evolving matrix of Christianity. Undoubtedly this matrix remains a vast panorama of possibilities. However, it seems certain that unless one wishes to return to a religious conservatism that denies the social and political gains of the European Enlightenment, along with denying the intuitive distrust of totalitarian structures operative within postmodern criticism and deconstruction, people of faith must grow to accommodate pluralism, democracy, and freedom of conscience. The dark progeny of the European Enlightenment, militant atheism and secularism, may be on the wane as Maritain, Epstein, and Taylor suggest. Furthermore, as Epstein suggests, we may be entering a “post-postmodern” epoch, transcending the avoidance of every unity as implied within “classic” postmodernism. However, if we acknowledge what is progressive in the Enlightenment’s respect for the rights of the individual and what is sound in the postmodern chastisement of totalitarianism, the preservation of the individual person’s integrity within an effective community of faith will become a fundamental task engaging the future of Christianity. It seems unlikely that various conservative, liberal and even radical denominational efforts throughout the Americas, Africa, and Asia, can bypass or in some way transcend this challenge arising from the European experience. The question of authenticity and community is simply crucial for the Christian’s self-understanding and comprehension of his or her place in the Church and in the world. The European experience, or more generally the Western experience throughout the sphere of Europe’s influence (and European thought and culture has tentacles which encircle the globe), has now brought this question to the forefront. After delineating Taylor’s definition and consideration of secularism in relation to his formulation of “the age of authenticity,” in conjunction with Maritain’s appreciation and criticism of the European Enlightenment and Romantic Movement, Epstein’s “minimal religion” will be examined in relation to Maritain’s exploration of the invisible presence of the visible Church and
his understanding of nature and grace as a prelude to a discussion of the future of Christianity.

SECULARISM AND “THE AGE OF AUTHENTICITY”

Maritain and Taylor have much in common when it comes to locating secularism within the context of a search for authenticity. Both thinkers perceive the modern concern for authenticity as emerging from the European Enlightenment and Romantic Movement, presenting modernity with the dual nodes of individualism and totalitarian unity. Both eschew the atomism and instrumental rationalism arising in part from the disengaged rationalism of Descartes as leading to the modern obsession with technology and the proliferation of material goods and cures. Both acknowledge that the notion of freedom as self-determination, exemplified in a thinker like Rousseau upshers in a totalitarian vision beginning with the Jacobins and working its way into the thought of Hegel and Marx. Maritain and Taylor wish to avoid totalitarian unity while seeking community through a unity that escapes atomism and instrumentalism. Neither Maritain nor Taylor deny what is positive in the search for authenticity, and both thinkers treat this search as fundamental to the historical matrix in which we are called to be. Finally, both perceive modern atomism, instrumental rationalism, militant atheism, and secularism as enshrouded in a denial of what is spiritual and fundamentally rational. It remains to delineate these parallels and summarize.

The implications of what Taylor encapsulates as “instrumental reason,” and traces back to the “disengaged rationality” of Descartes, were already evident in the work of Maritain. In the especially lucid achievement of the published version of his Massey Lectures in 1991, Taylor notes: “By ‘instrumental reason’ I mean the kind of rationality we draw on when we calculate the most economical application of means to a given end.” According to Taylor, the modern preoccupation with “instrumental reason” emerges from what he calls “the individualism of disengaged rationality, pioneered by Descartes, where the demand is that each person think self-responsibly.” Already in the 1920’s, Maritain observed how Cartesian rationalism, severed from relational reality or “disengaged,” paves the way for voluntarism and the triumph of the will through the “instrumental reason” of modern technology:

An appropriate technique should permit us to rationalize human life, i.e., to satisfy our desires with the least possible inconvenience, without any interior reform of ourselves. What such a morality subjects to reason are material forces and agents exterior to man, instruments of human life; it is not man, nor human life as such. It does not free man, it weakens him, it disarms him, it renders him a slave to all the atoms of the universe, and especially to his own misery and egoism.
What remains of man? A consumer crowned by science. This is the final gift, the twentieth century gift of the Cartesian reform.8

Disengaged and given to the individual will, reason becomes instrumental in the laissez faire jungle of classical liberalism, where the search for authenticity remains a private concern, while at the same time reason becomes instrumental in organizing the Romantic yearning for a common freedom, where the search for authenticity involves the general will and totalitarian unity. Concerning our age of authenticity, Taylor informs us that

Self-determining freedom has been an idea of immense power in our political life. In Rousseau’s work it takes political form, in the notion of a social contract state founded on a general will, which precisely because it is the form of our common freedom can brook no opposition in the name of freedom. This idea has been one of the intellectual sources of modern totalitarianism, starting, one might argue, with the Jacobins. And although Kant interpreted this notion of freedom in purely moral terms, as autonomy, it returns to the political sphere with a vengeance with Hegel and Marx.9

And in much of his writing throughout his long career, Maritain expresses similar concerns in regard to Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Marx.10 For Maritain as well as for Taylor, “self-determining freedom” and thinking “self-responsibly” helped foster the liberal secularism of the West and the militant atheism of the totalitarian Soviet system.

In *A Secular Age*, Taylor observes, through his treatment of what he designates “the age of mobilization,” how during the two centuries following the close of the eighteenth century the masses throughout the West, especially in Britain and France, adopted the secularism professed by the “enlightened” intelligentsia. According to Taylor, “we could zero in on the following proposition as the heart of ‘secularization’: modernity has led to a decline in the transformation perspective.”11 Secularism represents one pronounced orientation in Western civilization, an orientation defined as against the “transformation perspective” of the saints:

There seem to be two very different stances in our civilization, which one can describe both as tempers and as outlooks. What does one think of St. Francis of Assisi, with his renunciation of his potential life as a merchant, his austerities, his stigmata? One can be deeply moved by his call to go beyond flourishing, and then one is tempted by the transformation perspective, or one can see him as a paradigm exemplar of what Hume calls
‘the monkish virtues’, a practitioner of senseless self-denial and a threat to civil mutuality.\textsuperscript{12}

For Taylor, the “transformation perspective” involves the unconditional love that transcends flourishing and the reciprocity of mutuality,\textsuperscript{13} and here he reiterates what Maritain asserted in the 1920’s, that two ways of human mastery have emerged. According to Maritain, one way of looking at human mastery is through instrumental rationalism and the Cartesian legacy of “consumerism crowned by science” already noted above. Concerning the alternative, Maritain states:

\begin{quote}
Man can become master of his nature by imposing the law of reason – of reason aided by grace – on the universe of his own inner energies. That work, which in itself is a construction in love, requires that our branches be pruned to bear fruit: a process called \textit{mortification}. Such a morality is an ascetic morality.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

Furthermore, and again as if anticipating Taylor’s analysis, without disparaging technical advance in itself Maritain asserts that “if mechanics and technique are not mastered, subjected by force to the good of man, that is to say entirely and rigorously subordinated to religious ethics and made instruments of an ascetic morality, humanity is literally lost.”\textsuperscript{15} The refusal of inner transformation through “reason aided by grace,” and the pursuit of what Taylor calls “flourishing” and “civil mutuality” in the \textit{eclipse} of such transformation reveals the heart of modern secularism. Here it is a question of establishing the priority of the spiritual. “Technique” and “flourishing” may comprise a proper endeavor when rooted in Judeo-Christian promise. Taylor detects Christian leaven in the modern concern for “ordinary life” and the virtue of “benevolence,” and Maritain insists that material standards are required for human expansion.\textsuperscript{16} Instead of protesting “flourishing,” it might be best to consider both thinkers protesting “entanglement” in the world instead; i.e., the world in so far as it incubates egocentrism and materialism, excluding transcendence, transformation and the unconditional.

Taylor points to a kind of “benevolence,” which is to be understood as a warping and misplacement of the virtue in the cultural milieu Maritain often denigrates as “bourgeois democracy,” “bourgeois liberalism,” or simply “bourgeois individualism.”\textsuperscript{17} For Taylor, in such a milieu “benevolence” becomes the cement of enlightened self-interest in the entrepreneurial matrix of modern liberal society.\textsuperscript{18} For Maritain, echoing Nietzsche, “bourgeois liberalism” extols the self-seeking comfort of the “last men,” given to cleanliness, order and the polite smile. In \textit{The Person and the Common Good}, Maritain distinguishes three forms of materialism plaguing modernity: “bourgeois individualism, communist anti-individualism, and totalitarian or dictatorial anti-communism and anti-individualism.”\textsuperscript{19} Maritain unabashedly states in a vitriolic passage:
Of the three, the most irreligious is bourgeois liberalism. Christian in appearance, it has been atheistic in fact. Too skeptical to persecute, except for a tangible profit, rather than defy religion, which it deemed an invention of the priesthood and gradually dispossessed by reason, it used it as a police force to watch over property, or as a bank where anyone could be insured while making money here below, against the undiscovered risks of the hereafter – after all, one never knows.

Likewise, Taylor notes how the cultivation of order and discipline can be attributed to what is for Maritain “Christian in appearance.” Throughout the age of mobilization, stemming from the European Enlightenment and collapsing with the onslaught of authenticity in the 1960’s, discipline became the hallmark of civilization. For Taylor, as the masses adopted the secularism of the “enlightened intelligentsia” during this period, they also adopted the prior clerical concern with authority and discipline. There is much ambivalence here. It seems that we have people of faith, atheistic materialists, and those straddling between the two caught up in a civilization given to the use of religion “as a police force to watch over property, or as a bank where anyone could be insured while making money here below, against the undiscovered risks of the hereafter.” Of course, the “transformation principle” was never entirely abandoned. Believers like Maritain and Taylor perceive the operation of grace in every age. In A Secular Age, Taylor directly challenges the secularization hypothesis that would confine all expressions of religiosity in modernity to the all too human contrivance of “last men.” Nevertheless, the “benevolence” of “bourgeois liberalism,” with its promotion of “self-determining freedom” and thinking “self-responsibly” identifies a prevalent modern preoccupation with self-achievement within a safe, antiseptic humanitas.

Instrumental reason disengaged and in the service of “enlightened” individual self-interest, enhances the drive to conformity and regimentation in the name of freedom, giving rise to “bourgeois” culture and culminating in the various structures of totalitarian unity. Taylor argues that emerging as a counter-cultural movement along with the rise of “bourgeois” culture came a culture of authenticity, by which he means the understanding of life which emerges with the Romantic expressivism of the late-eighteenth century, that each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and to live out one’s own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority.
Present throughout the Romantic Movement, and coming to fruition with the onset of a new era in the 1960’s, such authenticity comes to require the postmodern disavowal of every unity noted by Epstein. Perhaps betraying an earlier generational bias, Maritain does not direct us to the 1960’s as a pivotal moment in the transition from one epoch to another. In the 1970’s Maritain did applaud the “hippies” for their distain of bourgeois culture. He even shared the enthusiasm of Thomas Merton’s conviction that Bob Dylan was a Hebrew Prophet. However, Maritain also chastised the burgeoning youth movement of the 1960’s for remaining entrapped within the self-seeking material web they claimed to detest. What is significant is that Taylor and Maritain perceive in the search for authenticity, present throughout modernity itself, the manifestation in our time of a profound human longing for personal integrity and spirituality often misdirected and eventually derailed by “self-determining freedom,” and thinking “self-responsibly.”

For Maritain, secularism like scientism must be overcome. However, the secular in itself, like science in itself, designates a natural aspiration whose time has come. The advance of technology and the pursuit of temporal goals have proper roles clearly acknowledged in our time; they are no longer “instrumental” in regard to religion, and yet remain subordinate to the transformation perspective. This has already been made clear in regard to technology, and concerning the secular or temporal order in general, Maritain observes:

The temporal order would be subordinate to the spiritual, no longer, of course, as an instrumental agent, as was so often the case in the Middle Ages, but as a less elevated principal agent; and above all, the earthly common good would no longer be taken as a mere means in relation to eternal life, but as what it essentially is in this regard, namely, as an intermediary or infravalent end.

Maritain establishes the problem of modernity within the context of anthropocentric humanism, anticipating what Taylor often refers to as “exclusive humanism,” advocating instead a form of theocentric humanism that allows for Taylor’s “transformation perspective” or his own “ascetic morality.” Here Taylor would agree with Maritain through his own advocacy of transcendence and theism as a way out of the exclusively human impasse. Of course, the anthropocentric humanism that Maritain criticizes is the essence of Taylor’s definition of secularism. For Maritain, the secular in itself, distinguished from secularism, entails the democratic evolution toward the flowering of human rights that indicates proper growth in the temporal or secular order, inspired in the West by the Christian Gospel and aided by grace. Surely Maritain’s understanding of democratic maturity and personal integrity encompasses Taylor’s notion of authenticity when it maintains, “that each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our
humanity, and that it is important to find and to live out one’s own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority.” When merely anthropocentric, such romanticism ushers us toward the abyss; however, this need not be the case. We thus arrive at Maritain’s dictum for living Christianity in a secular age and the age of authenticity, what he calls the concrete historical ideal of a new orientation for Christianity: “the holy freedom of the creature whom grace unites to God.”\textsuperscript{25} Maritain, although acknowledging the validity of the prior concern of Christendom with the ideal of Holy Empire, chastises its pursuit in the current historical milieu – e.g., Franco’s Spain – as decidedly totalitarian and antithetical to human growth.\textsuperscript{26} This is a sentiment echoed in Taylor’s analysis of Christian movements fraternizing with the swing to the right in mid-twentieth century Europe.\textsuperscript{27} Of course, for Taylor and Maritain, such “holy freedom” is neither the anarchic derailment fostered by self-authenticating individualism nor the totalitarian unity of a “liberated” collective.

What is crucial here is that for Taylor and Maritain, good will and rationality must be acknowledged in the public forum if there is to be any agreement or advance beyond the dual advance of atomism and totalitarianism; good will involves love and civic friendship in place of bourgeois “benevolence,” and common reason replaces the instrumental reason of technique in service of self-aggrandizement. Maritain’s “holy freedom” is a rational freedom responsible to community. In \textit{The Ethics of Authenticity}, Taylor draws the attention of would-be subjectivists and relativists to certain “inescapable horizons” that determine meaning and significance through rational dialogue. Taylor states: “Things take on importance against a background of intelligibility. Let us call this a horizon. It follows that one of the things we can’t do, if we are to define ourselves significantly, is suppress or deny the horizons against which things take on significance for us.”\textsuperscript{28} This “background intelligibility” or “horizon” is the common rational legacy that allows us to be authentic. As Taylor would have it,

\begin{quote}
I can define my identity only against the background of things that matter. But to bracket out history, nature, society, the demands of solidarity, everything but what I find in myself, would be to eliminate all candidates for what matters. Only if I exist in a world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order matters crucially, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial. Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}
Certainly Maritain the Thomist would agree with Taylor here. And it is Maritain who speaks of love and civic friendship as the cement that binds those of good will in a secular age, the age of authenticity where “holy freedom” is the Christian ideal. In a famous passage from *Man and the State*, Maritain goes so far as to speak of a common “secular faith” behind the struggle toward true democracy:

> men possessing quite different, even opposite metaphysical or religious outlooks, can converge, not by virtue of any identity of doctrine, but by virtue of an analogical similitude in practical principles, toward the same practical conclusions, and can share in the same practical secular faith, provided that they similarly revere, perhaps for quite diverse reasons, truth and intelligence, human dignity, freedom, brotherly love, and the absolute value of moral good.\(^\text{30}\)

Taylor acknowledges Maritain’s contribution here and, introducing John Rawls’ notion of an “overlapping consensus” argues for what might be called a convergence of authenticity in practical affairs as well.\(^\text{31}\)

What emerges from the parallels between Taylor and Maritain, and the complementing and augmenting of each other where they differ or speak alone, is the picture of a secular age which need not be secularist. and a search for authenticity with the potential to escape the abject materialism and slavery to the self and instrumental reason that defines much of modernity. Spirituality remains an inescapable feature of human nature. Persons in communication and communion define our authenticity and enshrine it as the common good in a truly pluralist and democratic society. Maritain asserts that Christian inspiration is behind this potential and that it indicates human maturity. But when “holy freedom” is said to define the ideal of a new Christian civilization, we must ask how what is specifically Christian remains. Are we entering the age of Christianity without religion developed by “death of God” theologians like Thomas Altizer and William Hamilton? Are we entertaining the secular city which fascinated a youthful Harvey Cox? Must not Christianity continue to be equated with the *ecclesia* sustained by a specific creed and harmony of worship linking it to what transcends the mundane and defines it precisely as a religion?

**EPSTEIN, MARITAIN AND “MINIMAL RELIGION”**

Mikhail Epstein assures us that what he proposes is in opposition to any theology that remains a “link in the chain of secularization.” According to Epstein, the apophatic and unconscious spirituality of a secular age, in the extreme form of secularism that became the militant atheism of the Soviet experience, has broken through to resurrection and religious revival. Epstein states:
the Protestant theology of the ‘death of God’ (Thomas Altizer, William Hamilton and their precursor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer) reflects the secularization of a faith that has to survive in ‘a world without God.’ What I call ‘minimal religion,’ by contrast, has already crossed this border: it is not the last link in the chain of secularization but, perhaps, the beginning of a new cycle of religious history. God, who is already dead, is being resurrected in the very country that was the first to crucify Him most relentlessly. A new and potentially powerful faith is in statu nascendi, whose prerequisite and fountainhead was the unique historical phenomenon of mass atheism.32

Epstein is clear that this new faith now being born envisages a new theology, and that this theology

is a theology of resurrection, of the new life of God beyond the confines of the Church, which has His historical body. The theology of resurrection is not the same as the traditional theology of the life of God in the historical church. Nor is it the same as the radical theology of the death of God in an atheist or agnostic world.33

Maritain’s exploration of the invisible presence of the visible Church, along with his approach to nature and grace, may shed some light on the emergent “resurrection” Epstein is addressing. Writing after the Second Vatican Council, in On the Church of Christ: The Person of the Church and Her Personnel, Maritain clearly states that firmly committed members of non-Christian religions and even professed atheists may be included within the Church.34 In a remarkable paragraph, Maritain summarizes his bottom line for membership in the Church of Christ:

It is an absolutely fundamental and universal element of Church which we must discover. Where to seek it? In my opinion, in man himself such as he comes into the world. I think that the primitive and fundamental element of Church, and one which exists everywhere on earth, – it is each human person who bears it in him, according as by nature he aspires to know the Cause of being, as also to a state of happy expansion of his being, and according as, wounded in his nature by the sin of Adam, – to such a degree that in his first act of freedom he cannot choose the good (and therefore love naturally above everything the subsisting Good) without grace naturam sanans, – he has at the same stroke, if he does not slip away from the grace initially given, a thirst for God which is at one and the same time of nature and of grace (of grace, in other words ‘exceeding all created nature’).35
Here Maritain reiterates prior treatment of “the first act of freedom” expressed by every human agent, wherein he argues that faith in God as the Savior Who is none other than Jesus Christ can be present in confuso and remain in a pre-conscious or barely conscious apprehension without any conceptual framework and leading to salvation.  

Not only does Maritain acknowledge the invisible presence in and of the visible Church, but throughout his lengthy corpus dealing with political and social (in other words, secular) issues, he clearly acknowledges the inspiration of the Gospel and the work of grace within the modern evolution toward democracy, pluralism and the recognition of inalienable human rights, beginning with the European Enlightenment and especially evident in the founding of the United States of America. Maritain states that “the democratic impulse has arisen in human history as a temporal manifestation of the inspiration of the Gospel.” Here, where grace completes nature, we encounter the spiritual leaven at work within the secular or temporal order itself for its own proper but, as Maritain reminds us, “intermediary or infravalent end.” Here, as well, we encounter the “holy freedom” of a new Christian civilization.

According to Maritain, the false view of autonomy promoted by the European Enlightenment, interprets freedom “in such a way that all possible acts of free choice may be available and that men may appear like so many little gods, with no other restriction on their freedom save that they are not to hinder similar freedom on the part of their neighbour.” As already noted, this anthropocentric liberal hope soon gives way to the promise of totalitarian grandeur. According to Maritain, civil society is essentially ordered not to the freedom of choice of each citizen but to a common good of the temporal order which provides the true earthly life of man and which is not only material but also moral in its scope. And this common good is intrinsically subordinated to the eternal good of individual citizens and to the achievement of their freedom of autonomy.

In other words, authentic “freedom of autonomy” must involve Taylor’s “transformation perspective” or Maritain’s “ascetic morality.” This goal of the saints is the foundation of the human person and its lure operates in the spiritual and temporal lives of individuals responsive to grace:

The person, in itself a root of independence, but hampered by constraints emanating from material nature within and outside man, tends to transcend these constraints and gain freedom of autonomy and expansion. In the realm of spiritual life the message of the Gospel has revealed to the human person that he is called to the perfect freedom of those who have become a single spirit and love with God: but in the realm of temporal
life it is the natural aspiration of the person to liberation from misery, servitude, and the exploitation of man by man, that the repercussions of the Gospel’s message were to stimulate.\footnote{40}

In the age of authenticity it is the Christian ideal to secure such “holy freedom” through the entrenchment of inalienable human rights beginning with “the right to existence” and “the right to personal liberty or the right to conduct one’s own life as master of oneself and of one’s acts, responsible for them before God and the law of the community.”\footnote{41} Not based on atomism and instrumental reason, the historical imperative within the Church of Christ, visible and invisibly present, since it is directed “towards the realization and progress of the spiritual freedom of individual persons, will make of justice and friendship the true foundations of social life.”\footnote{42} Authentic freedom involves commitment to the other and the civic virtues dear to Taylor and Maritain. Right reason, aided by grace and transcending the merely instrumental reason of bourgeois culture, directs us here.

What is most significant is that the Church is now called upon to work as spiritual leaven within the body politic. All persons of good will are called to work together in “justice and friendship” toward the common practical goals of sustaining and nourishing each in a pluralist democracy seeded with civic and religious virtues. Certainly Maritain acknowledges the apex of the Church’s visibility and efficacy in the mystery of the Eucharistic celebration where believers and even non-believers who are present at the celebration encounter the power of Christ under the simple appearance of bread and wine.\footnote{43} However, the visible Church proclaims the dignity of the human person through Pope and Council, and Maritain never wavers from maintaining that it is what he calls the person of the Church herself speaking through the magisterial authority of the Roman Catholic Church. This is so even though the personnel of the Church remain sinful and fallible. But it is through “little flocks,” small intimate groups of Christians and so called “prophetic shock-minorities,” small insightful organizations addressing injustice and engaging in political action within the body politic, that the seeding of society most directly occurs.\footnote{44} And since Maritain argues that the visible Church herself is invisibly present within the world, the fruit of the Spirit is often generated from a very mixed bag indeed! One might argue that it was often the invisible members of the visible Church who helped purify the Church during recent historical epochs. Without speculating about the Church’s invisible presence, Taylor notes how the breach with Christendom was apparently necessary for the further development of certain Christian virtues, acknowledging that “We might even be tempted to say that modern unbelief is providential, but that might be too provocative a way of putting it.”\footnote{45}

In his \textit{Integral Humanism} and elsewhere Maritain asserts that the Gospel leaven was present in the sweep toward democracy in recent centuries and that this spiritual leaven is even present in certain aspects of the communist revolt against bourgeois society. Only right wing
Authenticity and Community

Totalitarianism exemplified by the Nazi State is fully demonized and interpreted as retrogression to pagan empire. Maritain even acknowledges authentic growth and insight within the Marxist world as a reaction to the neglect of temporal duties within the Christian world.46

Here Maritain meets Epstein in perceiving the hidden God of recent centuries as allowing for human maturity and the response of faith beyond the confines of visible Church structure. Even the dark years of Soviet atheism become for Epstein God’s invitation to further dialogue:

In the post-atheist era, we have begun to understand that God’s silence is a way of His listening to us, His attention to our words. Such active silence is necessary for the continuation of dialogue where one speaker alternatively gives the floor to another. After God had uttered His word in the Old and New Testaments, in Scripture and in Flesh, what else could He say? It is time for human beings to reply to God, to respond to His word.47

Epstein tells us that “The new religiosity is ‘poor’ because it has no worldly possessions: neither temples, nor rituals, nor doctrines. All it has is a relationship with God – which is in the here and now.”48 Furthermore, presumably referring to the visible Church, Epstein tells us “After faith crosses beyond the threshold of the church, her service begins outside the church, in the depth of the world, in the everyday need to correlate life with absolute meaning.”49 In the age of authenticity, Epstein informs us, in words reminiscent of the perspective of Martin Buber, that each individual is dedicated to the sanctification of his immediate vicinity, which he then attempts to widen. The space of the minimalist church grows out of that point, occupied by each individual in the center of his neighborhood, until it reaches its maximum, which is coextensive with ‘communality.’ Hence personal and familial relations are the focus of religious life, expressed as love and brotherhood.50

And, echoing Emmanuel Levinas, Epstein tells us

Each individual and each thing, in its singularity and its particularity, become a kind of revelation about God. What we know about him better than anything else is that He is One, or, perhaps, oneness itself. Hence theology becomes an investigation of the unique, the unrepeatable, which is manifested in every thing as ‘the image and likeness, of God.’51
Epstein assures us that this is not postmodernism, where “difference is confined to one dimension, ironically tending to foster relativistic indifference toward the various traditions and values.” Rather, what Epstein promotes is what might be called the post-postmodern foundation Who is God, the One giving irreplaceable uniqueness to each creation.

Maritain captures Epstein’s insight in terms of the inalienable rights of the human person who, along with “the right to existence” and “the right to personal liberty,” carries “the right to the pursuit of eternal life along the path which conscience has recognized as the path indicated by God.” Beyond bourgeois liberal democracy and Soviet style totalitarian communism, Maritain calls for the removal of sovereignty from the political lexicon. Sovereignty must remain with God Who is the One and, for visible members of the visible Roman Catholic Church, with the pope to the extent that he functions as the vicar of Christ and spiritual head of the Church on earth. If one observes the whole Christian Church, we have a unity of diversity that avoids the absolute hegemony of any one creature, including the pope, while fully respecting the sacred dignity of every creature as the image of God. As Epstein writes in the obscure text which betrays his baptism through postmodernism:

Multidimensional difference would be the process of self-differentiation, giving rise to new, non-violent, non-totalitarian totalities ‘different from difference,’ thereby proceeding not from a single will to power, but from the ‘zero point’ or ‘border line’ within diversity. Minimal religion can be regarded as one possible form of these new, non-violent totalities.

But what is the cement enabling unity through the “zero point” or “border line?” Furthermore, how does one account for “being different from difference?” Although Epstein alludes to love as pivotal in establishing minimalist ethics, we will see how it is Maritain and Taylor who offer a decidedly Christian response to these questions.

THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIANITY

When considering Taylor, Epstein and Maritain in a discussion of secularism and the future of Christianity, three interlocking elements emerge: first, what might be called the interplay of the eternal and the temporal, of nature and grace; second, acknowledging the sanctity of each individual person, exemplified by Maritain’s reference to “holy freedom” and the inalienable rights of each; and third, the importance of small, intimate groups – Maritain’s “little flocks,” and Epstein’s “communality” that comes when “each individual is dedicated to the sanctification of his immediate vicinity, which he then attempts to widen.” Here the religious leads the secular when Taylor’s “transformation perspective” extends from
the individual into the body politic, through what Maritain refers to as “prophetic shock minorities.” Here authenticity involves community through the appropriate exercise of human nature moving toward completion with the aid of grace.

Quite simply, for Maritain the person of the Church, mysteriously unified yet diversely present throughout the visible and invisible elements of her membership, is the locus where eternity and time intermingle, where human nature attains completion through grace: “She [the Church] is a single and same person in Heaven and on earth.”55 And the Kingdom of God is indeed with us, whenever and wherever human nature comes to completion through the supernatural leverage of grace. The Church is existentially present in the communal transference of love. For Maritain, such love in action is the hallmark of the Incarnation and the fruit of God’s grace in the world, in the action of the Good Samaritan and in all those who actively implement the will of the Father, and not in the legalistic neglect exhibited by the Levite who failed to aid the victim on the road or in the devotion of those who call on the Lord while neglecting those in need.56

Likewise, Taylor establishes the intrinsically partial and therefore necessarily communal nature of human existence reflecting the Trinitarian God, wherein authentic catholicity implies interdependence and wholeness through the universality of a love that remains unconditional. Concerning the meaning of catholicity and the comprehension of a Catholic Church, Taylor states in words that would please a thinker like Levinas:

Our great historical temptation has been to forget the complementarity, to go straight for the sameness, making as many people as possible into ‘good Catholics’—and in the process failing of catholicity: failing of catholicity, because failing wholeness; unity bought at the price of suppressing something of the diversity in the humanity that God created; unity of the part masquerading as the whole. It is universality without wholeness, and so not true Catholicism.57

Authentic involvement within community, within the fully human community formed in the image of the Trinitarian God by the very grace of God, is the witness of Christianity in the world through the unconditional love manifested in the visible and invisible membership of a truly Catholic Church. Christian love is the unconditional and universal love that is God’s life throughout the worldwide human community. No one part of the whole exercises exclusive ownership or monopoly over the dispensation of this love and life; because, as Taylor informs us,

the love is not conditional on the worth realized in you just as an individual or even in what is realizable in you alone. That’s because 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.\textsuperscript{58}

Epstein’s journey to minimal religion traces some of the epistemic terrain covered by Maritain and Taylor while perhaps failing to disclose the Christian heart of the minimal religious event. Epstein agrees with Maritain and Taylor when he notes that “each individual and each thing, in its singularity and its particularity, become a kind of revelation about God,” and “hence theology becomes an investigation of the unique, the unrepeateable, which is manifested in every thing as the image and likeness of God.” However, it is Maritain and Taylor who explicate the significance of God’s universal and unconditional love, a love radiating from the core of Christian self-understanding, a truly Catholic love wherein the hegemony of the part yields to the absolute Sovereignty of the Triune God. Maritain and Taylor inform us that when Epstein speaks of “new, non-violent, non-totalitarian totalities ‘different from difference,’ thereby proceeding not from a single will to power, but from the ‘zero point’ or ‘border line’ within diversity,” it is precisely the loving life of Trinity and Incarnation through which “minimal religion can be regarded as one possible form of these new, non-violent totalities.”

Weaving together insights from Taylor, Maritain, and Epstein, one can argue that the future of Christianity, in so far as it remains true to the historical moment, thereby allowing authentic commitment within human community as it has evolved to date, presents us with a tapestry of inclusion. Now such inclusion, if we are to speak of religiosity, necessarily involves what Taylor acknowledges as “transcendence,” the thrust of religious discourse towards what is more than “exclusive” or “anthropocentric” humanism.\textsuperscript{59} If Maritain is correct, such transcendence includes the proper development of the secular as distinguished from secularism. We must ask, combining Epstein and Taylor, if the Deus absconditus exemplified within the unconscious of Soviet atheist society has prepared a “resurrection,” what Maritain calls a “renaissance,” not only within post-atheist Russia, but within post-secular Western society as well.

One can argue that signs of such inclusive spirituality have emerged beneath the very visible umbrella of the Christian Church, through the leadership of “little flocks” like L’Arche, where even care givers who call themselves “atheist” can participate in the communal transference of love through decision making within a spiritually charged atmosphere.\textsuperscript{60} There is the global reach of Taizé, declaring that God is love alone, expressed through interdenominational and multicultural celebration and service to all.\textsuperscript{61} Signs are present throughout the recent social teaching and action of the visible Church since the heyday of Catholic reform under the papacies of John XXIII and Paul VI, who was a friend of Maritain. One can point to the development of the currently designated Pontifical Council of Culture
(incorporating the former Council for Dialogue with Non-Believers) and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, as well as to the personal appeal of John Paul II to Mikhail Gorbachev and Fidel Castro. Here one is reminded of Maritain’s contention that the Church may become the final refuge of the human person. Also significant, because retroactive, are the penitential overtures of John Paul II on behalf of the Church in regard to the treatment of Galileo, the treatment of dissenters during the Inquisition, and other atrocious blights on the visible face of Roman Catholicism. And is it not the goal of the visible Church to be rendered explicit when all the saints achieve beatitude? (In his famous/infamous reflection on the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, The Peasant of the Garonne, Maritain appreciates the wish of the French scholar of Islam, Louis Massignon, that the Muslim Sufi mystic, al-Hallaj be canonized a saint within the Roman Catholic Church. Is this not what Christians await as the fulfillment of their faith? Is this not what all those of good will, perhaps many with the unacknowledged complement of God’s grace, help to prepare by striving to accomplish the potential in human nature available to our age through democracy, pluralism and the recognition of inalienable human rights? Must not the visible Church herself become the spiritual foundation and sustenance for such activity in the world, if there is to be a Christian “resurrection” or “renaissance?” To stand within the visible Roman Catholic Church does not entail service to an institution that claims to possess the truth, but rather service to the truth from wherever and whenever it arises while standing within the most powerful assembly of those who claim to represent Jesus Christ on earth. Perhaps this is what it means to stand in the shadow of Peter. It is curious to note that a well-seasoned Harvey Cox allows that the papacy may be the only voice within Christianity capable of sustaining a “meeting ground” for “various contending world views” under the auspices of spiritual authority. What is certain, if Maritain, Taylor, and Epstein have anything to teach us in concert, is that something like “minimal religion,” openly proclaiming and worshiping the Trinitarian Source of grace operating in every sphere of human intimacy through a form of “non-totalitarian unity,” will enable Christian belief and practice to appreciate ever more fully the invisible hand of God in history.

Henri J. M. Nouwen, one of the spiritual lights of L’Arche, offers what might be a compilation of Maritain, Taylor, and Epstein in regard to the future of Christianity. After acknowledging Tsimtsum, the account of creation in Jewish mysticism whereby God creates precisely by withdrawing, thereby enabling the other than God to be, Nouwen notes that

When the imitation of Christ does not mean to live a life like Christ, but to live your life as authentically as Christ lived his, then there are many ways and forms in which a man can be a Christian. The minister is the one who can make this search for authenticity possible, not by standing on the side as a neutral screen or an impartial observer, but as an articulate
witness of Christ, who puts his own search at the disposal of others. This hospitality requires that the minister know where he stands and whom he stands for, but it also requires that he allow others to enter his life, come close to him and ask him how their lives connect with his. 65

NOTES


4 See Taylor, A Secular Age, pp. 473-504.


7 Taylor, The Ethics of Authenticity, p. 25.


9 Taylor, The Ethics of Authenticity, p. 28.


11 Taylor, A Secular Age, p. 431.

12 Taylor, A Secular Age.

13 See Taylor, A Secular Age.

14 Maritain, The Dream of Descartes, p. 182.


17 Such terminology appears throughout Maritain’s extensive critique of modern economics, society and politics. See especially, Maritain, Integral...

18 See Taylor, A Secular Age, pp. 176-185.
19 Maritain, On the Church of Christ, p. 91.
20 Maritain, On the Church of Christ, p. 97.
21 Taylor, A Secular Age, p. 475.
23 Maritain, Integral Humanism, p. 177.
25 Maritain, Integral Humanism, p. 163.
27 See Taylor, A Secular Age, pp. 418-419.
33 Epstein, “Minimal Religion.”
34 See Maritain, On the Church of Christ, pp. 93-134.
35 Maritain, On the Church of Christ, p. 129.
37 Maritain, Christianity and Democracy, p. 25.
40 Maritain, Christianity and Democracy, p. 35.
41 Maritain, The Rights of Man and Natural Law, p. 60.
44 See the comments of Joseph W. Evans in Maritain, Integral Humanism, p. viii, note; and see Man and the State, pp. 139-146.
46 See Maritain, Integral Humanism, pp. 41-43.
56 See Lk 10:25-37; Mt 7:21, and 25:31-46.
61 See the Taizé Community website: http://www.tauize.fr/en
CHAPTER XI

BEING, BECOMING, AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE SELF

MARIO D’SOUZA

INTRODUCTION

In his book Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, Giovanna Borradori says that “believing that there is nothing more philosophical than history implies that real freedom begins with the realization that individual choices are formed in permanent negotiation with external forces.”¹ This claim is not qualified enough to meet with Maritain’s approval, for whom a philosophical reflection of history depends upon epistemology, philosophy of science, philosophy of nature, metaphysics, moral philosophy; only then, and moving through these domains, can one come to construct a philosophy of history. History, he says, deals with the singular and therefore cannot be considered a science. Only a philosophy of history through the universality of philosophical knowledge can rescue the singularity of history and relate it to human experience; a “philosophy of history as a kind of final application of philosophical knowledge to the singular.”² Borradori’s second claim that “real freedom begins with the realization that individual choices are formed in permanent negotiation with external forces” would also not meet with Maritain’s approval, whose position on history and its philosophical possibilities is made against the backdrop of a philosophy of freedom where freedom of choice, a prerequisite for the moral life, is meant to culminate and blossom in a freedom of autonomy and independence – indeed, a freedom of exultation or a freedom of expansion of the person.³ The relationship between history and freedom is a prominent theme for Maritain:

Human history is human in its very essence; it is the history of our own being, of that miserable flesh, subject to all the servitudes imposed by nature and by its own weakness, which is, however, inhabited and enlightened by the spirit and endowed with the dangerous privilege of freedom.⁴

The error, says Maritain, is when freedom of choice becomes the terminus; where free choice becomes an end in itself and human beings are “condemned to recurrent acts of choice without ever being able to bind [themselves]” and are “launched into a dialectic of freedom which destroys
freedom.” The person’s freedom, moving from choice to autonomy, is the foundation for a philosophical reflection of history, the application of philosophical truths to the “entire movement of humanity,” rendering philosophy of history to be a part of “moral philosophy.”

Maritain’s political philosophy heads straight for the issues of pluralism and the diversity of religious belief, topics that did not have the assistance of the sustained interest, dialogue, and scholarship that they have today. *Ransoming the Time* is one of his first works that comes to mind where the chapters “Human Equality” and “Who is My Neighbour?” set the stage for human and personal interaction in the midst of cultural and religious diversity. But who is the human being engaged in this dialogue? Or, who is the human being required to become in order for this dialogue to be transformed into an engagement of human persons?

**BEING AND BECOMING: THE HUMAN PERSON SOCIALLY CONSIDERED**

The first page of *The Range of Reason* expresses a concern for the future of civilization, and calls for a “genuine understanding of what knowledge is: its values, its degrees, and how it can foster the inner unity of the human being.” The inner unity of the human being is founded upon Maritain’s distinction between the person and the individual, an ontological and metaphysical distinction that pervades his socio-political philosophy. The metaphysical and philosophico-spiritual nature of personality and the material and contingent nature of individuality are the two poles of the one being, beings called to complete through their will what is sketched in their nature. Maritain’s metaphysics of society is undoubtedly secured upon immutable truths – reason, human dignity, human equality, a common human nature, fellowship, and the common good – but it is ultimately secured upon freedom. Because society is comprised of human persons, it is shaped by the personal and communal nature of the person: “personality tends by nature to communion.”

Maritain’s socio-political philosophy also inquires into the nature of the communal dimension of political society. He maintains that persons require membership in society, both for their “dignity” and for their “needs.” In developing this metaphysics of society he asks: “But why ‘is it that the person, as person, seeks to live in society? It does so, first, because of its very perfections, as person, and its inner urge to the communications of knowledge and love which require relationship with other persons.” This social metaphysics is founded on the two planes: the person’s personal life and membership in a social body. And though in a Christian universe human persons move towards a more supernatural and mystical communion and towards a “society of pure persons,” we can, in the midst of religious plurality, stop at this level of the socio-political with Maritain’s conviction that “personality seeks social life,” and that this seeking is adequately protected by the autonomy of temporal society and its own means in
striving for and achieving the temporal common good, a good deeply human, and a theme that richly adorns his work *Integral Humanism*.14

Early in *Freedom in the Modern World*, Maritain says that the philosophy of St. Thomas is not simply a philosophy of being, but that it is also, from the perspective of ethics, a philosophy of freedom.15 And so Maritain’s anthropology, grounded on the relationship and distinction between the person and the individual, is realized through the freedom of the person – thus, the importance of the theme of becoming. While Western societies are no longer unified either religiously or culturally (e.g., by a Christian culture), and while the unity of such societies is more “material than formal in character,” it is, says Maritain, a “unity of Becoming or of orientation which springs from a common aspiration and gathers elements of heterogeneous culture (of which some may be very imperfect) into a form of civilization which is fully consonant with the eternal interests of human personality and with man’s freedom of autonomy.”16 “Becoming and the ceaseless change of history places upon us the obligation of building order.”17

Maritain’s social and political philosophy is often a poetic appeal for the recognition of human dignity in the face of the horrors of the Second World War, but also in light of the cultural and religious diversity that began to shape Western democratic societies of his time. But he is ever anxious to secure human dignity on principles that are grounded in his understating of human personality and the person’s quest from freedom, as well as for transcendence, but also seeking membership and relationship in society. And while religion no longer provides communal cohesion, its absence does not take away from the nobility of the immediate object of social or temporal society, which is “human life with its natural activities and virtues, and the human common good.”18 While, on the one hand, human freedom subjects a great wear and tear on society and history, on the other hand, human progress is more than a collection of material and technical achievements. While the true measure of progress of temporal society cannot ignore such achievements, its progress, in being comprised of a society of persons, is mainly moral in nature.

The main advances in human history – insofar as they are not merely technical, but morally directed toward the common good of mankind and a state of affairs more fitted to the dignity of man – are acquired at the price not only of blood and sweat, but also of much love and self-sacrifice. Yet, once the change in question has been obtained through the effort of a few men and the agony of the spirit in them, it becomes either institutionalized or integrated in the collective consciousness – in any case, absorbed in the very fabric of this world, which is thus carried to a higher level of human civilization but still remains the world where both God and the devil have their parts.19

And so in seeking the unity of such a society, the “crucial question [confronting] human liberty concerns which path
shall lead to this progressive unification: unification by external forces and compulsion? [or] Unification by internal forces...by the progress of moral conscience, by the development of the relationship of justice, law and friendship, by the liberation of spiritual energies?"[20]

Maritain’s contribution to our interest in diversity, pluralism, and society is that he situates the discussion at a much higher level than we generally see today. Civilization and culture can continue to grow in the midst of diversity and in the absence of religious unity. To this end, he calls for substituting “tolerance” for “fellowship,”[21] fellowship that becomes the lens through which Christians are called to love non-Christians “in their own unfathomable mystery.”[22] His understanding of dialogue, therefore, is founded on human dignity and upon the conviction that “the good, all things considered...[is] much greater, deeper, and more fundamental than evil.”[23] Dialogue and fellowship are also rooted in virtue and reason, which is itself at the basis of social life.[24] Thus “the common good is at once material, intellectual, and moral, and principally moral, as man himself is; it is a common good of human persons.”[25] Persons, therefore, exist and give of themselves primarily through their interior unity, a unity that is socially and communally exhibited through intelligence and freedom, and through knowledge and love. Thus civic friendship, which is not granted ready-made, is the work of “virtue and sacrifice.”[26] In what he terms the “friendship of charity,” one which recognizes the other not as “an accident of the empirical world, but as a human being who exists before God,” Maritain summons society to go beyond the differences of religious beliefs to a unity that is not “supradogmatic” but “suprasubjective where we are called to go not beyond our faith but beyond ourselves in order to purify our faith of the shell of egotism and subjectivity in which we instinctively tend to enclose it.”[27]

What is the role of the philosopher in promoting this union of fraternity and charity that should mark pluralist and religiously diverse societies? The unity and equality of human nature cannot be visibly perceived; it can only be understood by the intellect,[28] and as human freedom is intimately bound with the intellect, the role of the philosopher becomes crucial. Two of the three essays in Maritain’s work On the Use of Philosophy are dedicated to the mission of the philosopher amidst pluralism and religious diversity.[29] These essays call for cooperation among philosophers based on the search for and the dignity of truth. Three points are worth noting on the philosopher’s role: as philosophy is called not to contemplate but to transform the world, the philosopher points to the dignity of thought. Second, in pointing to the ontological mystery of personality and freedom, the philosopher secures a greater unity than the illusive preoccupation with doctrinal differences. What should occupy the philosopher’s attention is not the order of ideas but cooperation based on heart and love. And finally, true universalism is not marked by indistinction
and relativism but by the universality that comes through friendship and justice, in spite of religious and philosophico-cultural differences. However, we must recall Maritain’s lament on the “failure of philosophic reason” in being reduced to the “mathematical reading of sensory phenomena, and the building up of corresponding material techniques” where absolutes of reality, truth, and value are forbidden. When the primacy of being and its relationship to becoming is displaced with the primacy of sensory phenomena, the distinctions between objectivity and subjectivity are lost, and are replaced by a subjectivity “entrenched within the individuality of the ego, instead of being spiritualized and universalized by its communication with objective being.”

**PHILOSOPHY AND THE CLASH OF CULTURES**

Today, the prominence of religion as a primary source of identity is calling into question the political liberal agenda of diversity for its own sake. Amartya Sen rightly wonders whether confining religious identity to religion and culture does not in fact lead to the “miniaturization” of human beings. He says:

> The confusion generated by an implicit belief in the solitarist understanding of identity poses serious barriers to overcoming global terrorism and creating a world with ideologically organized large-scale violence. The recognition of multiple identities and of the world beyond religious affiliation, even for very religious people, can possibly make some difference in a troubled world in which we live.

The difficulty is that the liberal democratic state has, at best, a vague idea of the common good, and it is usually politico-economic in nature. Here, personhood is relegated to the religious and cultural spheres where they are lumped together and deemed private, and citizens are expected to relate to one another within the politico-economic sphere, but divorced from these other dimensions of human identity. So while there is an acknowledgment of religious and cultural diversity, as well as a tendency of most citizens to categorize each other according to these identities, the state proceeds towards this politico-economic good separated from the formative identities of religion and culture. In remaining true to its principle of not favouring a particular religion or culture, the liberal state sees diversity for diversity’s sake, but is unable to respond to the complexity and mystery of human personhood, identity, and human flourishing. Today, religious and cultural identities go from the one extreme of being deemed private to the other extreme of becoming the sole identifiers of human identity. Maritain maintained that the common good was made up of material, moral, and intellectual dimensions. Today, however, human flourishing, with the exception of economic and material welfare, is relegated to the private
worlds of religion and culture. Thus, the constricted liberal understanding of the common good as life bound in economic and political union leads to another aspect of the miniaturization of human beings.

Dialogue in the context of religious and cultural diversity, but especially religious diversity, is in many ways, burdened by the materiality and market-corporeality of the public square. The arena for a dialogue between human persons seeking to grow in and exhibit the fruits of their freedom continues to groan and suffocate under the burden of this materiality. Thus, it has been rightly maintained that if the "normative message of Western liberal democracies exports is one of consumerism, fundamentalism will go unchallenged." It would appear that human flourishing is either defined through the narrow lens of material welfare – and, while religious fundamentalism is not opposed to such welfare per se, it views this flourishing in religious terms and through the narrow confines of a particular religious tradition – or, on the other hand, human flourishing is defined in strictly and, increasingly, in fundamentalist religious terms, with the result that believers of other traditions are rejected or become the objects of intolerance and persecution.

The literature on philosophers engaged in religious dialogue shows not only different emphases and concerns but is also marked by the different conceptions of philosophy. While comparisons are indeed odious, the philosophically unified world from which Maritain reflected on his time is well gone, and some have greeted this departure with applause, accusing it of a constricted conception of the world and one heavily dependent on Western categories. Nevertheless, today philosophers are being challenged to provide sufficient nourishment for dialogue. In the face of genocides, ethnic cleansing, and religious violence seeking the annihilation of other believers and faiths, philosophic reason itself seems too weak to lead diverse societies forward. But in spite of this weakness, the philosophical struggle is most worthwhile in that it has the most to offer in developing a wider and more inclusive perspective. For example, Habermas’ refusal to give up on the principles of modernity draws attention to how the inclusion of the other can be compromised when “particular interests can hide behind the glimmering façade of reasonable universality.” Furthermore, the structures of communication are distorted “from misunderstanding and incomprehension, and from insincerity and deception.” Mistrust and violence are often the result of these distortions.

Maritain was rightly concerned with viewing the world through the lens of science and empiriological measurement, a mindset that begins to influence human relations and judgments. Jurgen Gebhardt shares this concern, and maps this move with Max Weber and the ascendency of a rationalization, intellectualization, and a universalism secured on the methods of science, leading to the view that science, and particularly the social sciences, formulate the only competent methods to understand the whole of civilized humanity: “science rests on the fundamental (neo-Kantian) presupposition that empirical reality is a chaos and that only
Philosophical Transformation of the Self

Rational science can make valid sense of it.”\textsuperscript{36} The paradigm of the social sciences is based on a one-dimensional notion of modernization which seeks to impose order on chaos. Gebhardt says that political theorists must part company with the epistemological premises of the social sciences and seek to engage with human diversity whose “transcendental point of reference is a universal humanity” knowing that human beings strive for a resolution of the contradiction between self-transcendence and finitude.\textsuperscript{37}

There are also calls for an intercultural philosophy that goes beyond Western categories and turns to political, social, cultural, and economic questions within particular national environments. The basis of such a philosophy lies in the awareness that “all cultures today have undergone more inner conflict and turmoil than ever before in the past, with the result that they have become more self-reflective.” Such a philosophy responds to the fact that “while religions aspire to universality, for politics diversity is essential,” a diversity that is better served in a secular rather than religious state.\textsuperscript{38} However, while such a philosophy cannot ignore Huntington’s thesis of the clash of civilizations, it must also reaffirm that, however broad and sometimes problematic the categories of modernization and rationalization may be, philosophic discourse cannot proceed without some general acceptance of the place and role of democratic institutions as a means to secure such a discourse.\textsuperscript{39}

The question of modernism and modernity is at the center of this discussion of the clash of civilizations. It has been noted, for example, that while Muslims may come to dialogue from a position of “Modern Islam,” they are often confronted by the West’s naïve criticism of modernism, naïve in that it is often unaware or does not want to become aware of the implications of such criticism.\textsuperscript{40} Nevertheless, the obituary for modernization may well be premature, as “science and technology continue to be applicable everywhere and give the impression, if not of the triumph of universalistic worldview, but the “globalization” of Western ways of life.”\textsuperscript{41} This primacy of science and technology adds to the burden of a world already groaning under a materialistic reduction. Thus attending to the plurality of worlds through the real differences of religions, the differences of national histories and their impinging on national worldviews, the differences of cultures, or the differences of individual worldviews, both chosen and inherited, becomes the real challenge. This plurality of worlds is witnessed specially in the West, for example, with the rise of Muslim immigration and the seeming inability of Western societies to cope with fundamentally different philosophies of history: a Western, secular, liberal philosophy which sees history as a set of freedoms guaranteed by the state and unfolding through individual choice and decision and free from religious influence or cultural inheritance. For its part, a Muslim philosophy of history sees religion as fundamentally formative – forming choice and decision and shaping the very nature of the state. There is the added complexity that, while religion is given this primary role in an Islamic philosophy of history, various and varying
cultural expressions of this religion add to this complexity of what exactly is an Islamic response to life in secular liberal Western societies; there is no single Islamic voice speaking for all Muslims. However, the tension remains between one group looking at life in society in essentially terrestrial and liberal secular terms and leaving religious and transcendental explorations to the freedom of the believer, while the other group sees these explorations as fundamentally formative of social and political life. One can understand, therefore, the call for a healthy relativism as a means to deal with religious and cultural diversity, a relativism that explains diversity and recognizes that there is no single universal authority “which can determine the proper way to see and understand reality, the right ends in man’s life, or the right design for human society.” The advocates of this healthy relativism maintain that it “does not deny the existence of a common rationality between men, though it does not consider that requirements of human rationality and of varying cultural settings have to be convergent and uniform across space and time.”

Charles Taylor’s advocacy of “social imaginaries” and Meili Steele’s concept of “public imagination,” which is interchangeable with social imaginaries, is another approach to this question. While Steele sees this public imagination to include not only “images, symbols, concepts of culture” but also “normative language and assumptions about personhood, history, language, rights” all as a means to organize life in society, the difficulty seems to be in securing some common ground in the political square where diverse groups and traditions can come to agree on what constitutes these social imaginaries and what is part of the public imagination and how it is to be settled and agreed upon. Part of the difficulty today concerns the question of belief in God and one’s conception of God. God is not the common ground for intercultural philosophical dialogue, thus making the acceptance of the otherness of the other all the more urgent. Such dialogue requires that one hold on to one’s own truth claims as well as “playfully to engage in epoché toward one’s own convictions… in order to… truly consider the convictions, truth claims, and values of the other.”

CONCLUSION

An intercultural philosophic dialogue must steer clear of the Scylla of a bloodless and impersonal disposition weighed down by a materialistic and consumerist Weltanschauung seeking peace and tolerance at any cost, and resulting in a costly moral and human relativism. But it must also avoid the Charybdis of religion becoming the dominant source of human identity giving rise to intolerance towards those who differ from or reject the seeming all-encompassing and dominating nature of a univocal religious identity.

What Maritain offers to our day is to remind society to begin with the inherent dignity of human persons, their inherent goodness, and the natural,
philosophic desire to live in community and society marked by fellowship, as well as their desire to grow in freedom, one that is informed by one’s religious tradition, but not at the expense of the right of others to grow and manifest their freedom and personhood through their traditions. While the international magnitude of the clash of civilizations is both ominous and leaves us feeling helpless, what seems to be more worrying about the health of pluralist societies is their increasing ghettoization and reduction along religious and cultural lines. The retreat into such ghettos strikes at the heart of Maritain’s preference for fellowship over tolerance, as well as his conviction that the fabric of civic and democratic society would be harmed if one confined one’s real and significant human relations to members of one’s own group, and, out of necessity, interacted with the religiously and culturally other through the more accidental dimensions of life, characterized by economic, consumerist, and legal arrangements. Indeed, Maritain reminds us, time and again, that the common good is not simply a collection of private goods and nor is it to be confined within narrowly material and terrestrial categories. Becoming a member of society should be viewed in terms that are wider than simply the being of one’s religious identity. In spite of their differences and their varying adherences, philosophers, given their propensity for questions and refusing to remain content with ready-made answers and narrow perspectives, seem to be the ones best situated to lead this dialogue. Ultimately the difficulty is less with religions and more with the self-understanding of the believer, and philosophers, after all, have made the quest for understanding to be their stock and trade.

NOTES

6 Maritain, Philosophy of History, p. 17.
7 Maritain, The Range of Reason, p. 3.
8 See Jacques Maritain, Chapter III “Individuality and Personality” and Chapter IV “The Person and Society” in The Person and the Common Good,


10 Maritain, *Person and Common Good*, p. 47.


12 Maritain, *Person and Common Good*, p. 47.


24 See Maritain, *Ransoming the Time*, p. 29.


26 See Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, pp. 50-51 and p. 87.


28 See Maritain, *Ransoming the Time*, p. 3.


Segesvary, *Inter-Civilizational Relations and the Destiny of the West*, p. 21.


CHAPTER XII
GLOBAL ETHIC AS A RESPONSE TO THE CLASH OF CULTURES
UCHENNA OKEJA

INTRODUCTION

Globalization, when construed as an ongoing intertwinement of the contemporary world in the areas of finance and economics, presents a new ethical challenge to humanity. The moral challenge consists in the fact that, to live peacefully, the inhabitants of the globalizing world need a new moral vision that can account for why, on a global scale, we ought to treat others in a morally acceptable way. This means accounting for a global ethic which provides us as rational agents some normative grounds concerning what we morally owe one another as inhabitants of the same globe. This moral challenge of globalization has led to the vision articulated in the quest for a global ethic.

Since the appearance of the document “Towards a Declaration of a Global Ethic,” in 1993, the question of a global ethic has become an issue occupying and agitating the minds of many thinkers. The theory of a global ethic stands in contradistinction to the theory of clash of civilizations which is often associated with Samuel Huntington. Global ethic, at least in the sense propagated by Hans Küng, proposes that instead of a clash of civilizations, as Huntington calls it, the post-Cold War era is an opportunity to attain world peace. The questions implicit in this vision, however, include the following: How plausible is the claim that a new global ethic can bring about world peace (and thus, avert the clash of civilizations)? And how can a global ethic which is premised on the ethical commonality of the World Religions be viable? These questions form the core of this paper. The central argument is that, although a global ethic (when understood as a minimum standard of good and bad in the globalising world) is necessary, it will not be viable if premised (as it is presently the case) on the ethical commonality of the World Religions without any further normative justification.

THE THEORY OF CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS

The theory of a clash of civilizations has a formidable representative in the person of Samuel Huntington who postulated that “in the post-Cold War world flags count and so do other symbols of cultural identity, including crosses, crescents, and even head coverings, because culture counts, and cultural identity is what is most meaningful to most people.
People are discovering new but often old identities and marching under new but often old flags which lead to wars with new but often old enemies.”

Based on this observation, Huntington inferred that “culture and cultural identities, which at the broadest level are civilization identities, are shaping the pattern of cohesion, disintegration, and conflict in the post-Cold War world.” This is the main proposition which is encapsulated in the idea of clash of civilizations. The contention is that in the new post-Cold War world, “the most pervasive, important, and dangerous conflicts will not be between social classes, rich or poor, or other economically defined groups, but between people belonging to different cultural entities. Tribal wars and ethnic conflicts will occur within civilizations. Violence among states and groups from different civilizations, however, carries with it the potential for escalation as other states and groups from these civilizations rally to the support of their “kin countries.”

Huntington’s outlook summarized above has elicited divergent responses. One of the responses to the idea of clash of civilizations is the idea of a global ethic which is represented by Hans Küng. In his formulation of the key questions leading to the articulation of a global ethic, Küng noted that “we live in a world and a time in which humankind is threatened by what S. Huntington has called a ‘clash of civilizations’, for example between Muslim or Confucian civilization and Western civilization. However, we are threatened not so much by new world war as by every possible conflict between two countries or within one country, or a city, even a street or school.” Küng’s response to this challenge is that “there will be no peace between the civilizations without a peace between the religions! And there will be no peace between the religions without a dialogue between the religions.” Due to the fact that the dogmatic differences between the different religions must be taken seriously, Küng opined that, with such a situation at hand, real dialogue will be a naïve illusion. This is why he proposed that “there will be no new world order without a new world ethic, a global or planetary ethic despite all dogmatic differences.”

The above represents one of the background rationales for the global ethic which has become en vogue in some academic circles today. In proposing his idea of a global ethic, Küng noted that he “cannot share Huntington’s fatalism or accept his theory of civilizations as the ‘best compass for the future’, the slogan used to promote it in the media. His map seems all too simplified and his interest in a further dominance of the Euro-American ‘West’ which in no way may become multicultural … seems all too simplified. It is a question of maintaining Western technological and military superiority over other civilizations.” This forms the reason why Küng – in his own assessment of the world situation – insisted, inter alia, that “the allegedly unavoidable global clash of civilizations is perhaps the new anxiety-provoking model which is needed by some military strategists. But the vision for humankind which points towards the future is global peace between the religions as a presupposition and motive force for a
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The question which arises in this context is: how adequate is the global ethic response to the theory of clash of civilizations? Can Küng’s understanding of global ethic be considered a viable response to the imminent clash of civilizations à la Huntington? These questions demand an evaluation of the global ethic project in its internal composition in order to decipher its worth as a response to the theory of clash of civilizations. To do this, one must first account for the presuppositions embedded in the postulation of global ethic especially with regard to Küng.

THE GLOBAL ETHIC RESPONSE

Global ethic has been defined in different ways by different people, but one of the most succinct definitions was proffered by Küng who, in his draft of the ‘Declaration Towards a Global Ethic’ for the World’s Parliament of Religions, defined global ethic by means of the following statement: “by global ethic we mean a fundamental consensus on binding values, unconditional standards and personal attitudes.” The fundamental consensus Küng referred to in the foregoing definition is a consensus of religions and cultures which he says has been in existence for a very long time. Küng maintains that global ethic would not and does not seek to replace any or all the religions of the world and their ethical teachings. Rather, a global ethic seeks to bring to the fore the long existent but undiscovered commonality in the ethics of the world’s religions and cultures.

The phrase global ethic is usually construed in a way that makes the nuance of its semantics not immediately evident. These semantic problems include: 1) the relationship of the phrase to proximate concepts; 2) the inclination always to adopt the singular when expressed 3) the negative and positive denotations it carries with it 4) its relation to universality and 5) its connection to ethnocentrism. Apart from these semantic issues, there are also the questions of the difference between ethic and ethics in the conceptualization of global ethic.

Apart from Küng, there are others who have proposed and defended a global ethic in one form or another. These include: Leonard Swidler (who seems to be more concerned about the practicability of global ethic), Nigel Dower (who has considered the foundations of a global ethic from the perspective of political philosophy), and UNESCO (that seeks to come up with an ethical principle which will serve as a global ethic).

THE VIABILITY OF RESPONSE OF GLOBAL ETHIC TO THE IMMINENT CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS

Global ethic as it is presently formulated and defined sounds to any critical mind like an unrealizable utopia because there is evidence
everywhere to support the fact that there is hardly any consensus within any individual religion, not to talk of a consensus of religions and cultures overall. Added to this is the question of the nature and function of such an ethic: will the effort at articulating a global ethic in the end not lead to syncretism? Is it even desirable to embark on such a project? How can one justify such an ethic? How and where is the normative basis of such an ethic to be pinned down? The proponents of global ethic were not so naïve as not to have considered some of these questions; Küng, for example, answered the question about the nature and function of a global ethic as follows: a global ethic is not a new ideology or superstructure which seeks to replace the specific ethos (ethics) of the different religions, cultures and philosophies. Global ethic is the minimum common human value, moral standard and fundamental attitude which is necessary in ensuring that the society does not disintegrate into chaos.14

This explanation does not, however, suffice to quell the contentious issues surrounding the global ethic project. This is because a global ethic must in the first instance come up with convincing arguments for its claim to universal validity and the resulting normativity which transcends cultural particularities. What do we owe one another? To formulate this question in Kantian terms one could ask: what should we do in the age of globalization with its attendant novel challenges? This question underscores the basic issue that bedevils the formulation of a global ethic, namely: the obligating strength of such an ethic. The proponents of a global ethic need to answer this question in order to provide a justification of the normativity of a global ethic.

According to Küng, the golden rule principle is the expression and realization of global ethic.15 This means that the golden rule principle is the expression of the minimal moral standard and consensus of the world’s religions and cultures. According to Küng, the golden rule is the minimum universal human value.

To understand this moral principle as a universal value is, however, not only problematic but seems to be false. Even if the golden rule is an aspect of the factual agreement of the cultures of the world (which is in no way certain), there will still be the need for a normative justification of its moral worth. This is because a factual global consensus about ethical principle cannot be the basis of a global ethic: there is still the need to account for why we must abide by the ethical principle of the golden rule. Thus, the justification of the moral imperative inherent in the golden rule is of serious importance with regard to the formulation of a global ethic which seeks to base its universality on the ubiquity of the golden rule.

When one looks at the content of the definition of a global ethic, one sees a number of philosophical problems whose solutions seem extremely difficult. These philosophical problems include: how to arrive at an ethical consensus that would become a global ethic and the use of the term “global ethic.” The question in this regard is this: can one actually talk about a global ethic without implying that the content of ethics in all the various
Global Ethic as a Response to the Clash of Cultures

What, depending on the answer to the previous question, is the difference between a global ethic formulated in the West and other ‘regional’ ethics? If a global ethic is understood as being an ethic that will be universally valid, does it not suppose that the different ‘regional’ ethics have the same content? But this is obviously not the case; one could point to the difference between utilitarianism and Kantian deontological ethics. These two ethical conceptions are close to each other from a cultural and geographical point of view, but they contradict each other fundamentally.

QUO VADIS GLOBAL ETHIC?

To begin our consideration of the way forward for the global ethic project some preliminary observations are necessary. In this regard, it is pertinent to begin with the issue of universal ethics and global ethic. It is true that global ethic seeks an ethical minimum which will apply to everybody in the globalizing world, but does that make it a universal ethic? Is it not misleading to confuse a global ethic with a universal ethics?

The effort of Küng and others in seeking to establish a “better global order” – which has culminated in the formulation and declaration of a global ethic on the basis of a minimal fundamental consensus among major religions and cultures – has little to do with a universal ethic as philosophers understand it. To substantiate this claim, we can point to the fact that the word “global” refers to a desired factual unity of things of different geographical regions, whereas “universal” refers to a theoretical intersubjective recognition of the first principle and rules derived from that principle. By this understanding, universal ethics as such would be a result of practical reasoning, while a global ethic would be a result of a survey of the facts about precepts and practices of the world’s religions and cultures. In other words, a supposed global consensus on ethical issues is a factual discovery through inductive investigation, rather than a conclusion reached by means of a priori reasoning. Furthermore, a universal ethics concerns itself with principles that define the ultimate standards of the good life. It does not allow for the assumption that we know what is good and what is bad before being engaged in the rational process it offers. But a global ethic assumes that we know what is good and bad even before being engaged in the rational process of establishing such concepts.

From this differentiation of a global ethic from a universal ethic we can say that, on the conceptual level, the project of a global ethic has some measure of feasibility but a normative justification has to be provided for the basis of such an ethic. By this I mean that the conceptual possibility of formulating a global ethic alone is not enough to guarantee its practical acceptability. It is only the normative justification of such an ethic that will guarantee its appeal to the rationality and, thus, the assent of people around the world. The feasibility of the development of a global ethic could further be aided by making a case for a global ethics instead of a global ethic.
Recourse could be made to the ethical theory of Kwasi Wiredu to show what the normative justification of a global ethic could look like. In doing this, the following aspects of Wiredu’s formulation of African (Akan) ethics will be brought to the fore, viz., 1) Wiredu’s conceptualization of the concept of sympathetic impartiality and 2) the African concept of community. The common foundational feature of the different approaches to African ethics is the concept of the community. The community comprises not just human beings who could be empirically experienced but also the ancestors who cannot be empirically encountered. In traditional African societies, ethics was articulated and premised on the foundational notion of human welfare. This is why Wiredu seems right in his criticism of Kant where he notes that “the sage insisted that doing your duty is not morally meritorious unless it is done out of respect for duty. Kant spurned any suggestion that human well-being could be the motto of the moral life. On the other hand, by our lights, human well-being is an irreducible presupposition of all morality. Not, of course, that every quest for human well-being is a moral enterprise; but every moral endeavour is a certain kind of quest for human well-being.”

Here lies the basic relevance of African ethics for the normative justification of a global ethic. Global ethic, which seeks to bring about a better world order in the ever globalizing world, must have its orientation towards ensuring human well-being in the globalizing world. This makes the normative justification of such an ethic possible only within the context of an ethical conception which is premised on human well-being in the community. What is of utmost importance in the quest for a normative justification of global ethic from an African ethical perspective is this: the exposition and further development of the fundamental intuition of African ethics (i.e., human well-being in the community) for a larger global spectrum.

Wiredu formulated a vision of an African ethics using the key concept of sympathetic impartiality (the basic principle of morality from an Akan perspective). Sympathetic impartiality is a principle that seeks the harmonization of conflicting human interests. It seeks to attain human well-being by providing the basis for the conceptualization of how a balance could be attained in the tension among the conflicting interests of people within the community. By so doing, this moral principle also creates a balance between one individual’s versus another individual’s interest, individual versus community interest, and community versus individual interests. The harmonization of interests through the principle of sympathetic impartiality is more than just a liberal harmonization of interests because, without it, there could be no possibility of co-existence in the community. The process of attaining this harmonization, for Wiredu, is an argumentative process which culminates, in the ideal situation, in the consent of the parties involved. The normativity of the moral consensus accruing from this process finds its justification in the concern for the well-being of the community. This presupposes a shared concern for the well-
being of the community which makes the harmonization of conflicting human interests imperative. The principle of sympathetic impartiality as a moral norm presents a ground for the normative appraisal of conduct which is different from moral merit or demerit. The principle, thus, has as its background the two ways in which morality is construed; either as a set of rules or as a pattern of conduct cognizant of those rules. Sympathetic impartiality represents a fusion of the two conceptions: the impartiality is what the moral rules embody, and the sympathy is what the moral motivation evinces.

As a common denominator of the rival and pluralistic interests of various agents of the society, sympathetic impartiality is thus described by Kwasi Wiredu:

Let us start with the following minimal premises. We assume that every human being has a concern for his or her own interests, in whatever way the concept of interest might be defined. The problem of morals arises from the fact that not everybody has a natural inclination to be concerned about the interests of others at all times in their conduct. In consideration of this, the following imperative naturally suggests itself. “Let your conduct at all times manifest due concern for the interest of others.” The question, of course, is: “What is due interest?” I propose the following criterion. A person may be said to manifest due concern for the interest of others if in contemplating the impact of his actions on their interests, she puts herself imaginatively in their position, and having done so, is able to welcome the impact.

One does not need to look far to see that the above described principle is essential for the harmonization of interests in any society. On this ground, therefore, it may be asserted that the principle of sympathetic impartiality is a human universal transcending cultures, when cultures are viewed as social forms and customary beliefs and practices.

With his articulation of the principle of sympathetic impartiality which shows the basic idea behind African ethics as understood within the Akan conceptual scheme, Wiredu touches on two important aspects of global ethic which are 1) the justification of the golden rule and 2) the process of arriving at a consensus and not just agreement in the quest for harmonizing conflicting human interests within the society. The path Wiredu points out in his articulation of an African ethics is of immense importance to the possibility of a global ethic because 1) the concept of sympathetic impartiality shows how the inter-subjective structure and the obligatory nature of the golden rule (which is the basic intuition of a globally shared ethical principle) can be justified, and 2) the idea of consent and not agreement of the parties involved in the argumentative process leading to the harmonization of conflicting interests is not only more
realistic but also more desirable. This is because agreement of the parties would involve getting them to discard their original position in favour of a new one, whereas consent only requires acceptance for the sake of peaceful coexistence. This seminal idea of African ethics as articulated by Wiredu shows the path to a rooted but cosmopolitan and normatively intact global ethic.

NOTES

3 Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations, p. 28.
10 Küng and Schmidt, A Global Ethic, p. 41f.
15 Küng and Schmidt, A Global Ethic, p. 15.
18 Wiredu, Cultural Universals and Particulars, p. 29.
19 This point has also been made by Anke Graness in her comparison of the ‘Discuss ethics’ model for global ethic and the model embedded in Wiredu’s consensus ethics. For more details see, Anke Graness, “Das Projekt einer globalen Ethik und die afrikanische Philosophie. Vortrag auf dem 20. Weltkongress der Philosophie,” (1998), http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Afri/AfriGran.htm.
INTRODUCTION

After various discussions during the 1970s and 80s about the ‘return of religion’ into the public sphere, there occurred a distinct shift in the tone of the debates. The immigration of non-Christian groups into Western countries, as well as the contentions of atheists, raised the question of concrete adjustments required by pluralism – the delicate balance between the rights of the individual and those of minorities and majorities. Moreover, religious minorities established in the West – for example, Jews and Jehovah’s Witnesses – as well as atheists, took advantage of the introduction of human rights charters to assert and demand respect for their particular practices. Depending on the national contexts in question, these charters have been interpreted and applied in very diverse manners.

But how can fundamental reflections on secularisation, secularism, and religion influence legal and state decisions regarding religious accommodation? How are we to reflect on the scope and meaning of symbols and religious practices in the public sphere? When it comes to debates about a crucifix on a wall, prayer at a political assembly, a zoning permit to construct a place of worship, a prayer room, a particular leave requested at a public or private institution, a school exemption for religious reasons, or an option of displaying or wearing a religious symbol, how are we to position ourselves – and according to which understanding of politics, religion, culture, human rights, and community life?

These questions have shaken several societies, especially since the 2000s. In Canada, the province of Quebec distinguished itself by the way in which it approached such issues through successive public commissions. In the context of one of these commissions, held in Quebec between 2007 and 2008 and focused on reasonable accommodation for religious practices and beliefs, the philosopher Charles Taylor and the sociologist Gérard Bouchard specifically addressed these issues. This article examines the genesis of the positions that they developed in this report – sometimes called the “Bouchard-Taylor Report on Cultural and Religious Accommodation.”
One may wonder whether these positions were predictable given their respective antecedent reflections. (For several years, both men had been conducting work on nationhood, common life, and related practices and expression.) Thus, after a summary and analysis of a number of aspects of the Report, I turn to the relevant views of Taylor and Bouchard in general. One will see that, in fact, we can trace in their larger work the genesis of their substantive positions on the public sphere and religion, as well as the formulas of pluralism. Note that the aforementioned genesis concerns the very foundations of their reflections.

Admittedly, large sections of the Report represent new work, notably that relating to the management of reasonable accommodation granted to persons wishing that their particular religious practices be respected in different milieus and organizations. The Report offers pages of remarkable material on these facts and practices. Consequently, in addition to the summary and analysis, the first part presents an unprecedented critical analysis of the media reception of several cases of accommodation that have made headlines and caused an uproar in public opinion. This first part concludes that, in most cases, there exists a significant gap between the facts and how they have been reported by the media. The final section of this paper looks at the receipt of the Report, in addition to posing some critical questions about religion in the public sphere.

SECULARISM AND INTERCULTURALISM: SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

The tenor of the Report is marked by a double perspective. On the one hand, it affirms in different ways that Quebec society has already made clear choices with regard to the issue of religious accommodation, and that these choices are themselves part of an international perspective with well-defined legal and political parameters. On the other hand, the Report also recognizes the need to clarify certain aspects that were unclear. The most contentious discussions that were conducted as part of the Commission focused on a number of anticipated issues. How is Quebec different from the rest of Canada? What vision of secularity ought to be adopted? Which values should be reaffirmed and promoted? What are the existing signposts, and which ones require further specification?

Such signposts tend to orient various levels of the regulation of social life. They notably consist of political and legal norms, as well as references specific to each context. With regard to the political, three signposts have long existed: liberal democracy that defends the rights and freedoms of all citizens provided that they respect the rights of others and the collective interest; French as the common public language, as well as the protection of minority languages; and Quebec’s immigration and integration policy, the most recent statement of which dates to 1990. However, for greater clarity, the co-chairs of the Commission recommended that the government define interculturalism and secularism with more precision. We later learned that
the demand for basic texts primarily came from Gérard Bouchard, Charles Taylor being more reluctant with regard to general statements and developed, official public policy.

For several years, interculturalism had been presented as a science-based approach with regard to multiculturalism. The Report states that this approach ought to be further clarified in connection with policy on integration in a piece of legislation, an official statement, or some kind of political statement. The Report also suggests some elements of definition in order to better distinguish the reality of Quebec from the rest of Canada. While certainly very influenced by Canadian multiculturalism, the province of Quebec has opted for an interculturalism – an approach that is more specific, notably by recognizing the existence of a majority ethnic group, namely francophones of French-Canadian origin, concerned about their survival. Thus, we find a response of the commissioners to the identity crisis that had emerged in recent years in Quebec in the face of particular ethno-religious demands. Canadian multiculturalism was envisaged as something more concerned with social cohesion than the preservation of a ‘founding cultural tradition,’ as is the case in the Quebec. As for the rest, in our opinion, several of the proposed aspects intersect with the Canadian multiculturalist model.

The Report also proposes the preparation of a white paper on secularism in order to define the understanding of secularism in Quebec. For several decades, the government of Quebec has presented a range of policies that are respectful of the freedoms of belief and religion. The concept of secularism had been defined in the 1999 report *Laïcité et religion* (Religion in Secular Schools) authored by the *Groupe de travail sur la place de la religion à l’école* (Working Group on the Place of Religion in Schools), commonly referred to as the Proulx Report after its chairperson Jean-Pierre Proulx. Proulx recommended the secularisation of the public school system, though without excluding religious world views within schools, from which arose the notion of an “open secularism,” defined as follows:

> We then deliberated, and finally came to the unanimous conclusion, that the time has come to define the place of religion in our schools from a new perspective. This new perspective provides for open, secular schools that would draw on the common values of citizens and include the study of both religious and secular world views. It recognizes the spiritual dimension of individuals and allows schools to offer common spiritual and religious services if they wish to do so. It also provides that schools may, outside school hours and in keeping with their priorities, make facilities available to religious groups that wish to offer services to their members.
In their report, Bouchard and Taylor discuss a certain number of principles that could form the basis for this open secularism, in which they endorse, most notably, the neutrality of the state: “the ideal proposed here is that of a pluralistic society that achieves an overlapping consensus on basic political principles, i.e., solid agreement between citizens on these principles, even if they adhere to a wide range of fundamental reasons,” notably with regard to religious convictions. Although it has been cited only once, in our opinion this well-known principle, which parallels Rawls’ philosophical horizon on the vision of state neutrality, underpins the entire Report. We will revisit this idea later in this text through an examination of one of Taylor’s reflections. It may partly represent the Canadian Supreme Court’s inspiration for the ruling on the neutrality of the state, released in April 2015.

With regard to the concept of secularism, we have already conducted a semantic study of the Proulx Report, the studies commissioned by the committee, and the briefs that were filed before the hearings that followed. Undeniably, this usage was made according to the distinction, proposed by the historian Jean Baubérot, between secularisation and secularism. The former would refer to a sociocultural phenomenon witnessing the decline of beliefs and practices, while the latter applies to the sphere of the state. Only sometimes employed up until then, the adjective ‘secular’ would no longer be part of the Quebec debates thereafter, something that has important implications that will also be discussed. Baubérot’s distinction would appear in the Bouchard-Taylor Report.

The Report notably addressed two highly contentious issues regarding the management of religion in such a framework: the wearing of religious symbols by employees of the state and the religious heritage of Quebec. On the issue of religious symbols and state employees, the Report concluded that this practice could be permitted if two principles were respected. First, the religious symbol in question ought not hamper the individual’s ability to do their work by representing an excessive constraint. Such would be the case for a burka worn by a teacher; by covering her entire face, it hampers communication with students. Second, the religious symbol should not violate the neutrality of the state. Persons who occupy official positions that have a dimension of authority and must incarnate state neutrality, such as judges, prosecutors, police officers, and the Speaker of the National Assembly, are not to declare their religious affiliation when they perform their duties. (Important to note: this recommendation represents the result of a compromise between Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor. Only the former did not endorse the wearing of religious symbols by state officials.) With this recommendation, the Report deliberately opposes existing case law. Indeed, in the past, courts have rendered such favourable decisions as the wearing of the Sikh turban by members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) whose regulatory hat is a well-known Canadian symbol. In suggesting that certain officials must abstain from the wearing of such symbols, however, the Report
advocates a stricter vision of state neutrality that extends to certain functions performed under the auspices of the state. In pleading for a strong liberal view of individual religious freedom, Bouchard was probably being cautious not to alienate his many colleagues.

The subject of Quebec’s religious heritage is introduced along the following lines: The religion of the majority should not be present in state norms. According to the principle of neutrality, privileges (e.g., denominational public schools) and institutional practices (e.g., theistic prayers said at the beginning of meetings of municipal assemblies) have no place in such contexts. In this regard, the authors of the Report reflect, in part, Canadian jurisprudence, concerning general norms stemming from religious sources, the most famous case being the obligation of the Sunday holiday that was declared unconstitutional in 1985 by the Supreme Court of Canada. The most recent cases related to the same discussion are ones on prayer. The Ontario Court of Appeals opened the possibility for a transdenominational prayer at municipal assemblies, while declaring that a Christian prayer – the “Our Father” – represented something too religious and therefore inappropriate for such assemblies. A decision of the Superior Court declared a theistic prayer non-discriminatory. In Quebec, by comparison, the Human Rights Tribunal ruled clearly in favour of the withdrawal of all such prayers, but it was then overruled by a unanimous decision of the Quebec Court of Appeals in May 2013; the original decision was finally upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada in April 2015.

With respect to heritage symbols, the Report distinguishes between those with regulatory and those with heritage functions. The cross atop Mount Royal represents an example of the heritage function, but the crucifix in the National Assembly affects a regulatory function, a religious affirmation of the majority at the seat of power and policy making. In the second case, the Report recommended removing the religious symbol, a way to detach religious expression from locations in which power is exercised.

Beyond these specific recommendations, the co-chairs advocate a so-called ‘open’ secularism, i.e., one that allows space for individual expressions of religion within public areas and institutions, except in a number of particular cases, based on the same principle of equality that limits majority expression, except with regard to expressions of heritage. It should be noted, however, that in a book co-authored with Jocelyn Maclure, an expert-analyst on the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, that developed its own position shortly after the release of the Report, Taylor takes a different stand with regard to religious symbols worn by certain state officials. While the Bouchard-Taylor Report recommends that public officials whose function has a dimension of authority (e.g., police officers, judges, the Speaker of the National Assembly) should be prohibited from wearing religious accoutrements, the book authored by Taylor and Maclure does not advocate this limitation. Bearing this differing position in mind, what can
we make of the genesis of the fundamental positions of the co-chairs that can be understood as constituting a liberal secularism?

**TAYLOR, MODERNITY, AND RELIGION**

Like Bouchard, Taylor stands in favour of specific identities, whether national in nature or otherwise. Chronicler of the emergence of modern identity, he attacks the subjectivist claim that conceptualizes the subject as a self-determined monad and recalls the conditions for the development of modern identity, under the dialogical mode within one’s surroundings, in the framework of a joint articulation between identity, authenticity, and recognition. In *Sources of the Self*, he postulates horizons of meaning, among which are religions, that can contribute to the constitution of the modern subject.\textsuperscript{11} The political consequences are communitarian, although particular groups are still to be recognized if they have suffered irreparable harm (e.g., women, homosexuals, aboriginals, ethnic groups, etc.).

With regard to religion, Taylor stands out in the landscape of contemporary analytic philosophy by presenting Christianity as a way of overcoming conflicts and as an unsurpassable source of charity, a position surely inspired by René Girard and his work in overcoming the sacrificial logic of violence in the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus, with Christian charity culminating in love for one’s enemies. Yet, Taylor nonetheless is in favour of strict state neutrality in the Western context. With regard to his views on religion in the public sphere, I would underline two points. For Taylor, cultural particularism is more acceptable than religion, except in the cases of non-Christian nations. Also, for several years, Taylor has defended the view, derived from John Rawls, regarding overlapping consensus with regard to neutrality in the public sphere. These ideas are also found at the heart of the Report signed by the co-chairs.

*Recognition of Cultural Differences*

In a shorter work on multiculturalism, Taylor comments that there are two competing liberalisms in North America: the operative type that avoids giving precedence to a vision of the ideal society and fosters collective management of the charters of rights and courts of justice, and the positive type that gives the majority precedence. (Quebec, in this case, is a model, with its legal provisions to protect the French language.)\textsuperscript{12} Sensitive to societies that have been confronted with the challenge of cultural survival, Taylor advocates the more nuanced positive liberal model that accounts for a ‘politics of difference.’ In his essay on multiculturalism, one idea somewhat foreshadows his position as co-chair of the Commission. He mentions the fact that transnational migrations have rendered the expected reactions in the host countries – something of the nature: “This is just the way it is here” – rather problematic. The underlying attitude smacks of
Secularism according to Taylor and Bouchard

contempt and, as Taylor states, we are led back to the problem of recognition.\textsuperscript{13}

As for religion itself, it seemed to have a rather unclear status within culture. In his book, Taylor scarcely emphasizes religion while nonetheless evoking the Christian model of separation – render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s – that is implicitly at work in Western liberalism. Muslim societies, for example, would not have to submit to such a model, something with which Rawls would have probably agreed. Taylor also evoked the relationship with the sacred that exists in older cultures and that merits our respect, since they have created something admirable, a relationship with the good, the sacred, which is held as true and important by many people.

In the introduction to this short work on multiculturalism, Amy Gutman goes much in the same direction. She suggests that the type of liberalism evoked in the debates that put multiculturalists and their adversaries into opposition could never result in a similar neutrality for all institutions. This position seems to suggest that religious, but not cultural, neutrality goes without saying. She cites the American model as illustrative of the separation between church and state, since it avoids identifying any one of its institutions with a particular religious tradition. But in the cultural realm, particular values are promoted within the limits of protective rights.\textsuperscript{14}

My view is that the position of religion in the United States as well as within cultural groups where survival is at stake is altogether unclear. Taylor suggests that the separation between politics and religion in the West is a given, although cultural identities can be supported. The example of the United States is an excellent illustration of the contrary. The separation does not necessarily preclude theistic and deistic expressions in the public sphere: sermons, prayers, currency, symbols, and the like. Above and beyond these considerations, Taylor would support the same position in the Report of the Commission. One of Taylor’s lesser known texts, however, allows an even more explicit reflection on the matter.

Overlapping Consensus (Rawls)

Published in 1998, “Modes of Secularism” outlines the emergence of two strategies employed in the separation of religion and state from the beginnings of modernity.\textsuperscript{15} One opposes state recognition of one particular denomination or religious tradition without excluding the common theistic and deistic space in which various beliefs converge (i.e., the strategy of the common space). This is the American case. The second strategy, initiated by Hobbes and Grotius, postulates the establishment of a political space and a fully independent ethics that places religion in the private sphere, yet without conflicting with religion. The latter made headway in the United States, even though the “One people under God” remains influential.

Religious diversity, and particularly atheism, calls the two models into question. With regard to the independent model, atheists would like to push it even further, as they are often hostile to all traces of religious
influence. Believers generally do not appreciate this perspective to the extent that, according to Taylor, we find them in the literal context of a *Kulturkampf* (culture war) built around a set of societal “fundamentals.”

Taylor thus proposes Rawls’ notion of “overlapping consensus,” which requires a common understanding about a circumscribed group of principles and dimensions. This observation demands that both of the strategies that have existed from the beginnings of modernity be abandoned, since they are too ‘in-line’ with Judeo-Christian norms and world views: “Secularism is not optional in the modern age.”

From here, Taylor develops a number of elements that characterize an imagined community (see the work of Benedict Anderson) in hopes of rallying all citizens. He refers to perverse and exclusive forms of nationalism in order to argue in favour of a minimal space of common understanding. Important for our work, note that Taylor does not exclude the several forms of separation between church and state, though without a complete renunciation of state support where respect for the equality between religions is present (e.g., for schools). He admits that the common space (individual and group rights, democracy, common elements of identity) can sometimes include particularist elements such as history, language, culture and, in certain cases, religion. But according to Rawls’ vision, minimal national identity will not lead to anything resembling a total convergence of moral and religious horizons.

To complete this overview, Taylor’s book, *A Secular Age*, develops a number of aspects that are dear to him. A revealing element perhaps, Taylor only discusses Quebec a few times, and then only in order to discuss the decline of its historically close relationship with Catholicism and the normative receding of its commitment to religious dimensions, such as confessional religious education. It should be noted that the book was completed several months before the Commission’s work began. Taylor argues that religious meaning represents a legitimate horizon for the interpretation of beliefs at the heart of modernity. But we also get a strong sense that he stands in favour of a neutral, pluralist, and egalitarian political space with regard to religion, so that there remains hardly any room for particular religious nationalisms. All of these aspects are also reflected in the final position of the Report co-authored with Bouchard. The following may support the fact that Taylor is quite in line with a Catholic “personalism”, a strong trend before the 1960’s that valued authentic spirituality but that was unsympathetic to a ritual or cultural religion.

A detailed analysis of Taylor’s book by Jean Grondin is illuminating in several respects. Taylor formulates his understanding of modern faith in terms of charity and inner fulfilment. The following argument can be found at the centre of his thesis: faith finds itself in a fragile state during the modern era due to new forms of fulfilment that have enabled humankind to glimpse and discover other forms of self-realization that are not necessarily in opposition to belief. To support this reading, he refers to several models of the converted whose humanitarian works are impressive. His justification of faith in God during the modern era is mainly based on ethical arguments,
and he abandons metaphysical reflections and any consideration of deism as being significant. In this regard, I might add that, for the Canadian philosopher, a reflection on the collective national and political aspects of faith cannot have much relevance. Grondin concludes that, despite its extremely insightful historical analysis, Taylor fails to formulate a philosophy of religion and a truly philosophical justification of belief in modernity. Taylor’s enterprise is ultimately more ethical, historical, and sociological in its scope.

GÉRARD BOUCHARD’S WORK ON COLLECTIVE MYTHS

For several years, Gérard Bouchard has been working on transformations in the collective imaginary. He has reflected on the blending of Quebecois culture and the constitution of a plural national and regional space that can favour a collective identity that is at once national, pluralist, and dynamic. The work that Bouchard co-authored with Alain Roy summarizes his perspectives very well. This research has been conducted on the horizon of a political hope that nourishes Bouchard, that one day the Canadian province of Quebec will become an independent country.

In my opinion, the importance granted to the centrality of official texts as well as the public status approach to religion can be largely traced to Bouchard’s earlier work, especially regarding the following two ideas. The first concerns a national project that welcomes diversity; and the second relates to collective myths. Recall that the Bouchard-Taylor Report devotes several pages to the definitions of political models such as interculturalism and open secularism, thus proposing that the government develop a juridical text or a policy statement for the former, and a white paper on the latter. It is well known that Charles Taylor was uncomfortable with the idea of such official texts, considering that the charters of rights and the legal approach of requests for accommodation to be sufficient. Neither did he endorse the concept of myth – which is, in any case, absent from the Report. The Bouchard-Taylor Report, in this light, can be seen as the product of a consensus, but not a unanimous agreement, of the two academics.

A National Project Welcoming Ethnic Diversity

Bouchard’s 1999 essay on the nation of Quebec is explicit: after several decades of developing a national project of welcoming, free of a legacy of ethnicity, French origins, and related traditions and customs, Quebec found itself grappling with a plurality of divergent or contradictory models; it even witnessed the resurgence of the old French-Canadian identity. Bouchard questions the reformulation of the nation in the face of ethnic and cultural diversity. In strong terms, he diagnoses the destabilization of modern nations. He postulates that the fragility of North American nations constitutes an advantage in comparison to Europe; North American nations are generally more flexible and quicker at adapting to
new challenges. He proposes a national model that eschews the discriminatory practices of an ethnic nation as well as the rational abstraction of a civic nation founded uniquely on the rights of the individual. Bouchard prefers another paradigm, one that combines homogeneity and diversity, which must find a balance in the nation of Quebec as a North American francophone community. Within the framework of an adapted identity apparatus, religion is included as nothing more than stemming from a private choice.24 Undeniably, this question would remain at the heart of his extensive work on the Commission.

The Importance of Collective Myths

Bouchard argues that there can be no national project without a parallel conception of myths. In his 2007 work, based on the diagnosis of a cultural crisis in the West and in Quebec, as expressed by a majority of Quebec intellectuals (a little over 50 per cent among the dozens interviewed), Bouchard makes a number of important contributions to the debate – rather portentous, since the book was published at the cusp of the Commission he would co-chair starting in March 2007. Although he recognizes that serious problems have affected Western societies such as Quebec, he refuses to advocate the pessimistic diagnosis of decline and profound cultural crisis. His favoured analytical tools are the mobilizing myths of a society that are subject to dynamic future manifestations. Far from being absent from the imaginary, national myths are actually being renewed. Powerful myths have long been present in Quebec: the survival of French-Canadians and the “arch myth” of the singular, unifying myth of the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s. After these mobilizing periods, there occurred a fragmentation of myth, a typical configuration of myth in the history of societies. Since the initial myth building period, Bouchard has identified a number of more recent myths that have developed, notably interculturalism, secularism, ‘Americanness,’ modernity, political sovereignty, ‘Quebecness,’ and the rise of Quebecers in the business world – all the ‘manifestation’ myths, and so on.25 Bouchard’s 2007 publication identifies the sources of myth as the work of the intellectual, institutional management, and social ritualization.26

In a number of earlier works, Bouchard developed a more systematic conception of myth. In 2003, he defined what he conceptualized as the “collective imaginary,” i.e., representations that nourish a community’s vision of itself and the other, a world view that includes identity, memory, and utopia. He also studied how a number of myths in Quebec’s past, such as the complex representation of the self, are often in contradiction with reality.27 First, he stated that myth is spread in both the emotional and non-rational realms as well as in the rational realm that provides a sense of formal primary order.28 It includes an unverifiable nature, ranging halfway between reality and fiction. Myth is further defined by the fact that it is created by emotions and beliefs, part of a normative order of effectiveness,
and not primarily about truth or falsity, and it is able to take the form of a narrative, an ideology, an image, or worship.\textsuperscript{29}

The above evinces the constituent features of the study of myths in the social sciences. Yet, it seems that Bouchard’s particular enterprise is focused on myths that have been put into place by intellectuals and ideologues on discourse – something of which he has studied the processes in New World societies.\textsuperscript{30} Another key idea worth mentioning: Bouchard criticizes the shortcuts that embellish or blacken the situation, observable both in the context of certain scientific analyses as well as in media discourses, an idea that would sit at the centre of the work of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission. It appeals to intellectuals who are to play their role in addressing the risk of drifting.\textsuperscript{31} What is to be avoided, Bouchard insists, is the ‘morose’ influence of our French cousins.

Let us look at a few ideas about religion in conclusion. In the 2007 work, with regard to religion during the modern and contemporary era (on the subject of which Bouchard recalls the great contradictory discourses such as ‘the return’ or ‘the disenchantment’), Bouchard concludes with a diagnosis of recomposition and transformation under the signs, for example, of managing matters and the rejection of dogmatism.\textsuperscript{32} Roman Catholicism underwent a major transformation due to the dynamics of choice and freedom that had been prevailing for decades. It is interesting to note that Bouchard, in his 1997 work edited with the French anthropologist Martine Segalen, endorses the thesis of ritual reconstruction by actors and the paradigm of a culture in the process of deconstructing itself while on the verge of the decline of recourse to rites of passage (e.g., birth, marriage, death).\textsuperscript{33}

\textit{Discussion: The “Quebec Model” and the Privatization of Religion}

To conclude this section, I would like to raise a number of points. Bouchard certainly identifies well the richness and complexity of myths. I nonetheless question the power he accords to intellectuals in their formulation. Likely an indication of Taylor’s lack of enthusiasm for the idea, the Report does not include this notion, although it sometimes alludes to the collective imaginary. It seems to me that a myth is largely based on its somewhat unpredictable reception. Under what conditions does a narrative acquire the status of a myth in a society? I would say that, over time, it constitutes a horizon that is responsive to the flow of various debates and historical events. In Quebec, I would suggest that the myth of survival continues to remain active, as is common in most distinct minority societies in which a majority of members share a common origin.\textsuperscript{34} The Bouchard-Taylor Report recognizes this notion in the following observation: “two poles that have constantly guided changes in intercultural thinking in Quebec, i.e., constant tension between the concern for openness and anxiety for the future of the French-speaking community.”\textsuperscript{35}
The list of myths Bouchard includes, from interculturalism to secularism, is rather surprising. While they certainly represent important terms, I would not agree that they have achieved the status of myths in Quebec, at least not yet. However, one of the active myths that has persisted since the Quiet Revolution and that has found its place in the current debates is that of the ‘Quebec model.’ Based on the scale to which they have engaged with this idea, I suspect that it has for many years represented one of the most important sources of emphasis for government commissions. As a result, the idea of a “Quebec secularism” has been claimed. The specificity of the Quebec context undeniably serves as the engine for an intellectual dynamism in search of original lines of interpretation. Recall, too, that even the concept of interculturalism represents a neologism forged in Quebec. Elsewhere in the francophone world, the term interculturality is generally employed.

If we regard the “Quebec model” as a myth, I would define collective myth as follows: a narrative that can be interpreted in a variety of manners, evoked by several groups with divergent interests and ideologies, and creating a collective dynamic. The narrative contains both fact and fiction, truth and falsity, as with the collective memory. In this regard, it is inaccurate to suggest that Quebec represents a ‘model,’ and it is also inaccurate to suggest that its contributions are completely a product of Quebec. But it functions, and it greatly mobilizes media, lobby groups, political parties, and a large number of intellectuals. Undeniably, there exists a very active and widespread interest in ‘making believe’ in this Quebec model.

To return to the final Report of the Commission, it seems to me that its very momentum can be located in this inspiration to both create and identify a Quebec model, no doubt under the influence of Gérard Bouchard: of a specific interculturality, an open secularism that would avoid the extremes of what we find in France – but only with regard to individual expressions of religion, an egalitarian pluralism that distances itself from models that continue to be marked by Christianity or a dominant form of theism, whether in the United States, Europe, or elsewhere. With regard to interculturalism, even though the Report has not taken up the concept of myth, it nevertheless retains references to the collective imaginary in some places. The intention of this inclusion is quite clear, as evidenced in the following excerpt: “Legislation on multiculturalism clarified and popularized the Canadian model, which was subject to intense promotion. It has thus become a core value. It has penetrated the imagination and is now at the heart of Canadian national identity. Why not do as much with Québec interculturalism as an original form of pluralism?” In short, the aim of guiding the social project through the development of collective frameworks that would serve as strong symbolic references, ultimately orients the tenor of the Report by largely following the theoretical approaches of the earlier work of Bouchard.
THE REPORT AND ITS RECEPTION: THE PUBLIC STATUS OF RELIGION

When it comes to religion, it seems as though Bouchard conceptualizes it as being at once an anthropological area of great interest and at the same time to be relegated to a private zone that remains in view of the public sphere. Taylor defends the possibility of believing in the context of an advanced modernity, fostering dynamic religious volunteer activity in both the civic and community spheres, but with no place for religion in arenas of power. Both Bouchard and Taylor strongly advocate a common space that remains neutral with regard to religious conviction. Although the National Assembly of Quebec did not welcome their views on the question, the Supreme Court of Canada did in April 2015.

THE RECEPTION OF THE REPORT: THE GOVERNMENT OF QUEBEC’S VOLTE-FACE

An official act of the Government of Quebec, on the very day of the release of the Report, was to vote in favour of the motion to keep the crucifix on the wall of the National Assembly – thus, going directly against one of the explicit recommendations of the Bouchard-Taylor Report. It is worthwhile to refer to an excerpt that appeared on the website of the state-funded national public broadcaster, the CBC/Radio-Canada, entitled “Québec garde le crucifix” (Quebec Keeps the Crucifix):

Reactions to the presentation of the Report of the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences have not been long in coming.

A few minutes after the presentation of the recommendations of the co-chairs, Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor, the Charest government indicated that it did not intend to remove the crucifix above the seat of the Speaker of the National Assembly.

The announcement of the Charest government was a direct response to the report of the commissioners that recommended that the crucifix above the seat of the Speaker of the National Assembly be relocated to the Parliament...
building in a place where its significance as a heritage piece could be valued.

The Quebec government then made a motion calling for the maintenance of the crucifix in the House on behalf of the heritage and history of Quebec. This motion was passed unanimously by the 100 members present in the National Assembly for the vote.\textsuperscript{37}

The actual text of the motion can be translated as follows: “The National Assembly reiterates its commitment to promote the language, history, culture and values of the nation of Quebec, favouring the integration of each in our nation in a spirit of openness and reciprocity that bears witness to our attachment to our religious and historical heritage represented by the crucifix in our Blue Room and the coat of arms that adorns our institutions.”\textsuperscript{38}

The fact that 100 elected officials voted in this way, including a Muslim, Fatima Houa-Pépin, demonstrates the rift that had formed between the legal, intellectual, and political worlds. Various attempts since to suggest bills in this direction have raised major controversy. It should be mentioned, however, that some politicians admitted to voting without any real sense of conviction. Most notably, during a public conference, the Parti Québécois MNA (Member of the National Assembly), Daniel Turp, a practicing Protestant Christian, recounted that he felt somehow constrained to vote in favour of the motion.\textsuperscript{39} He admitted that several of the MNAs feared the reactions from the segment of the electorate who are very attached to religious symbols.

While the issue continues to be a matter of ongoing discussion, many must be very happy with the April 2015 decision of the Supreme Court of Canada, which ruled against the reciting of a prayer at the beginning of the municipal council meetings of the city of Saguenay, Quebec. For the first time, the court expressed a very strong and unequivocal notion of the neutrality of the state:

The evolution of Canadian society has given rise to a concept of this neutrality according to which the state must not interfere in religion and beliefs. The state must instead remain neutral in this regard, which means that it must neither favour nor hinder any particular belief, and the same holds true for non-belief. The pursuit of the ideal of a free and democratic society requires the state to encourage everyone to participate freely in public life regardless of their beliefs. A neutral public space free from coercion, pressure, and judgment on the part of public authorities in matters of spirituality is intended to protect every person’s freedom and dignity, and it helps preserve and promote the multicultural nature of Canadian society.
Secularism according to Taylor and Bouchard

Justice Clément Gascon, who gave the reasons of the Court, quotes the Bouchard-Taylor Report on this point:

In this regard, I note with interest a passage from the report of the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences entitled Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation (2008). The Quebec government had given this commission a mandate to study the question of religious accommodation in the Quebec context in 2007. In its report, the Commission urged that the following distinction be made: “However, we must avoid maintaining practices that in point of fact identify the State with a religion, usually that of the majority, simply because they now seem to have only heritage value.” [p. 152] (par. 87).

CONCLUSION: OUTSTANDING ISSUES

In conclusion, I would like to revisit the issue of neutrality and common space. For my part, I would advocate a moderate neutrality of the state that is not closed off to all expressions of religion, whether of the majority or minorities. For experts on religion – meaning people who have been formally trained in the in-depth study of religions and not those attached to a discipline that forms cognition based on particular epistemologies regarding certain specific religious questions – the actual terms of the debate have often been unsatisfactory. In the pursuit of equality, various issues have been analysed, such as the wearing of religious symbols, saying prayers in public spaces, the visibility of a religious symbol that is more or less mobile or embedded in connection with the environment in which these diverse expressions are manifested. The relative neutrality of the state that has been achieved has also been evaluated, with regard to the equality between all citizens and their freedoms of conscience and religion. These challenges are important, but they have their limitations.

In the name of freedom of conscience and religion, some have quickly tried to eliminate all forms of religious expression. But what about the actual discrimination instigated by such expression? The 2015 Supreme Court decision is less clear on this particular judicial question. The philosophy of human rights is concerned with discrimination and violations of freedom of conscience. So, how do we evaluate their extent? With regard to the example of the opening prayer at municipal council meetings, the Ontario judgement declares that, if it possesses a certain neutrality (i.e., it is a non-sectarian prayer), its negative impact is not strong enough to merit abolition. With regard to violations of religious freedom, both the impact and intention of the expression are critical factors. The first question from here would be as follows: do religious symbols and practices in arenas of power carry sufficient discriminatory impact? Do they actually compromise the usage of public space? It is one thing to separate the legislative and
administrative authority of the state from those of religious influence. It is another thing entirely to eliminate all forms of religious expression in the public sphere. Most Western countries conserve these outward expressions of religion since they are quite significant for citizens, whether historically, symbolically, or in the realm of belief. But which ones?

The judgement by the Superior Court of Ontario regarding the prayer, already cited, states:

In a pluralistic society religious, moral or cultural values put forward in a public governmental context cannot always be expected to meet with universal acceptance … This conclusion derives considerable support from the fact that the preamble to the Charter itself specifically refers to the supremacy of God … Our national anthems and others refer to God, in coats of arms, oaths and many other governmental contexts.40

On the other hand, the Human Rights Tribunal of Quebec ruled twice against the recitation of public prayer.41 Clearly and firmly, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of a deep respect for equality, stating the following:

Insofar as the practice authorized in Renfrew was one whose effect constituted an insubstantial impairment, that case can be distinguished from the case at bar. Furthermore, although we need not cast doubt on the findings of fact of the judge in that case, the Tribunal’s findings in the instant case are clear. The City’s practice is religious, and its effect on the complainant was more than trivial.” (par. 140)

In brief, the 2015 Supreme Court decision on neutrality is very clear, but other paragraphs leave a door open for more discussion. The same applies for religious symbols. Nevertheless, in the future, the courts will have to take the principle of neutrality as abstention, clearly stated by the Supreme Court, into account.

In a different context (the United Kingdom), in a memorable presidential address (2011) to the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, James Beckford criticized the current fascination with reflections on post-secularism.42 The first reason that justifies his opposition to this concept of ‘post-secularism’, whose use has become inflated, is that Western societies have always maintained close and multiple links with religions. The famous ‘return of religion’ to the public sphere actually reflects a deficiency of analysis. In order to speak about post-secularity with any rigour, we must implicitly refer to a time that is itself ‘secular.’ Yet no detailed analysis has established such a finding. If democracies are meant to assure freedom for citizens and governments against religious authorities and religions themselves, they nonetheless maintain other types of
relationships with these religions: public expressions, social and health services, charities, organizations embedded into the social fabric, and so on. Even though Beckford’s analysis pertains specifically to the British case, his analysis concerns other Western societies as well:

The concept of ‘postsecular’ trades on simplistic notions of the secular. It has a shortsighted view of history. It refuses to examine the legal and political forces at work in regulating what counts as ‘religion’ in public life. There is therefore a danger that talking about the postsecular will be like waving a magic wand over all the intricacies, contradictions, and problems of what counts as religion to reduce them to a single, bland category.43

Even if, on one side of the debate, we can postulate that there has been a fragmentation of both the religious and of individualization, we cannot ignore the actual discriminatory impact of discrete expressions of religion in the public sphere, even though several of the implicated actors would like to conserve them. In another context, however, it should be noted that aboriginal minorities freely practice their forms of spirituality in the political arena. If that is the case, should countries with Christian origins be able to preserve their theistic expressions? At the origin of national tensions caused by religious diversity, perhaps there exists a sentiment that religious tolerance is a concept born uniquely from the individual practices of religious minorities, whether they be the inspirations for open or integral secularism. In this way, it represents a limited tolerance that seeks to eliminate religious and historical traces, as well as theism and deism, particularly from public and political spaces.

In short, should John Rawls triumph with his minimal consensus utopia? The response as well as the question is not in fact so simple. In rereading Rawls’ chapters on the famous concept, we can discover several discussions that focus on fundamental ethical challenges. This liberal philosophical project proposes a rather extended state neutrality, on ethical issues in particular.44 Though a person of extraordinary renown when he passed away in 2002, perhaps Rawls did not succeed in his own national space. Jeffrey Stout even attributes to Rawls a part of the responsibility for the polarizing of positions in the United States since the 1970s.45 In face of such a liberal secularist project advocated by certain fringes of intellectuals, the religious attitudes of those who were once liberal have become traditionalist, e.g., Stanley Hauerwas. In France, a similar debate can be identified in the work of Jean Baubérot whose friend and adversary, Jean-Paul Willaime, recently criticized the notion of extended secularism regarding public expression of religion.46 Willaime advocated a secularism that recognized religions as partners of the state at various levels.

In closing, we can assert that the debates on these questions are in some ways only just beginning. Between 2004 and today, the Supreme
Court of Canada has seemingly modified its point of view on the tolerance of religious accommodation practices for minority groups, giving in some cases fewer rights to religious minorities (e.g., Hutterites in Alberta). The Court even limited reasonable accommodation in the work place. Again, in April 2015, it took a liberal and republican turn in the Canadian public sphere. Our societies thus continue on the quest for the appropriate management of pluralism, the contours of which can change even over the course of a few months. Particular regional, national, continental, intercontinental, and international contexts add further complexity to the discussions at hand.

NOTES

1 See G. Bouchard and C. Taylor, Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation (Québec: Commission de consultation sur les pratiques d’accommodement reliées aux différences culturelles, 2008), p. 135. I participated in these debates for several years since the Chair of Religion, Culture, and Society has been entrusted with the study of religion in the public sphere. I was among a group of fifteen experts who served as counsel to Bouchard and Taylor throughout the course of the commission.


7 Bouchard and Taylor, Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation, 152.

8 R.C. Big M Drug Mart Ltd. [1985] 1 R.C.S. 295. This decision lifts the prohibition of conducting commerce on Sundays. In actuality, Sunday remains a generally quieter day than others of the week, with many employees reposing from their Monday to Friday schedule, and stores often opening later in the day on Sundays.

9 Among the decisions taken in Canada, there are: Mouvement laïque Québécois v. Saguenay (City), 2015 SCC 16; Cour d’appel du Québec. Saguenay (Ville de) c. Mouvement laïque québécois 2013 QCCA 936; Tribunal des Droits de la Personne. L’Honorable Michèle Rivet. Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse c. Laval (Ville de) 2006 QCTDP 17;

13 Taylor, Multiculturalisme, p. 87. With regard to religion, Taylor places attention on the distinction between positive and operative moral obligations. In Taylor’s estimation, the most clear thinker on the subject is Dworkin (1978) who distinguished between two moral obligations. 1) A positive obligation—a particular positive view on particularities. But beyond our ontological views whether on the purpose of life or the ideal life, we are still supposed to treat others fairly. This takes us to the second type of obligation, the operative. Society is driven by an operational obligation to treat all people with respect. So, the majority ought to avoid imposing a privileged conception of virtue so as not to give the impression that they feel they are superior to minority groups (77-79). See R. Dworkin, ‘Liberalism’, Public and Private Morality, S. Hampshire (ed.), (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1978).
16 Taylor, “Modes of Secularism”, 36.
19 Taylor, A Secular Age, p. 598.
20 On personalism in Quebec, see notably E.-Martin Meunier, Le pari personnaliste. Modernité et catholicisme au XXe siècle, (Montréal: Fides, 2007).
24 Bouchard, La nation québécoise, p. 28.
26 Bouchard, La culture québécoise est-elle en crise?, p. 145.
32 Bouchard, *La pensée impuissante*, p. 150.
Translation of: “Les réactions à la présentation du rapport de la Commission de consultation sur les pratiques d'accommodement reliées aux différences culturelles ne se sont pas fait attendre. Quelques minutes à peine après la présentation des recommandations des commissaires Gérard Bouchard et Charles Taylor, le gouvernement Charest a fait savoir qu'il n'avait pas l'intention de retirer le crucifix qui surplombe le siège du président à l'Assemblée nationale. Cette annonce du gouvernement de Jean Charest était une réaction directe au rapport des commissaires qui recommandaient que « le crucifix au-dessus du siège du président de l'Assemblée nationale soit retiré et remplacé dans l'Hôtel du Parlement à un endroit qui puisse mettre en valeur sa signification patrimoniale ». Le gouvernement du Québec a alors déposé une motion réclamant le maintien du crucifix en Chambre au nom du patrimoine et de l'histoire du Québec. Cette motion a été adoptée à l'unanimité par les 100 députés présents à l'Assemblée nationale pour ce vote.”
38 Translation of: “Que l'Assemblée nationale réitère sa volonté de promouvoir la langue, l'histoire, la culture et les valeurs de la nation québécoise, favorise l'intégration de chacun à notre nation dans un esprit d'ouverture et de réciprocité et témoigne de son attachement à notre patrimoine religieux et historique représenté par le crucifix de notre Salon bleu et nos armoiries ornant nos institutions.”
Secularism according to Taylor and Bouchard

At the centre of Maritain’s political philosophy is the notion of integral humanism, which he developed in a series of lectures delivered in 1934, first published in 1936 under the title Humanisme intégrale, and later published in English translation as True Humanism or Integral Humanism.¹ The integral humanism of which he writes is proposed as the basis of political activity that is “Christianly-inspired, and ordered to a Christian temporal ideal”², yet it aims to enlist the active participation of those who are not Christian, and perhaps not even theists. Maritain calls this integral humanism theocentric, for it recognizes that “God is the center of man.” He thus distinguishes it from anthropocentric humanism, according to which “man himself is the center of man, and therefore of all things.”³

I am not going to be considering all aspects of Maritain’s integral humanism, but shall be looking at it insofar as it is open to a greater-than-human reality. I shall ask whether Maritain’s integral humanism, or something akin to it, is desirable in its own right, and also whether it might provide a basis for social harmony and the avoidance of cultural clashes in a diverse modern society. If I am correct, something like it is desirable, although to preserve social harmony in our own times it might be better described as a religiously inclusive humanism.

INTEGRAL HUMANISM COMPARED TO EXCLUSIVE HUMANISM

In A Secular Age, Charles Taylor writes of a phenomenon which he says was unprecedented in history prior to the rise of secularism in the West during the past 500 years.⁴ That phenomenon is the gradual emergence of what he calls self-sufficing humanism or exclusive humanism as a widely available option. What Taylor means by exclusive humanism is very similar, though perhaps not identical, to what Maritain means by anthropocentric humanism. Taylor says that it is “a humanism accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything beyond this flourishing.”⁵ The only example of exclusive humanism that Taylor recognizes in the ancient world is Epicureanism.⁶ It is not to be found in the views of the Stoics or the Platonists, both of which, according to Taylor, “placed us in a larger spiritual and cosmic order,” as did the views of Aristotle, which are said to have placed importance on “the
contemplation of a larger order as something divine within us.” Exclusive humanism is said to have arisen in modern times out of Christian forms of humanism. According to Taylor, it was not until the late nineteenth century that expression had been given to a number of fully-developed forms of exclusive humanism.8

Born into the latter era in 1882, it would be an important part of Maritain’s life work to reply to and contest various forms of exclusive humanism, such as “bourgeois liberalism” and Marxism. In support of his position, he would appeal to ancient and medieval sources such as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas.

AN OPEN DEFINITION OF HUMANISM

On the first page of his introduction to Integral Humanism, Maritain paraphrases Aristotle’s position as stated in the Nicomachean Ethics, and in so doing summarizes his own reason for rejecting exclusive humanism: “To propose to man only the human, he remarked, is to betray man and to wish his misfortune, because by the principal part of him, which is spirit, man is called to a better than purely human life.”9 This “great pagan wisdom,” Maritain maintains, cannot be severed from our tradition of humanism; at the very least, he says, “we are warned…not to define humanism by the exclusion of all reference to the superhuman and by the denial of all transcendence.”10 He then proceeds to define humanism broadly, in a way which he says would allow it to be “developed along very divergent lines.” According to his definition, humanism “tends essentially to render man more truly human, and to manifest his original greatness by having him participate in all that which can enrich him in nature and history (by ‘concentrating the world in man,’ as Scheler said approximately, and by ‘dilating man to the world’).”11 Humanism is also said to demand that we develop our inner potentialities and that we work to make physical forces the instruments of our freedom.

Notice that the foregoing definition of humanism, which Maritain offers only in order “to leave the whole discussion open,” is not strictly speaking a definition of integral or theocentric humanism, because it does not make explicit reference to a divine being. It does, nevertheless, call for a certain openness of humanity to otherness, as in “dilating man to the world.” It is not an exclusive humanism, because it conceives of the human being as part of a larger cosmic order. Let us, for the sake of convenience, call this Maritain’s open definition of humanism.

Although Maritain does not put it exactly this way, his open definition of humanism, inasmuch as it conceives of humanity being enriched by opening to the world and participating in nature, leaves open a fruitful middle ground between integral humanism, in its full Christian sense, and extreme anthropocentric humanism which makes man, in the words of Protagoras, “the measure of all things.” Maritain’s integral humanism, so far as it is theocentric, presupposes a personality in man
whose needs “surpass the whole order of the universe,” and which therefore cries out to be in relation with the divine. But the open definition of humanism calls only for the enrichment of human personality by participation in the world, without explicit reference to the divine.

A humanism of the open definition, which nevertheless falls short of integral humanism, may be found in an earlier stage of Maritain’s own philosophical development: his period of Bergsonism before his conversion to Catholicism. At the time of his initial encounter with the thought of Henri Bergson, Maritain was part of a small group, which included Charles Péguy and Georges Sorel, who were looking for the “revelation of a new metaphysics.” In other words, he and the others were looking for a new science which would open the door to “being as such” and help explain its ultimate causes and principles. Bergson’s lectures at the Collège de France offered hope to minds such as theirs, which had been “engaged to their sorrow by agnosticism or materialism” and “brought up in the most depressing pseudo-scientific relativism.” The hope came when, “with the most unforgettable emphasis,” Bergson said that “it is in the absolute that we live and move and have our being.” Bergson’s philosophy ultimately failed to satisfy Maritain’s longing for an explicit metaphysics. But its affirmation of our connection with the absolute, which represents being as such and a larger cosmic order which transcends human subjectivity, saved him from despair. It was enough to persuade him and another student at the Sorbonne, Raïssa Oumançoff, to abandon their suicide pact and to become engaged to be married. Bergsonism thus served as a way-station for the young couple on the road to theism and integral humanism. Long after his conversion, Maritain would continue to speak of “the absolute” as well as of “an Absolute superior to this world.”

Bergsonism is obviously not the only humanism that inhabits the middle ground between Maritain’s theocentric and Christianly-inspired integral humanism on the one hand, and forms of exclusively anthropocentric humanism on the other. Another example of such a humanism may be found in a thinker identified by Charles Taylor as a proponent of an exclusive humanism and of an “immanentizing moral power,” but who (in the passage quoted by Taylor) actually expresses an openness to what is more than human. This prominent twentieth century philosopher finds two different natures in us, one which is finite and self-centred, and another (not unlike the divine element which Aristotle finds in us) which “shines impartially,” for it is “universal, absolute and impartial.” This philosopher says that our universal and impartial nature “rises above the life of the senses,” that it “aims simply at what is good, without regarding the good as mine or yours,” and that “its impartiality leads to truth in thought, justice in action, and universal love in feeling.” “Distant ages and remote regions of space,” he says, “are as real to it as what is present and near.” It may come as a surprise that the philosopher who made those statements, in an essay first published in 1912 entitled “The Essence of Religion,” was none other than Bertrand Russell. Although
Russell is well known for his agnosticism and his rejection of Christianity, he was not always averse to contemplation of a larger spiritual and cosmic order, and in the essay in question he retains a somewhat Platonic notion of the good. The point I want to make is that some common ground exists even between philosophers as different as Maritain and Russell, inasmuch as Russell’s humanism is open to the world and to a realm of absolute value.

MARITAIN’S CHRISTIAN PLURALISM

Let us now consider the extent to which Maritain provides for common cause between his theocentric and explicitly Christian integral humanism, and forms of humanism which may not be avowedly Christian or even explicitly religious, but which do not make man the measure of all things.

In Integral Humanism, Maritain unabashedly calls for a “new Christendom,” which nevertheless differs in important ways from the regime of mediaeval Christendom. The new Christendom is to be characterized by five main features discussed in the fifth chapter. They are: (1) pluralism; (2) the autonomy of the temporal sphere, which means that the state is supreme in its own sphere, and not an instrument at the disposal of any religious authority; (3) the freedom of persons to pursue their spiritual perfection free of coercion by the state; (4) “unity of social race,” by which Maritain means a recognition of the equal dignity of all human persons; and (5) the realization of a community bound together by fraternal love. Moreover, the new Christendom is conceived of as democratic in its form of governance. Of the five main features, I will focus on Maritain’s vision of pluralism.

The pluralism envisaged by Maritain is one of “diverse social groupings and structures,” which perform a variety of functions, including economic and juridical functions, and which come together in “an organic unity.” The place of these social groupings and structures, intermediate between the individual and the state, is recognized in the principle of subsidiarity, as stated in Catholic social teaching and quoted by Maritain.

Maritain himself says that “the most meaningful application” of “the pluralist principle,” pertains to “relations between the spiritual and the temporal” in a religiously diverse society. The pluralist solution which he proposes is neither the religious monism of the mediaeval state, nor a liberal pluralism which would treat all human opinions as equal and allow each “spiritual family” to be a law unto itself, but something midway between those two alternatives. The legislature of the commonwealth would grant each spiritual group a particular juridical status, taking into account both the condition of each group and the overall orientation of the body politic toward the virtuous life and “the perfection of natural law and Christian law.” “The body politic,” says Maritain, “would be directed toward a positive pole that would be integrally Christian, and its different structures
would deviate more or less from this pole, according to a measure determined by political wisdom."25

Thus, Maritain in *Integral Humanism* proposes what he calls a “vitally Christian” city. He rejects any attempt to seek unity based upon a philosophic minimum or common denominator, citing the alleged failure of philosophers – including Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel and Comte – to provide European civilization with a unifying principle no longer found in faith.26 The quest for a common denominator is dismissed as “a pathway to intellectual mediocrity and cowardice, weakening minds, and betraying the rights of truth.”27

**METHOD OF PERSUASION**

How does Maritain expect that non-Christians would be persuaded to support this Christianly-inspired state, given that, according to his principle of plurality, their social groupings would be accorded a somewhat inferior status in the pluralist democracy of the new Christendom? That is, their opinions and ways of worship (if any) would be tolerated for the sake of a social peace and out of respect for the individual conscience, but their errors would in no way be approved.28

Maritain suggests that remarkable Christian leaders will arise, who will have the ability to overcome such obstacles and to persuade others of the advantages of the Christian conception:

> Because the bearers of this Christian conception will have had enough spiritual energy, enough force and political prudence to practically exhibit to men capable of comprehension that such a conception is in conformity with sound reason and with the common good; and also, because men capable of comprehension are few in number – to awaken, and to merit the confidence of others, [and] to win the moral authority of veritable leaders . . .29

Notice that Maritain says that the bearers of the Christian conception will *practically exhibit* to those capable of comprehension that their conception is in conformity with sound reason, *not* that they will do so by rational argumentation.

Years later, after the end of the Second World War, Maritain had the opportunity to exercise his own skills of practical persuasion, although not precisely in the context of Christian evangelization. In *Man and the State*, Maritain speaks of the process, in which he played an important role, of the preparation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights published by the United Nations in 1948. He does not attribute the remarkable cross-cultural agreement to a process of reasoning from rationally-known theoretical principles (where theoretical principles tell us what “is”) to practical conclusions (which tell us what “ought” to be). Rather, he says that the
agreement on practical truths came about despite the fact that the participants, who differed in religious faith, ideology, and philosophical commitments, began from “extremely different, or even basically opposed, theoretical conceptions.” He says that it would be “quite futile to look for a common rational justification of these practical conclusions and these rights.” Instead, he attributes the agreement on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to “the basic practical ideology, and the basic principles of action implicitly recognized today, in a vital if not formulated manner, by the consciousness of free peoples” and of “a sort of unwritten common law, at the point of practical convergence of extremely different theoretical ideologies and spiritual traditions.” In other words, Maritain attributes the agreement to principles of the natural law, which he contends are known to us by a process in which reason plays a subordinate role, being guided and directed by “affective inclinations and dispositions of the will.”

Maritain, in *Man and the State*, seems to regret the failure to have reached a shared rational justification for the agreement achieved on human rights at the U.N. He says that rational justifications are “indispensable,” since “each of us believes instinctively in the truth, and only wishes to give his consent to what he has recognized as true and rational.” In the same book, he says that in order to establish a new Christianly-inspired civilization, it will be necessary to revive latent Christian feelings and moral structures which can be traced back to the old Christendom, and “to persuade the people, or the majority of the people, of the truth of Christian faith, or at least of the validity of Christian social and political philosophy.” The question remains as to how people might be persuaded of the validity of Christian social and political philosophy in the absence of a commonly accessible rational justification of practical conclusions. In speaking of philosophical positions, which ought to be rationally accessible and not held on the basis of faith alone, I suggest that Maritain does not provide us with an entirely satisfactory answer, and that more work needs to be done.

**SUPERIORITY OF INTEGRAL HUMANISM**

Another key question remains to be addressed more fully. Why favour a theocentric or integral humanism as opposed to an exclusively anthropocentric humanism? On this point Maritain is clear, passionate, and insistent. As we have seen in his paraphrase of Aristotle in the introduction to *Integral Humanism*, he considers a restriction of humanism to what is merely human to be a betrayal of our humanity, for we are called to something better. Maritain believes in a humanism “nourished at the heroic sources of sanctity,” a humanism which he says “leads man to sacrifice and to a truly superhuman grandeur, because in that case human suffering opens its eyes and is borne in love – not in the renunciation of joy, but in a greater thirst, a thirst which is already joy’s exaltation.”
Western humanism has, according to Maritain, “religious and transcendent sources without which it is incomprehensible to itself.” By *transcendent* sources, he means “all forms of thought... which find as a principle of the world a spirit superior to man, which find in man a spirit whose destiny goes beyond time, and which find at the center of moral life a natural or supernatural piety.” This definition of the transcendent acknowledges the contribution not only of Christianity, but also of the classical Greco-Roman tradition of Homer, Sophocles, Socrates, and Virgil. Secondly, he maintains that so far as contemporary forms of humanism in the West retain “some common conception of human dignity, of liberty and disinterested values,” they retain them as “a heritage of ideas and sentiments once Christian but today little loved.”

It is a recurrent theme in Maritain’s writing that, as he puts it in *Man and the State*, “the direct ordination of man to God” is “the bedrock of human dignity.” The same idea is stated in *The Rights of Man and Natural Law*, written in the early 1940s:

> The worth of a person, his liberty, his rights, arise from the order of naturally sacred things, which bear upon them the imprint of the Father of Being, and which have in Him the goal of their movement. A person possesses absolute dignity because he is in direct relationship with the absolute, in which alone he can find his complete fulfillment. His spiritual fatherland consists of the entire order of things which have absolute value, and which reflect, in some way, an Absolute superior to the world and which draw our life towards this Absolute.

Notice that for all of Maritain’s references to God and his reliance upon specifically Christian and Catholic sources, in speaking of the “absolute” and of “the order of things which have absolute value,” he also appeals to those readers who might only have a vague sense of the transcendent without a belief in a personal Deity. As contrasted to the “last word” and the “deepest layer” found in religious thought, the most basic and minimal expression of this approach simply looks to the human person’s direct relationship, unmediated by the community, to a realm of absolute value.

This direct relationship of the human person to the absolute is notably lacking in the politically-relevant examples of anthropocentric humanism that are Maritain’s main targets in *Integral Humanism*: bourgeois liberalism and the spirit of capitalism on the one hand, and Marxism on the other. Both of those, for Maritain, leave us with an unacceptably diminished notion of what it is to be human. Maritain in some detail describes their deficiencies, including forms callousness and disrespect for human dignity.
One may object that Maritain, who says he is neither of the Left or Right, is unfair in his characterization of one or the other ideology. But what he does pinpoint successfully is the stultifying effect of any humanism which excludes access to the absolute and transcendent, whether this occurs in the context of a commitment to Marxism or socialism, or a commitment to capitalism as a totalizing ideology. Human beings are free insofar as they stand in relation to the universe and to God, regardless of how they may or may not conceive of God. They cannot be comprehensively defined by their roles in any humanly-devised system of politics or economics. A public conception of the human person that limits itself to an exclusive humanism is bound to lead to social tension by neglecting a crucial aspect of our makeup.

Even supposing it would be possible to construct a society based upon a more benign sort of anthropocentric humanism than the forms depicted by Maritain, we would be left with the sense of emptiness, flatness and general dissatisfaction which Taylor finds to be a defining feature of the secular age. On the other hand, passionate religious belief, for all of its deep meaning and high-mindedness, may lead to religious intolerance and cultural clashes. This is a dilemma squarely faced by Maritain. His political philosophy seeks to resolve the dilemma with the principle of plurality, which tolerates, but does not approve of, certain errors as a lesser evil for the sake of social peace as well as for the sake of the rights of conscience.

The principle of plurality is not, however, to be understood as calling for mere tolerance of any human being, for a person in error is not reducible to the error. In regard to the person, as distinct from the person’s beliefs and practices, the governing principle is that of fraternal love. In a later essay, Maritain says that there is “real and genuine tolerance” only in the case of one who is firmly convinced of a truth, or of what one holds to be a truth, and who respects the rights of others who deny the truth. The rights of those others to exist and to speak their own minds arises not because they are free from the demands of truth, but because of their human nature and their human dignity and “those very resources and living springs of the intellect and of conscience which make them potentially capable of attaining the truth.” In the same essay, Maritain expresses a preference for the word “fellowship” over “tolerance,” in part because it connotes something positive in human relationships. On the other hand, this fellowship is not to be purchased at the price of any diminishment of “what is due to truth.”

At the turn of the last century, two young people, Jacques Maritain and Raïssa Oumançoff, vowed to end their lives if they did not find an alternative to the intolerable emptiness of the anthropocentric humanism and the scientific positivism of their day. First, they discovered Bergson’s philosophy; later they converted to Catholicism. It would eventually become a key part of Maritain’s life work to propose a form of human social organization which would enable people of faith to live in harmony with those of different religious and philosophical views, without
sucumbing to intellectual mediocrity and without betraying the rights of truth.

For Maritain, not betraying the rights of truth meant the establishment of a pluralist democracy with an avowedly Christian orientation, moderated by civil tolerance. Having lived through the ideological tumult and the two world wars of the first half of the twentieth century, Maritain presents us with a stark alternative. He says, “the world is done with neutrality. Willingly or unwillingly, States will be obliged to make a choice for or against the Gospel. They will be shaped either by the totalitarian spirit or the Christian spirit.”

**HOW MIGHT THIS WORK TODAY?**

Today, the realization of Maritain’s ideal of a pluralist democracy with an avowedly Christian orientation seems more remote than ever. In Canada, for example, we cannot turn the clock back to the 1950s, when the country saw itself as a Christian democracy. Today we are dealing with a much different demographic situation. Large segments of the population profess either a non-Christian religious belief, or no religious belief at all. How, then, can Maritain’s integral humanism be relevant for our times?

Maritain’s central point is still valid. A humanism that excludes access to the absolute, the divine, and the transcendent involves a reduction to a life less than fully human. It also makes it more difficult to speak of the inherent dignity of the human person, which is the basis of human rights, if it is not recognized that we bear the imprint of the divine or stand in relation to the absolute. Persons capable of a conscious relationship with the divine and transcendent have unmediated access to ultimate meaning and value. As such, they cannot be treated as mere parts of the body politic, or as indebted to the political order for their very humanity. Maritain contends that the political common good in its very essence involves a recognition of something greater than itself: the vocation of the human person to goods which transcend it. For this reason, public life ought to be open to what he calls the absolute or the transcendent.

How is this to be achieved? In *Integral Humanism*, Maritain says that Christians who have “a full and total grasp of the end to be attained” will take the initiative in the common work of the political community. Others who are not Christian, but who have at least a limited grasp of the truths known more fully in the Gospel, will also be enabled to participate, “perhaps without being the least generous or the least devoted.” In our own times, however, we cannot assume that our political leaders will always be professed Christians. Nor can we assume that a proclamation in the political sphere that the fullness of truth is to be found in the Gospel will be generally acceptable, even among those who are in substantial agreement with the Gospel’s moral teaching. Those of us who still share Maritain’s belief in the desirability of a Christianly-inspired body politic need to develop a public language open to transcendent truth, but which is not
explicitly Christian, which will enable us to find common cause with other people of goodwill.

This is not to suggest that explicitly religious and Christian language has no place in the public sphere, or that there will never again be a Christian consensus, or that people should compromise their religious beliefs. Nevertheless, explicitly Christian language has certain limitations and is unlikely to foster a consensus that includes those who are not inclined to accept Christianity. In a religiously diverse society, it should at least be supplemented by language that speaks to the great majority of the population, Christian and non-Christian alike. Maritain himself, in his open definition of humanism, in his early Bergsonism, and in his appeal to the ancient pagan wisdom, shows that we can speak of ethical and metaphysical truths compatible with Christianity and other world religions, without appealing to religious revelation or using explicitly Christian language. And indeed, Christian theology has been enriched by language and concepts borrowed from pagan philosophers such as Aristotle and Plotinus, and has developed its doctrines using those philosophical tools.

The development of a public language open to transcendent truth ought to include a further development and refinement of the language of the natural law and natural rights, so as to make a rational appeal to the “basic principles of action” which Maritain, after his experience of the United Nations and UNESCO, found to be implicitly recognized in the consciousness of free people. The basic principles of action are also known as first practical principles, or the first principles of the natural law, which according to Aquinas are self-evident to human reason. Knowledge of them is independent of religious belief. While there is bound to be legitimate disagreement about practical conclusions that apply in particular and complex factual situations, the first practical principles, concerning which Aquinas says no one errs, are the indispensable starting-points for any rational discussion of human action. These principles include what Aquinas calls the precepts of love, including love of neighbour (expressed at a minimum as “one should do evil to no human being” or “avoid offending those among whom one has to live”) and principles specifying basic human goods which ought not be violated. They need to be supplemented by recognition of something that is not necessarily self-evident, but which Maritain forcefully argues for, and which is supported by Christian doctrine: that all human beings (not only one’s own family, race or tribe) are our neighbours inasmuch as they are possessed of dignity which demands respect and gives rise to human rights.

Let me close with a brief mention of John Rawls, who in his influential book, Political Liberalism, looks for an enduring social peace based upon an overlapping consensus of reasonable doctrines. Inasmuch as Rawls’s political conception, in the words of its author, “does without the concept of truth,” it apparently involves what Maritain would call “a betrayal of the rights of truth.” Although Rawls disavows skepticism or indifference to truth, he proposes that the question of the truth of his
polITICAL CONCEPTION BE REMOVED FROM THE POLITICAL SPHERE AND CONFINED TO DISCUSSION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF EACH OF THE “COMPREHENSIVE DOCTRINES” THAT FORM THE OVERLAPPING CONSENSUS. 61 ON THE OTHER HAND, MARITAIN WOULD HAVE FOUND SOME COMMON GROUND WITH RAWLS WHERE RAWLS SPEAKS OF “THE PLAIN TRUTHS, NOW WIDELY ACCEPTED, OR AVAILABLE, TO CITIZENS GENERALLY,” 62 IT IS WITH REFERENCE TO SUCH PLAIN TRUTHS, WHICH INCLUDE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF THE NATURAL LAW, AND SECONDARY PRECEPTS DERIVED THEREFROM, THAT WE MAY FIND THE BASIS OF AN AUTHENTIC SOCIAL PEACE. IF MARITAIN IS FUNDAMENTALLY CORRECT IN ADVOCATING INTEGRAL HUMANISM IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE, AND I MAINTAIN THAT HE IS, WE MUST AT THE VERY LEAST BE OPEN TO PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF THE TRANSCENDENT AND OF TRUTH AS TRUTH. IT OUGHT TO BE POSSIBLE FOR US TO DO THAT, IN A REASONABLE WAY, WITHOUT DISTURBING THE SOCIAL PEACE. ANY SOCIAL PEACE PURCHASED AT THE PRICE OF CLOSING OFF THE REALM OF TRANSCENDENT TRUTH WOULD NOT BE WORTHY OF THE NAME.

NOTES


2 Integral Humanism, p. 318.

3 Integral Humanism, p. 169.


5 Taylor, A Secular Age, p. 18.

6 Taylor, A Secular Age, p. 19.

7 Taylor, A Secular Age, p. 27.

8 Taylor, A Secular Age, p. 28; cf. pp. 242-95.

9 Maritain, Integral Humanism, p. 152; see Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 10.8.

10 Integral Humanism, p. 153.

11 Integral Humanism, p. 153.


13 What is probably Maritain’s most lucid explanation of what he means by metaphysics may be found in his An Introduction to Philosophy, trans. E.I. Watkin (London: Sheed & Ward, 1947), p. 80, including footnotes.

14 Maritain, Ransoming the Time, p. 53. The quotations in the next sentence are from the same page.


16 See quotation, *infra*, from *The Rights of Man and Natural Law*.


18 Aristotle’s divine element is referred to in passing by Taylor, as quoted above. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.8, 1177b26-1178a4.


21 *Integral Humanism*, p. 256.

22 Maritain, *Integral Humanism*, p. 256, quoting Pius XI, Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*: “It is an injustice, a grave evil and a disturbance of right order for a larger and higher organization to arrogate to itself functions which can be performed by small and lower bodies.”

23 *Integral Humanism*, p. 257.

24 *Integral Humanism*, p. 258.

25 *Integral Humanism*, p. 258.

26 *Integral Humanism*, pp. 258, 262.

27 *Integral Humanism*, p. 262.

28 Maritain, *Integral Humanism*, p. 258. See also *Man and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 169, n.25. In *Man and the State*, Maritain quotes the passage in question from *Integral Humanism*, “with some amendments to the English translation.” Notice that in the later book he retains the essence of the principle of plurality: “To me this principle signifies that, in order to avoid greater evils (that is, the ruin of society’s peace and either the petrification or the disintegration of consciences), the commonweal could and should tolerate (to tolerate is not to approve) ways of worship more or less distant from the true one...”

29 *Integral Humanism*, p. 262.

30 *Man and the State*, p. 76.

31 *Man and the State*, pp. 76, 78.

32 In regard to “affective inclinations and dispositions of the will,” by which the intellect is said to be “guided and directed,” see Maritain, “On Knowledge Through Connaturality,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 4 (1951), p. 474. See also Maritain, *Man and the State*, pp. 91-92: “That kind of knowledge is not clear knowledge through concepts and conceptual judgments; it is obscure, unsystematic, vital knowledge by connatural or congeniality, in which the intellect, in order to bear judgment, consults and listens to the inner melody that the vibrating strings of abiding tendencies make in the subject.”
Integral Humanism or Exclusive Humanism?

33 Man and the State, p. 77.
34 Man and the State, p. 167.
36 Integral Humanism, pp. 153-54.
37 Integral Humanism, p. 154.
38 Integral Humanism, p. 154.
39 Integral Humanism, p. 155.
40 Man and the State, p. 149.
43 In the case of Marxism, the error of eliminating transcendence and making economics the preponderant aspect of human life is compounded by its dialectical materialism wherein, as Maritain puts it using Aristotle’s language, “material causality thus becomes purely and simply the primary causality” (Integral Humanism, p. 184). In regard to the Soviet Union under Stalin in the 1930s, Maritain writes of the “complete contempt for the human person” under a totalitarian Marxist system characterized by its harshness, its use of terror and its “bureaucratic despotism” (Integral Humanism, p. 205). Bourgeois liberalism and its ideology of capitalism, inasmuch as they neglect the transcendent and give first priority to economics, hardly fare any better in Maritain’s view than Marxism or the Soviet system. Indeed, Maritain blames the de facto atheism of bourgeois liberalism for giving birth to the same element of atheism in Marxism, which is thus described as a “tributary of bourgeois liberalism” (Integral Humanism, p. 202). Nor does Maritain dismiss the Marxist critique of bourgeois liberalism (Integral Humanism, p. 203). Bourgeois liberalism is no less dehumanizing than Marxism, for in the bourgeois liberal’s spirit of capitalism “the poor man is there as an instrument, and not as a human person,” and “the rich man exists only as consumer or paunch, not as a person” (Freedom in the Modern World, p. 69). The spirit of capitalism, as conceived by Maritain, is not only “a spirit of bold and courageous conquest of the earth”; it is also “a spirit of enslavement of all things to the endless increase of the sacred pile of material goods” (Freedom in the Modern World, p. 69).
44 Taylor, A Secular Age, p. 391.
45 Integral Humanism, p. 158; Man and the State, p. 169, n. 25.
48 “Truth and Human Fellowship,” p. 32.
49 “Truth and Human Fellowship,” p. 33.
Man and the State, p. 159, quoting The Rights of Man and Natural Law, p. 23.

George Egerton and John Stackhouse, “Multiculturalism in Canada: Historical and Socio-cultural Reflections” (abstracts and podcast of two public lectures and dialogue), Graduate and Faculty Christian Forum at the University of British Columbia, 13 November 2008, <http://gfcf-ubc.ca/archive_2008_2009.htm> (24 May 2010). Historian George Egerton observes that Canada has moved from the model of Christian pluralism or Christian democracy that prevailed until the 1950s, to a type of religiously inclusive pluralism under Prime Ministers Diefenbaker and Pearson in the 1960s, to what he calls secularist pluralism under Prime Minister Trudeau and subsequent administrations. Secularist pluralism is distinguished not only by a strict separation of church and state, but also by privatization of religion. In other words, even religious ideas and concepts are to be excluded from public life. Thus, when Trudeau spoke to the House of Commons in 1967 with respect to changes in the Divorce Act, he ushered in the new era with the following words: “The concepts of the civil society in which we live are pluralistic, and I think this parliament realizes that it would be a mistake for us to try to legislate into this society concepts which belong to a theological or sacred order” (Commons 1967, 5083, as quoted by Egerton, “Trudeau, God, and the Canadian Constitution: Religion, Human Rights and Government Authority in the Making of the 1982 Constitution,” in Rethinking Church, State and Modernity: Canada Between Europe and America [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000], p. 96). Although the wording of the preamble to the 1982 Charter of Rights, which speaks of “the supremacy of God and the rule of law,” was reluctantly (according to Egerton) accepted by Prime Minister Trudeau, it has apparently not been given any effect. Egerton maintains that the Canadian elite which defines our politics and culture, including the justices of the Supreme Court of Canada, have supported secularist pluralism. He does, however, mention one recent exception, the report of the Taylor-Bouchard Commission in Quebec in 2008, which he says recommends a welcoming and inclusive attitude to religion.

Integral Humanism, p. 282.

Summa theologiae I, q. 79, a. 12 c. and ad 3; I-II, q. 94, a. 2; De veritate, q. 16, a. 1.

Summa theologiae I, q. 79, a. 12, ad 3.

Summa theologiae I-II, q. 100, a. 3, including obj. 1 and ad 1, and q. 100, a. 5, ad 1, for mention of the precepts of love (praecpt a dilectionis), sometimes called precepts of charity, which command love of God and of neighbour. One minimal formulation of the precept of love of neighbour, “to avoid offending others among whom one has to live,” is from the translation of I-II, q. 94, a. 2 by the Dominican Fathers of the English Province; the formulation “that one should do evil to no man” is found in the same translation of q. 100, a. 3. In a fuller sense, love of neighbour includes positive obligations to do good for others and not only to avoid harming others.

John Rawls, Political Liberalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. xviii-xix; p. 223. I am not here intending a full-fledged discussion or critique of Rawls. However, one objection to his “overlapping consensus,” apart from the question of truth, is that it may embody practical conclusions which at best are appropriate to a particular place and time. It is not clear how there can be an enduring political conception which supports the stable and just society that Rawls hopes “may exist over time” (xx), without identifying and making an appeal to unchanging practical principles, rather than to conclusions which must ever be revised as times and circumstances change.

Rawls, Political Liberalism, p. 94.

Rawls, Political Liberalism, pp. 150-51.

Rawls, Political Liberalism, p. 225.
CHAPTER XV

ESTABLISHING RELATIONS THROUGH TRUTH AND LOVE

JEAN-NIL CHABOT

INTRODUCTION

The issue we shall address here concerns the common good and its four pillars: truth, love, peace and solidarity. The present discussion is inspired by Pope Benedict XVI’s three encyclicals, and follows the sequence of their publication.

To deal adequately with this issue, one must first deal with a fundamental question that underlies all others: Does God exist? Faith and reason work together to affirm the existence of the divine to the satisfaction of all people of good will. Reason by itself can easily come to the conclusion that the existence of God is much more certain than his non-existence. Knowing that this deity exists, that it is one, that all proceeds from it and tends towards it (towards its unity), such is freedom for the intelligence. Veritas vos liberabit.

So if God exists, what and who is he? On the question, “What is God?” Henry Suso, in the fourteenth century, replied:

You should know that all the teachers who preceded us could never explain God, because he is above all thought and all intellect. And yet a man of God succeeds in doing so, though in a far removed way, and that is the supreme human beatitude. It is in this way that long ago some virtuous pagan masters, particularly Aristotle, sought the answer. He searched the course of nature to find out who was its Lord. He searched with fervour and found. He deduced from the orderly course of nature that necessarily there had to be a single sovereign, Lord of all creatures, and that it is He whom we call God.1

But the God of Henry Suso is more than that of Aristotle. His, is a personal God, who must be kindness in itself, because he is so tender and amiable in his creatures. So the God we need to restore brotherhood in the world is a God who is love.

Love is revealed gradually in creation from its simplest forms to its highest and it tends towards a unity more and more perfect. From the physical union of atoms to the sexual union of living beings, and finally to the unification of all people into one mystical body; a mystical body that Christianity knows by faith and that Marxist socialism and other totalitarian
regimes have attempted to reproduce without God. When it comes to the individual person, there are degrees of ascent in love, which Benedict XVI explains in his encyclical *Deus caritas est*. His analysis reflects the dialectic of Plato’s *Symposium*. The final end of the ascent willed by the Creator is union with the divine. This is well summed up by the title of the first part of *Deus caritas est*: “The Unity of Love in Creation and in Salvation History”

So, in regard to the Creator’s design, there can be agreement between truth discovered by reason and truth which is received through faith. There must also be a common understanding regarding truth itself. Pilate’s sceptical question, “What is truth?,” well reflects the relativism of our time. For the limited human mind, truth is always a search – something that relativistic culture tends to forget when it becomes, itself, doctrinal. And concerning this task, that is, the search for truth, man has the benefit of reason, specifically of philosophical reason.

**LOVE, TRUTH, AND JUSTICE (*DEUS CARITAS EST*)**

Love and truth tend toward unity, but when these two things are not experienced in the minds and hearts of a nation or when human weakness becomes a general obstacle, positive law must come to the rescue. However, the latter can only compensate externally for what is lacking in the hearts and minds of individuals. Even there, positive law has no authentic force without Eternal law, that is, without God, and without natural law, which is the image of Eternal law in creation. Canada recognizes, in a way, that inference in the preamble to its constitution. For their part, the Ten Commandments have given man the main concepts of natural law, whose general imperative is the love of God and neighbour.

Basically, it is love that unites, but we cannot love what is not known – yet there is no genuine knowledge other than the truth, often reflected in the aspect of beauty and harmony. In the latter cases, it is a lovable knowledge, but a true one, even if it is not quite that of rationality, as it would be in geometry, for example.

“You shall love the Lord your God ... You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Regarding this command, Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski said that “until now, no manifesto more complete of justice than this one has appeared, one that would give man to man, the heart to the heart and the hand to the hand.” Justice is also truth – it is the attribution of what is actually owed to each person. Hope for an authentic human progress is largely based on love and justice. In a society where these two realities meet, there is less room for the ills of social disintegration. Such a society allows the proper functioning of democracy where conflicts are resolved without a revolutionary disorder.

The political regime that is most favourable to peace and solidarity, conditions that are so desired by the human family, would be that of an authentic democracy established on the basis of Christian love and justice. One of the great philosophers of the twentieth century who wrote on
democracy, Jacques Maritain, is rightly recognized as a major interpreter of Catholic thought. Maritain does not hesitate to associate democracy with the Gospel. His reflection and testimony helped the world to understand that democracy is not just a mode of political cohesion, but has an ethical value in itself, because it is based on the dignity and freedom of conscience of the human person.2

Maritain proposed an evangelical concept of society where it is not the temporal that protects the spiritual, but the spiritual that protects the temporal. According to him, as a social system of justice and equality, democracy is the temporal fruit of the Gospel. Without falling into relativism, he perceives pluralism as a fundamental aspect of the democratic state, since he considers the human person, without distinction, as the foundation of society. Another aspect, according to him, is that conscience is linked to truth, but it cannot impose its moral beliefs on others.3 The democratic state, Maritain teaches, can reconcile truth and freedom by overcoming both the absolutism of the totalitarian state, which seeks to impose a supposedly true ideology, and the liberal relativism which denies the truth. The State is not neutral in imposing non-belief – which would be itself a fundamentalist secularism – rather, it is neutral by guaranteeing freedom of expression for all ideologies, religions, and groups. Maritain has promoted these same principles generally in international law and global governance. Ultimately, evangelical democracy, such as Maritain wanted it, is a humble regime, subject to the natural law and always ready to adhere to the interpretation given by the Church’s magisterium.

Maritain was first of all a metaphysician because he believed that only the science of being could offer the foundation for an integral humanism. Nevertheless, he was also undeniably an existentialist, since in following the example of his master, Thomas Aquinas, he offered to contemporary thought the intellectual tools necessary to solve, in the truth, the problems as they arose during the course of history. In fact, he wrote his books in the course of cultural debates and in the midst of political controversies and events of his century, at a time when ideologies dominated by the left and the Hegelian right generated the totalitarianism that the world has regrettably known.

Concerning universal solidarity, a question arises about the coherence of Church and State. How can there be a perfect harmony between these two societies since they exist in view of distinctive ends? Maritain’s explanation follows that of Thomas Aquinas, in stating that a distinction must be made between the fact that a thing is (according to its nature or its shared essence with like things) and the fact that it simply is (having its own “act of existing”). The Church and the State have their own proper act of existing, which can distinguished by their object, one being temporal and the other reaching beyond the temporal. On the other hand, both these societies are specified as human since they share the same social nature of man. They are rooted in the same human being, where they cannot be separated, although the distinction of their proper ends requires that one
renders to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God. These distinctions which relate to religion and politics are required in order to avoid conflicts between both spheres of human life.

The issues of conflicts, disagreements and opposing viewpoints, with which the present volume is concerned, find their solutions in Christian truth and charity, provided these are lived. Where humanity has its roots in Christianity it can truly progress and seriously address the major problems it faces, particularly when it considers the latter by broadening its thinking. It must give itself a broader view and a more rigorous reasoning, by freeing itself from the purely scientific and relativistic mind. It must develop a mentality which “expands the spaces of rationality” by remaining open to faith. We must, therefore, seek truth, we must appropriate it with a mind free of reductive ideology and reproduce it integrally in today’s culture while exchanging with other searchers who are spiritually free.

In this regard, it is good to remember that the conflicts characterized as religious are very rarely so. It almost always comes down to social or political issues and, when religion is involved, it is mainly because it has been politicized as was the case in Northern Ireland and as is still often the case with Islamic fundamentalism. Regarding the latter, we can take as an example the case of clashes in Jos, Algéria, where 500 Christians of the Berom ethnic group were massacred by Muslim Fulani. According to Bishop Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Abuja, this issued from a conflict between “herders” and “farmers.” What was involved, according to him, was “social, economic, tribal and cultural claims.”

**MAMMON: OBSTACLE TO JUSTICE (CARITAS IN VERITATE)**

Charity in truth, the principle of spiritual unity, has its material counterpart. There is a concrete unifying power which is apt to become the enemy of love and truth when it rests on a suffocating materialism. This is money – not money in itself – one of the greatest inventions in the service of humanity – but the financial system where those who have the power to create and manipulate money use it as a dictatorial instrument to satisfy their thirst for power and riches. This situation is well described by Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). In this encyclical, the Pope declares that “this dictatorship is being most forcibly exercised by those who, since they hold the money and completely control it, control credit also and rule the lending of money.” “Hence”, the Pope adds, “they regulate the flow, so to speak, of the life-blood whereby the entire economic system lives, and have so firmly in their grasp the soul, as it were, of economic life that no one can breathe against their will.”

I think it is important to introduce, here, a distinction within the notion of economics: First, there is money and credit; then there is the monetary system which supports the money and makes it effective; finally, there is the market with respect to goods, services, and distribution.
Bernard Lietaer, in his book *The Future of Money: Beyond Greed and Scarcity*, argues that in order to have the capacity to imagine (the initial step before creation) a new economy which would be instrumental in view of a new social order, we need to abandon the paradigm to which we are accustomed. This is assuming, of course, that our intention is indeed to share the wealth and build a united but plural world, one that is just and reflects universal solidarity. In perfect agreement with Toynbee, Lietaer believes that “the extreme concentration of wealth and rigidity in face of changes helps to explain the fall of twenty-one civilizations of the past.”

I say, therefore, that the world is currently being unified under the auspices of Mammon that distributes, at its own discretion and for its own purposes, the economic blood to the entire society. Nations, even the richest, are taken hostage by means of debts that are not payable because their size, which increase exponentially, exceeds even the power of imagination. This system is very encompassing and it is not easy to break through its walls – impossible, if God does not exist. It represents a major challenge for philosophical thought and the action that should follow.

Knowing the internal mechanism of a false monetary system will not save it. Rather, the solution is to extract from the nature of man the principles of a just monetary system. Indeed, to attain the simple truth of material reality as expressed by the symbolic values called money, it would be sufficient to produce a genuine epistemology of money and credit. Thomas Aquinas, following the method of Aristotle, teaches that in order to carry out a scientific investigation it suffices to address four types of questions: Does the thing exist? What is this thing in itself? What are its properties? Why does it have these properties? Philosophers must find the answers to these epistemological questions: Does money possess a proper nature that defines it? If so, what are its properties? Why does it have these properties?

The economy acts as a universal thrust of the temporal/material world towards unity, and money is its engine. The trouble is that the symbol has managed to take the place of reality – it has become a latent reality which imposes its laws on the authentic reality, that is, on the real economy, which consists of production, services, and distribution. Thus, the economic order is reversed. While the normal function of the monetary system is to make financially feasible what is physically feasible and desirable, the present system has come to assume the power to determine what is physically possible and that is why it is false. For example, if the construction of a bridge is desirable, even necessary, and if the human and material resources (such as labour and technology) are available, the financial system must reflect this possibility of realization and provide the necessary funds. It is not for it to determine the need and possibility of building the bridge. Moreover, the construction should be debt free because it consists of new wealth and is not an actual expense – the actual expense occurs when the use deteriorates and depreciates the value of the bridge.
The recent global financial crisis has shown the fragility of the current economic system and the institutions linked to it. It has also demonstrated that a system which defers only to a purely materialistic ideology cannot promote a common good. Take the example of colonial mercantilism. When foreign financial authorities entered underdeveloped countries to exploit their resources without considering the local way of life, they inevitably become a source of conflict. Conflicts can occur even where there is agreement with the governmental authorities of those countries if no agreement with the indigenous population have not been made previously, for it is they who are the authentic guests of foreign companies. According to Benedict XVI, “the international community has an urgent duty to find institutional means of regulating the exploitation of non-renewable resources, involving poor countries, in order to plan together for the future.” The Pope is warning us, rightly, that we cannot “remain impassive in the face of actual and potential conflicts involving access to natural resources.”

In reference to the more specific question of money and credit and their role in colonial mercantilism, we find that many poor nations have been reduced to financial slavery by international banking institutions. Solidarity requires that wealthy nations offer help to the poorest without imposing shackles.

There is another critical aspect of the economic issue and it is the just allocation of money and credit. John Paul II gave its principle of justice in his encyclical *Labores exercens*:

> To whatever task man is occupied, be it relatively primitive or, conversely, ultra-modern, he can easily realize that, by *his work he enters into two inheritances*: the inheritance of a part of what is given to all men in the form of natural resources and on the other hand, all that others have already developed from these resources, primarily better techniques, that is to say, in applying a series of increasingly perfect working tools. While working, man “inherits from the labour of others.”

Benedict XVI reiterated this principle in other words: “All that the earth produces and all that man transforms and produces, all his knowledge and technology, are for the material and spiritual development of the human family and all its members.” The task of the financial system is to give effect to this economic and cultural heritage, which, for example, could be the institution of a universal dividend. In all cases, to apply this principle, we need to rethink the financial system with minds liberated from the bounds that hold many brilliant minds prisoner. What we have to do, it seems, is to put the reins on Mammon and make it a servant by imposing on it a new function dedicated to the common good and to justice. This is what Jacques Maritain would have wanted.

The day before his death on April 29, 1973, Maritain finished writing a text which summed up his thoughts on this subject, which he considered
the most urgent in today’s society. In this text, Maritain speaks of a society where the state would produce as much as it should, for the use of every citizen, tokens that would give them access to the common heritage of all people, that is, cultural and material wealth:

To every citizen [he wrote] would be distributed enough tokens to allow everyone to enjoy freely a basic, but high enough standard of living, ensuring an existence worthy of man, in his material life, his intellectual life and that of his family and ... it goes without saying that any tax payable to the State would disappear in our new regime.

In the fifth chapter of his text, without beating around the bush, Maritain condemns interest on money. He writes: “In our society ... all types of loans with interest would lose their reason for being since, to whomever would like start a business or any institution, the State would provide, on request, all the necessary tokens ...” Maritain continues:

It was Aristotle who told us the truth about loans with interest, and how decisively he did so when he declared false and pernicious the idea of the fertility of money, and argued that of all social activities the worst is that of a money lender, who forces to become productive of a gain, a naturally sterile thing like money that can have no other property and no other use than to serve as the common measure of things.10

Nowadays, the interest charged on money lent by the person who earned it is deemed eligible, as it does not affect the money supply of a country. By contrast, what is entirely unjust, is the interest charged at the source by the institutions that create money and credit from nothing, and then lend it, while asking more than the loan in return. This aberration is the source of pseudo-debts that reduces to slavery even the most prosperous nations, because it is impossible to pay back more than has been created. This system is the main source of economic crises and a major generator of conflicts.

It must be admitted, however, that the crises that the world experiences have moral roots, and therefore they are interdependent of each other. Whether in finance, religion, politics or the environment, we need to retrace our footsteps and find out where we have erred. For example, when money was being corrupted by becoming a mere instrument of gain, or simply an instrument of power rather than an instrument of wealth distribution, not only did environmental protection take a second place, but so also did justice.

During his message for the 2010 World Day of Peace, Pope Benedict offered some solutions, among them a coherent approach to the “universal destination of the goods of creation.”11 More specifically, he was calling for
a lifestyle marked by sobriety and solidarity, guided by new rules and confident, courageous commitments to the development of strategies that actually work, while decisively rejecting those that continue to fail. It is only in this way that the current crisis can be a real opportunity for discernment and strategic planning.

Safeguarding the primacy of the person and its spirit belongs to the State and international organizations such as the United Nations as well as the ecclesial magisterium. We know that to establish itself, peace needs favourable condition; political, economic, and cultural, as well as spiritual. However, it is not easy in the current political and economic context to give precedence to the primacy of the individual. It is even more difficult to accept the importance and necessity of religion, whose noble and authentic role is to fulfil and perfect the human person. There is a good deal of hesitation in giving religion the space necessary for its role in the public sphere.

CONCLUSION (SPE SALVI)

Hope is both a goal and a path. “Faith is the substance (hypostasis) of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). The thing we hope for, but still cannot see, is somehow already in us by its affiliation with our nature — that is, the good that is hoped suits our spiritual nature just as the thing we see suits our sensitive nature. Hence, it is important for philosophy to discover a common good which rests particularly on the principle of the “universal destination of the goods of creation.”

However, the knowledge of cures for the ills that impede the common good is not enough by itself. Theory must advance to the informative, and the informative to the performative. Hope demands that we act and to that end we cannot do without religion and especially not Christianity. Benedict XVI wrote, in Spe Salvi, that “to be progress, progress needs the moral growth of humanity” 12, adding that “the reason of power and action is likewise urgently in need of integration thanks to the opening of reason to the saving forces of faith, of discernment between good and evil.” In other words: “Man needs God, if he does not want to remain without hope.” “Science can contribute greatly to the humanization of the world and humanity. However, it can also destroy mankind and the world unless it is steered by forces that lie outside it.” 13 Benedict also said that “God is the foundation of hope — not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end — each individually and humanity as a whole.” 14 Thus, He is the God of faith, the same as that of philosophical reason, but viewed from a different angle and more perfect.

My view in this paper is obviously that of a Christian believer. Christianity offers the ultimate unifying principle: Love (that is: God). To attain this principle, it offers a triple means: the way (or path), the truth, and the life.
The path is not the domain of philosophical reason, but rather belongs to the faith that witnesses. Life is also another area, that of a faith that is lived. By contrast, the truth involves the contribution of the philosopher because it is the object of reason. On the view that I have presented, Christian truth is able to assimilate all truths, even those that are discovered by its enemies, because it is all that is true.

Love that is witnessed, lived and reasoned, is what Christianity offers the world for the common good.

NOTES

1 Vie dominicaine, ch. 50, my translation.
2 Taken from an interview by Zenit with Piero Viotto, the author of Jacques Maritain, Dizionario delle Opere [Jacques Maritain, Dictionary of his works]. Viotto teaches pedagogy at the Catholic University of Milan.
3 However, according to Maritain, the human person must have a right to conscientious objection in extreme situations, such as the case of a law that is unjust but approved by the majority.
5 Pius XI, Quadragesimo Anno, (The Restoration of the Social Order) # 106
6 Cahier de propositions pour le XIXe siècle, Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer pour le Progrès de l’Homme, p.8
7 Laborens Exercens, # 13.
8 Words addressed to Mrs. Mary Ann Glendon, President of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences on the occasion of its XIIIth full session, April 28, 2007.
10 Maritain, Une société sans argent.
12 Spe Salvi, # 23.
13 Spe Salvi, # 25.
14 Spe Salvi, # 31.
CONTRIBUTORS

**Leslie Armour** (1931-2014) was Research Professor in Philosophy at the Dominican University College, Ottawa, and a Member of the Royal Society of Canada. He was the author of a number of books and articles in the history of philosophy, the philosophy of culture, and the history of ideas (including "Infini Rien": Pascal's Wager and the Human Paradox (1993), Being and Idea: Developments of Some Themes in Spinoza and Hegel (1992), The Faces of Reason: An Essay on Philosophy and Culture in English Canada, 1850-1950 (1981), and The Idea of Canada and the Crisis of Community (1981). He was also a long-time principal Editor of the International Journal of Social Economics (UK).

**David Bellusci** studied English Literature, Linguistics, and Philosophy at the University of Toronto, the University of Calgary, Simon Fraser University, Concordia University, and the Dominican University College in Ottawa, Canada. He has taught at Simon Fraser University, in Zimbabwe, at the University of Cape Town, and is currently Assistant Professor in Philosophy at the Dominican University College. In 2003 he entered the Order of Friars Preachers.

**Cecil Chabot** is a doctoral candidate in historical anthropology at the Université d’Ottawa. He is a member of the International Centre for Northern Governance and Development at the University of Saskatchewan, and has worked as a Parliamentary Secretary’s Assistant in the Office of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Canada.

**Jean-Nil Chabot** studied at the University of Alberta and the Université Saint-Paul, and obtained a PhD in philosophy on “Suprématie de Dieu et primauté du droit” from the Université Laval. He has taught philosophy at the Our Lady Seat of Wisdom Academy, Barry’s Bay, Ontario, and is the author of several works of fiction, including The Redeeming of Ingeborg, The Triumph of Melchior Zedec, and Kari et le curé de Sainte-Anne.

**Mario D’Souza** is Dean Emeritus of the Faculty of Theology at the University of St Michael’s College, University of Toronto, Canada, where he also holds the Basilian Fathers Chair in Religion and Education. An authority on the philosophy of education of Jacques Maritain, D’Souza’s research on religion, human personality, and cultural unity has been informed by his studies in Ireland, Canada, and the United States.

**Jennifer Hart Weed** is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of New Brunswick, Canada. She specializes in medieval philosophy and philosophy of religion and has an interest in issues in popular culture. She is also co-editor of 24 and Philosophy (2007) with Richard Davis.
David Klassen holds degrees in law and philosophy, including a PhD in Philosophy from the Catholic University of America. He is a lecturer at Corpus Christi College, University of British Columbia, Canada. He teaches philosophical anthropology and writes on humanism within western cultural traditions.

David Lea taught for twelve years at the University of Papua New Guinea before becoming Professor in the International Studies Department at the American University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. He is the author of a major study of the concept of property rights in Melanesia (Melanesian Land Tenure in a Contemporary and Philosophical Context, 1997).

Martha F. Lee is Professor of Political Science and Assistant Provost for Inter-Faculty Programs at the University of Windsor, Canada. Her primary research is in religious and political apocalyptic beliefs and millenarian movements, and she is the author of Millennial Visions, Essays on 20th Century Millenarianism (2000) and Conspiracy Rising: Conspiracy Thinking and American Public Life (2011).

Solange Lefebvre has degrees in social anthropology and theology and is Professeure titulaire and holder of the “Chaire religion, culture et société” at the Université de Montréal. She is author of Cultures et spiritualités des jeunes (2008) and (as editor) La religion dans la sphère publique (2005). She is a Member of the Royal Society of Canada.

Thomas Philbeck was Assistant Dean at the Bahrain Campus of the New York Institute of Technology. His primary area of research is postmodern aesthetics and the place of religion, and he is the author of a recent essay on “Unanticipated Consequences: Foundational Tensions at the Seams of Wealth and Education in the Gulf.”

Sari Nusseibeh is President of Al-Quds University in Jerusalem as well as Professor of Philosophy. Founder of “Middle East Nonviolence and Democracy,” and a former Fellow of the Baker Institute for Public Policy at Rice University, he holds graduate degrees in philosophy (Oxford) and in Islamic Philosophy (Harvard), and is author of texts in philosophy as well as applied social issues, such as Al-Hurriyyah Bayn Alhadd Wa’l Mutlaq (Absolute and Restricted Freedom)

Uchenna Okeja studied philosophy, theology, and management in Nigeria and at the Pontifical Urban University, Rome, and received his PhD in Philosophy at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, where he is currently a faculty member. His principal area of interest is on the normative grounds for a global ethic, and his most recent

**Richard Schaefer** is Associate Professor of History at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh. His research is primarily in the Catholic Revival and the History of Philosophy, and he has published in the *Catholic Historical Review, First World War Studies, History of European Ideas*, and the *Journal of the History of Ideas*.

**Walter Schultz** is Research Professor in the Faculty of Philosophy at the Dominican University College, in Ottawa, Canada. He is President of the Canadian Jacques Maritain Association and Editor of the journal *Etudes maritainiennes/Maritain Studies*.

**William Sweet** is Professor of Philosophy at St Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada, and is President of the World Union of Catholic Philosophical Societies. He is a past president of the Canadian Philosophical Association, of the Canadian Jacques Maritain Association, and of the Canadian Society of Christian Philosophers, and *Presidente d’onore* of the Istituto Internazionale Jacques Maritain (Rome). The author or editor of over 30 books, primarily on human rights, the philosophy of religion, and the history of modern political thought, his most recent books are *Ideas Under Fire: Historical Studies of Philosophy and Science in Adversity* (with Jonathan Lavery and Louis Groarke, 2013) and *What is Intercultural Philosophy?* (2014). He is an elected Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and of the Royal Asiatic Society.
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The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

PURPOSE

Today there is urgent need to attend to the nature and dignity of the person, to the quality of human life, to the purpose and goal of the physical transformation of our environment, and to the relation of all this to the development of social and political life. This, in turn, requires philosophic clarification of the base upon which freedom is exercised, that is, of the values which provide stability and guidance to one’s decisions.

Such studies must be able to reach deeply into one’s culture and that of other parts of the world as mutually reinforcing and enriching in order to uncover the roots of the dignity of persons and of their societies. They must be able to identify the conceptual forms in terms of which modern industrial and technological developments are structured and how these impact upon human self-understanding. Above all, they must be able to bring these elements together in the creative understanding essential for setting our goals and determining our modes of interaction. In the present complex global circumstances this is a condition for growing together with trust and justice, honest dedication and mutual concern.

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP) unites scholars who share these concerns and are interested in the application thereto of existing capabilities in the field of philosophy and other disciplines. Its work is to identify areas in which study is needed, the intellectual resources which can be brought to bear thereupon, and the means for publication and interchange of the work from the various regions of the world. In bringing these together its goal is scientific discovery and publication which contributes to the present promotion of humankind.

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