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Narrating Secularisms: Being between Identities in a Secularized World

Edited by
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The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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Preface

WILLIAM DESMOND & DENNIS VANDEN AUWEELE

The present volume of essays came to be under unusual circumstances. The general idea was to collect a number of narratives on how relatively young academics deal with the experience of being displaced by the confrontation with differing ideologies in a new place of residence. Concretely, this meant that eight young academics would reflect on their relocation to KU Leuven, often from a place that they call home that was of a different religious or ideological mindset. In most cases, Leuven proved to be a far more secularized environment than the one to which these young academics were accustomed. For most, this proved to be a wonderful occasion for self-reflection and even held the promise for mutual enrichment. But this did not always happen smoothly, and a variety of cultural shocks aroused hesitation, incomprehension and, at times, irritation.

In a desire to hang on to the authenticity of these experiences, we have chosen for the unusual approach of letting these narratives unfold themselves. Authors were not asked to reflect *sine ira et studio* – they remain self-consciously aware of being a philosopher, as well as an individual – but they were asked only to keep an open mind of intellectual integrity. Needless to say, this means that not all contributors – as well as the editors – subscribe to every word of caution, value judgment or normative suggestion that is made throughout this volume. Some of the contributions naturally evolved into highly personal reflections on passing through secularization, doubt and (new) faith; others moved more smoothly into philosophical reflection, at times assisted by some of the great philosophers of our age and the past. We hope that these reflections open up perspectives and that readers find themselves enriched (and perhaps strengthened) by their content.

One final, more personal note. Originally, this volume was planned as having one more contribution by a good friend and fine scholar, Peter Losonczi. Alas, Peter passed away before attending to his contribution, and he is dearly missed. The editors and contributors would like to dedicate this volume to Peter and his family. *Pie Jesu Domine, dona eis requiem*. Farewell Peter, wherever you may roam, know that you are missed.

Part One
Being Singular, Being Unsure and
Being Together

1.

Finessing a Plurivocal Between: Culture, Religious Community and Public Life

WILLIAM DESMOND

I

The idea for the essays in this volume was inspired by the international character of philosophical studies in Leuven. There is an entire program in philosophy from BA to PhD in English at the Institute of Philosophy, and the students come from every continent of the world, with many languages, traditions, customs, forms of life. Many come from countries where religion occupies a place of higher honor than it has come to occupy in the more secularized West. Some come from countries like Japan where religion in the Western sense does not occupy the same position of importance, and yet one could not clearly call such countries secular. The situation of secularization in Belgium itself presents its own complications, and for many of these scholars and students arrival here challenges them with encounter with another culture, and not least in relation to common attitudes to religion. The idea was suggested to challenge these visitors to give some significant articulation to their understanding of religion in such a situation, paying attention to divergences and overlapping between their home culture and what they have come to experience in an often more radically secularized context. Part of the motivation behind this was the worry that the so-called problem of secularization is not the same for inhabitants of cultures other than Western Europe (where, of course, there are significant diversities also). Perhaps the problem looks differently elsewhere. Perhaps there is no problem in the more typical Western sense. Perhaps also those who experience the inside and the outside of such a secularized culture might have something significant to say about their being at home, or not being at home, again in what we often take as typical Western secularized culture.

The diverse contributions here try to address some of these issues and do so in a many-voiced way. Many range wider than just issues connected with secularization, touching on the issue of what it means

to be human, what it means to be religious. It is worth remembering a certain doubleness: many here come from elsewhere, though we are on the soil of Belgium. In the long history of Leuven this doubleness is to be found: people come who are outsiders, outsiders who may become insiders, perhaps insiders who will remain outsiders. Yet something of this doubleness of condition is not at all to be lamented. It may well reflect something of a doubleness in the issue of secularization, an equivocality in the relation of the religious and the political, a doubleness in the relations between a religious community and a culture, between Church and public life: inside and outside, intimate and foreign, immanent and yet a sign of transcendence.

The situation of many today is shaped by a plurality of cultures and peoples, and one of notable features of life in Leuven is allowance for the *passage between* different cultures, with scholars and students coming here from far flung lands, and going forth or back to teach or pursue their further lives in their own or in strange lands. There is a living exchange between here and elsewhere. Of course, if one were to speak of being Catholic one would be invoking the universal: *kath'holon* – to be catholic is to be what one is with respect to the whole. The Latin word for universal signifies something of being turned to the One: *unum – versum*: towards the One. This sense of the universal, and the One is important. When I grew up as a Catholic in Ireland I never thought of myself as a Roman Catholic – I was a Catholic. Indeed the first time I went to mass in America I was stunned to see the American flag on the altar. The sense of the universal had been bred in the bone – though, of course, the bone itself had been pickled in more local flavorings, often invisible to the insider of a culture, but very evident to the outsider. By travelling between cultures, one gets not only a better feel for these different cultural flavorings, but also for what remains constant in the differences of plurality. In the past this constancy was maintained in the Latin language. The turn to the vernacular, very much bound up with the recognition of the importance of culture(s), reminds us how particular, living languages, not neutral universals, are the immediate lived carriers of more local particularities – with all their cultural flavorings.

This is not to imply that the flesh of culture and its textures are only in the particulars, and that the universal is disembodied and lacking its tang. One of the amazing things about religion, especially monotheistic religion, is its power to marry the universal and the

singular. The human being's relation to God, and God's relation to us, is intimately singular. In relation to God we are not mere instances of a class called "humanity" or specimens of a species. But as intimately singular this divine relation is offered to all humans; it is universally on offer. This is a reason why I think we should speak of religion in terms of what I call the intimate universal.¹ Religion is not for merely privatized subjectivities nor for an objectivized generality. A great challenge is to live up to both the universal and the intimacy, and hence to embody the divine relation in the flesh of different cultures, and in a manner which does justice to both the universality and the intimate singularity.

II

Turning now to the issue of culture, we find that the question of the universal is redoubled. There is no one universal culture. There are many cultures. And while there may be universal dimensions to particular cultures, there are particularities that tie a culture to this people, or this land, or this history or time. There is a tension in a culture between its more universal possibilities and the charge of local particularities and its parochial loyalties. One thinks of Greek and Roman culture as having their universal possibilities, yet these always coexisted in tension with the demands of more local particularities. There is a dialectical tension here which admits of no permanent and absolute solution. We always exist in that tension. The question is how we live with the tension and negotiate it. Powerful nations, with imperial ambitions, are particularly prone to universalize their own particularity, with the risk of loss of fidelity to the more truly universal. They will claim it to be their manifest destiny to be the bearer of the universal, the privileged representative of the universal on earth. It may also be that powerful nations claim to be "defenders of the faith," but the mantle of religion will cloak a more worldly will to power. There is a dangerous doubleness here, against whose potential for equivocity a religious person must be on guard.

We have to address the variability of cultures. Some cultures are more promising with respect to a universal dimension, others more

¹ See W. Desmond, *The Intimate Universal: The Hidden Porosity Among Religion, Art, Philosophy and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

closed in on themselves, with the danger of making themselves an idolatrous counterfeit of the universal. Catholicism is not identical with any culture, though obviously its own universal range must make it more compatible with cultures in which the promise of the universal is acknowledged or at work.

It is for this reason that the dialogue of Athens and Jerusalem could be the fruitful dialogue it has been for the West. The universal, differently qualified, is at work in both, with peculiar challenges of how to negotiate where the stress is to fall. I only say here that just as a particular culture must resist idolizing itself, a marriage between Catholicism and a particular culture must equally resist idolizing such a culture, or this or that enculturated form of Christianity. There is more at stake in being religious. The fact that Christianity could and must speak to the poor and the outcast, indicates its intimacy with those who often fall outside the officially sanctioned groups in many powerful cultures. Christianity exists not only within a culture but on those precarious boundaries between the inside and the outside of a particular culture. In this double position, to be a Christian is to be a witness to the immanent culture of what passes beyond the terms of its immanence: the communication between God and humans, and not least the outcasts – the intimate universal.

All of this is not a matter of situating culture over against religion, or vice versa. The very word “culture” carries intimacy with the religious. The origins of culture are in *cultus* – *cultus* not just as our own self-cultivation but as our placing of ourselves in readiness for communication from the more ultimate powers. For we are first the recipients of endowments which we do not produce through ourselves alone. We receive as beneficiaries original powers that we can and must cultivate to become the beings we are meant to be. The *cultus* of religion is inseparable from realizing the full promise of human culture in that sense.

Perhaps premodern peoples had some lived sense that culture and *cultus* are intimately connected. In modernity that intimacy has come under pressures, some of which I want to briefly note. If there is an intimacy between religion and culture, it can come to be that culture sets itself into a kind of opposition to religion, when it begins to think of itself as entirely autonomous, wanting to free itself from the perceived hegemony and heteronomy of the religious. Something of the familiar picture of modernity here emerges: religion is allowed

its space, and then art, science, philosophy claim their own autonomy, initially from religion, then progressively setting out to complete themselves on their own terms and entirely through their own self-determination, no longer the benefices of the divine, but claiming to be entirely self-defining. The tension between religion and culture can be exacerbated in this, with even culture itself, now secularized, assuming a quasi-religious tonality. I think of the religion of art, for instance, from Romantic times to now.

III

I will briefly touch on three significant factors, relevant to our theme, that we find in the culture of modern times – first, the dynamic of secularization; second, the culture of autonomy dominant in much of the West for many centuries and whose story has not yet come to an end; third, the insinuations of a scientific culture claiming that science and technology hold all the answers, actual or potential, to the questions of the human condition, be they theoretical or practical. Post-Enlightenment intellectuals have believed that the problem of religion was solved by secularized culture, by claims for human autonomy, by the advances in science and the benefits of technology. As events of recent year have shown, the importance of religion is not shelved by secularization and the culture of autonomy. Likewise, science and technology, lightening this burden or that, are also accompanied by unanticipated shadows that darken our dwelling in creation.

First some remarks on secularization. Secularization is said to be a general characteristic of Western modernity and has been diversely defined: for instance, as the process by which the world here and now becomes determined through itself alone; as the progressive liberation of humankind from tyrannical authorities; as connected with the scientific disenchantment of the world from which all traces of the divine have been stripped away; as bound up with the increasing rationalization of all the spheres of human life; as the extension to all spheres of human life of the power of autonomous self-determination. However one defines it, there seems to be a contraction of the claims of religion to cover the whole of reality, most especially evident in the withdrawal of religion from the public sphere, a withdrawal that is sometimes forced rather than chosen.

Going with these developments we find, so to say, a certain desacralization of public institutions. The altar and the throne may have been in deep collusion throughout history, but now the altar is stripped bare, and the king on the throne is deprived of any divine authorization. There is no sacred king. Power, public power, is human power, not divine, and the legitimacy of all social arrangements is to be traced to one or other diverse configurations of human power.

If religion is called on to withdraw, this goes with what is to be called the privatization of religion. Religion may be allowed as a private affair, an affair of the heart, let us say, but any claims it makes to be a public affair are enfeebled. If it tries to introduce itself into the public space, it is greeted with suspicion, if not hostility, and the accusation that it serves to give rise to invidious conflicts. The allegedly disruptive power of religion in the public sphere must be domesticated by taking it altogether out of that public sphere. For there are sources of social power and sovereignty but these are based in humankind and in humankind alone. They are not to be backed up by any appeal to God.

One might suggest that the issue of secularization is a particularly Western pre-occupation and that in many parts of the world the relation between public life and religion does not at all conform to the pattern of the West. Of course, in relation to the West we can ask: What exactly was, and is the extent of the so-called withdrawal of religion from public life? Could any such withdrawal ever be the full reality? Or was the reality more a matter of placing certain constraints on religion – constraints sometimes to its benefit, sometime to its detriment? Was it often historically (say, throughout the nineteenth century) more a matter of religion being sent into retreat and now of religion returning, sometimes with new vitality, from that retreat? Of course, privatized religion, leading to an inner migration, can end up in an autism of spirit. Beyond the always available distractions of entertainment, any words of deliverance then become hard to hear in the silenced intimacy of the religious spirit.

One might also ask – and this has been asked by religious people – if the disenchantment of the world is always bad news for religion. One might claim, especially with the monotheistic traditions, that God is absolutely singular: God is God and nothing but God is God. Hence the world is not God, the human being is not God. The first religious command is to respect this absolute difference of the divine. This

means we must knowingly relate to the world as *not* divine. Of course, that relation can be differently defined. That the world is not God need not mean that the world is devoid of signs that communicate of God. That it is not divine does not justify an agenda that would want to extirpate all these signs from the world – as some forms of iconoclastic religion have been tempted to do. And there are versions of secularization in which this agenda to extirpate the signs of God is actively at work.

“Privatization” is not the last word, but there is indeed something private about being religious, in the sense of its being perhaps the most intimate thing at the heart of the human being. I see this intimacy in terms of the intimate universal. Hence the issue here cannot be a matter of privatization in line with the ideological terms of private property. “Mine, mine and mine alone” – these are *not* the words communicated in the intimate universal. The “privacy” of religion bears on the singular relation of the soul in communion with God, a communion inseparable from the community of other human beings, hence something neither merely subjective, nor simply objective. The intimacy is noted by Augustine when he talks of God as more intimate to me than I am to myself, and superior to my highest summit. We know of Augustine’s turn to the inward self without which his own conversion would not be comprehensible. Yet that conversion is not primarily a turn to himself but in the end accession to the community of faith, at the core of which is the communication of God in the intimate universal.

It is worth stating that there can be turns to the self that are not homecomings to the intimate universal but platforms for accentuating the powers claimed on behalf of unbridled human self-determination. The turn to self is then a turn from others, including the divine other, perceived as equivocal, perceived as possible curbs on my own self-determination. This brings us to our second consideration, namely, the modern *culture of autonomy*. Here the turn to self takes on a different character to the religious turn towards porosity to the divine in the intimate universal.

Relative to this culture of autonomy, it is noticeable in debates about modernity that the only value that seems to pass muster in an uncontested way is that of freedom. Everyone is in favor of freedom, though what exactly is meant by freedom no one is completely sure. Tyrants sing some of the sweetest hymns to freedom. No other good

is taken as uncontroversial: God is not, happiness is not, virtue is not. Freedom is. If I am not mistaken freedom is predominantly understood in terms of a certain notion of autonomy. So much so that for many today there is no difference at all between freedom and autonomy. That there might be other forms of freedom that are not defined by autonomy – such a consideration does not come to the fore. There might be freedoms *beyond* autonomy, and this will change the whole picture. This we will see below with the “being freed,” the release of agapeic service.²

I propose that there is a certain tension between how we tend to understand freedom as autonomy and a sense of God as transcendence. Autonomy concerns our self-law – *auto-nomos*. We claim to give the law to ourselves as self-determining. This is thought to be the opposite of heteronomy: heteronomy is the law of the other – *nomos of to heteron*. Everything other thus is a potential threat or limitation on my assertion of autonomus freedom. Very evidently, God is an other that cannot be reduced to my own self-determination. Hence in this way of thinking, God sits very uneasily with the affirmation of my claim to autonomy. It seems we have to affirm either God or our own autonomy.

This is a very crude alternative, I think, but it can come to be embedded within the modern culture whereby human beings understand themselves. We find it famously in philosophers like Nietzsche – If God exists, how could I endure not to be a god – therefore there is no God. Or Sartre: if God exists, I am not free, since God determines everything; if I am free, God cannot exist; I am free, therefore God does not exist. This mentality insists on an “either/or” between freedom and God, human autonomy and divine heteronomy. It is like a master and slave relation. If God is master, I am slave. If I am not a slave but free, there can be no master – therefore no God. Even if there now seems to be a God, in time to come there will be no God, since my freedom becomes a *project* to overcome all others, divine or human or natural, that constrain freedom. This is important since some forms of modern atheism, and some forms of secularization are *projects* advanced in terms of a *moral justification*: belief in God, it is claimed,

² I have explored these other forms of freedom in, among other places, *Ethics and the Between* (Albany: SUNY, 2001), chapters 6-12.

is morally unacceptable to a mature humanity that has come of age in terms of its own free self-determination.

We need not accept this “either/or.” There is a tension or an antinomy between autonomy and transcendence, I believe. If autonomy is absolute, we must relativize divine transcendence. If transcendence is absolute, we must relativize autonomy. I think the absolute claims of autonomy have to be relativized by a nuanced sense of our being in relation to others, and hence in terms of freedom both before autonomy and exceeding autonomy.³ It is not a question of denying freedom – it is a question of giving a more finessed account of it, one not at all incompatible with the mystery of divine transcendence. Divine transcendence might be seen as endowing the human being with the promise of a freedom, not only to determine itself, but to be beyond itself in the community of agapeic service where we live in the image of divine generosity.

(An aside: we now are said to live in postmodernity, but interestingly one of the themes of postmodern thought is that the claims of modern autonomy are untrue or overstated. We are always related to others beyond our self-determination. Quite a lot of postmodern thought is not religious, and sometimes it is either indifferent or hostile to religion. But there is an interesting point of convergence with some forms of religious thought in which our relativity to others, including God as the absolute other, requires something more than the modern culture of autonomy.)

The modern culture of autonomy which tends to identify heteronomy with a curtailment of freedom has been extended beyond the individual to diverse forms of social order, such as those expressing ecclesiastical and political power. The latter are seen as bastions of heteronomy. Hence the need is felt to take an attitude of aggression against religion as a heteronomous reality. Putting to one side the truth of this way of criticizing religion, the question of freedom comes up in the sphere of religion itself, with respect to the freedom of religious choice. One of the great shames of religion in the past was the wars generated between Christians – putting religion into shame, and making some persons think only something entirely other than religion could prevent such wars.

³ On this more fully see my *God and the Between* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), chapter 1, for instance.

True religion requires freedom; the notion of a forced conversion is a contradiction in terms. What is greatest and noblest about being religious is that it is the most intimate thing relative to the communication between the human and the divine. No one else can be there for one in that space of communication, no one else can be religious for one. One is non-replaceable, non-substitutable. There is a deep singularity in this. I do not mean this as the opposite of the public – not at all. It may well be the case that religious community alone is able to truly reconcile the singular and the universal. Hence there is something quite right about the “privatization” of religion in this intimate sense. Religion is, like love, the most intimate thing for the human being – love of God who is more intimate to me than I am to myself. This intimacy is not narcissistic, or autistic. It is impossible to understand without communication, and communicability. This is another reason why we should speak of the intimate *universal*.

What of the third factor, namely the *culture of scientism* which looks to science and technology to provide all the essential answers to the human condition, if not now, then in the future? I would say that the guiding universality of science and technology, to the extent that they are guided by one, is not that of the intimate universal. They can have effects which impinge on, sometimes even mutilate, what is most intimate in the human condition, but they are not witnesses to the intimate universal, certainly what is fully implied by this, in their impersonal, objectifying and instrumentalizing orientations to being. The Church, as witnessing to the intimate universal, is a sanctuary against the culture of scientism. Note that science is not scientism. Scientism is rather a philosophical, indeed ideological interpretation of science which claims for science an inappropriate absoluteness or ultimacy. I would say that science, witnessing to knowledge in the spirit of truth, and technology administered in the service of the good, are not to be opposed to the intimate universal; though without the ontological and epistemic reverence of which religion is the first-born, they can become opposed.

Pascal distinguishes *l'esprit de géométrie* and *l'esprit de finesse*. The former is appropriate to the culture of objective truths such as we pursue in the hard sciences and mathematics. The latter is required when we deal with the human being, in the more encompassing sense of culture, as articulating the deep ambiguity of our being, somewhere between nothing and infinity, alike marked by wretchedness and

glory, and called into relation to God, beyond all our knowing did not God already mysteriously make himself known to us.

Religious finesse is very important in a time such as ours in which *l'esprit de géométrie* is often in the ascendant, met too often by a univocalizing fundamentalism or religious literalism. Finesse solicits a readiness for a more intimate knowing, bearing on what is prior to and beyond geometry. It calls on a mindfulness that can read the signs of the equivocality of human existence, and not simply by the conversion of these signs into a univocal science or a philosophical system or a set of fundamentalist dictates. Here the promise of the religious and its reverence come most into their own. Finesse is by its nature an excellence of mindfulness that is singularly embodied. It cannot be rendered without remainder in terms of neutral and general characteristics. It cannot be geometricized. We come first to know of it, know it, by witnessing its exemplary incarnation in living others of evident finesse. Finesse refers us to the concrete suppleness of living, mindful, spirited intelligence that is open, attentive, attuned to the singularity of the occasion in all its elusiveness and subtlety.

Singularity here does not betoken a kind of autism of being, nor does it mean that any communication of its significance to others is impossible. This singularity is rich with a promise, perhaps initially not fully communicated, and yet available for, making itself available for, communicability. Communicability itself cannot be confined to articulation in neutral generality, or homogeneous universality. Finesse is in attendance on what is elusive in the intimacy of being, but that intimacy is at the heart of living communicability. Religious finesse, finding a worldly articulation in the wise judgment that bears of issues of public importance, bears witness to the intimate universal.

The mind of finesse is very appropriate to postmodern pluralism in that this pluralism often claims to celebrate ambiguity, equivocality, and so on. But finesse has to do with a *discernment of what is worthy to be affirmed in the midst of ambiguity*. It is not the indiscriminate glorification of ambiguity. It is the excellence of mindfulness that does not deny the ambiguity, is not false to it, but it seeks to be true to what is worthy to be affirmed in the ambiguity – and not everything is worthy to be affirmed. The gifts that it fosters are receptivity, attention, mindfulness of singular occasions, happenings, and person, a readiness for the surprising and the genuinely other – a feeling for the intimacy of being itself, and intimate nourishment of the spirit of

truthfulness in our own selves. Religion and art have been the great mistresses of finesse in the past. Without finesse, in circumstances of ethical ambiguity, there is no discerning ethical judgment. Without finesse, there is no serious and profound philosophy also. Without it in politics, the huckster, or worse, usurps the place of the statesman.

IV

Some secularists have advocated the utter privatization of religion, hence seeking to deny any connection of religious community with culture and public life. And yet we continue to see that it is impossible entirely to privatize religion. Such "privatization" might be seen as reflecting an economic capitalist model: a private property, not a public service, religion must compete or be traded on the market. This is privacy without the intimacy of the religious passion. No one owns religion. It is more nearly true to say one is owned by religion, at least claimed by its urgency of ultimacy. By contrast with the capitalist model, the political-economic model favored by communism urged the expropriation of private property, the bringing of religion into public ownership, under State control. But this is socialization which also deprives religion of the intimacy of its sacred character, not merely deprives but works to extirpate it, given that its public owners were zealous executioners of a political agenda of atheism.

I would speak of the difference of the political and the religious in terms of the distinction of the communities of erotic sovereignty and agapeic service.⁴ The first has to do with the social intermediations of worldly power and its immanent excellences; the second has to do with the intermediation of transcendent good beyond will to power, whether in the intimate intermediation between the soul and God, or the communal intermediation of a religious people with God and the ethical service this calls forth. Though there is something deeply intimate about religion, religion extends to the whole (Catholic as *kath' holon*), hence it is very difficult to confine it to one domain among others. It is not that religion needs to exert hegemony over the whole: this would be a kind of totalitarian monism of the sacred. But if the spirit of religion lives in the community of agapeic service, then

⁴ See *Ethics and the Between*, chapters 14 and 15.

it is in this spirit of generous service that it places itself at the ready for the whole of reality. It is available not just for this here or that there, but potentially is available for all, if need be without any precondition, especially in circumstances where the poor and the needy, in material terms, in spiritual terms, ask our aid.

When secularization take the form of hostility to religion, in the longer run it can help the religious to see that its own concern is not worldly will to power, and the dominion of erotic sovereignty. Religion is not politics, though it has implications for politics, precisely by standing at an angle that is vertical to the immanent economy of political power itself. The long process of secularization in modernity can be seen as a purgatory in that sense. And this, not as a prelude to the regaining of worldly power, but as enabling the clearer realization within religion that there is something beyond the community of erotic sovereignty. This is the community of agapeic service. One wonders, for instance, if Marxist-inspired liberation theologies do not make enough of the difference between the communities of erotic sovereignty and agapeic service, opening the latter to the corrupting temptation to trumpet alone about worldly will to power – all in the admirable name of social justice.

Acceptance of the separation of Church and State in the West can be pushed in different directions. It can further the marginalization of religion in society. In the guise of neutrality, it can foster an indifference to the most important ethical and spiritual issues. It can lame the Church when it feels it must protest on behalf of a higher measure. I particularly think of those for whom this separation means that the final judge is the state. We see this in the French revolution. We find it in diverse thinkers like Hobbes and Spinoza. We see it in Hegel for whom the State becomes god on earth. The Church is a *merely* spiritual community, it is said, while the State embodies worldly freedom in the immanent sphere – and this is the fullest realization of freedom, Hegel thinks. This is a separation that puts the Church beneath the State when it comes to the most important things. The Nazis were very suspicious of the churches for that reason – the idolization of the *Volk* cannot but seem blasphemous to one who believe that God alone is God – and not all churches escaped the idolatry.

The separation can be viewed more positively: we need discrimination between different kinds of communities, but we also must

avoiding merely subordinating the religious community to secular power. The community of erotic sovereignty is not identical with the community of agapeic service, and the second is the more ultimate community, though not to be defined in terms of the sovereignties of worldly power. The community of erotic sovereignty deals with the governance of immanent power and, when it is just, it deals with the ethical excellences that come with the right uses of worldly power. The community of agapeic service is concerned with transcendent good, not simply in a “beyond” but with the faithful enactment of what it asks of us here and now. This does not mean that the here and now is all there is. There is something more ultimate than worldly will to power.

The Church may have learned in this separation to discover itself more truly in relation to the second community, the community of agapeic service. This is not just a moral community. It has to do with the holy. It cannot subordinate itself to the State in the sense of accepting this as the last judgment. There is a divine measure above. This goes against the denial of any “above” or “beyond” in modernity generally. But religion is eviscerated without some sense of this “above.”

The difference of erotic sovereignty and agapeic service may help us to see more truly what is at the heart of being religious. Separation cannot mean a mere opposition or dualism – for there is also relation in what is separate. It is impossible to confine agapeic service to any one space or sphere – even though it is more than happy to act *incognito*. “Separation” can point to the promise of an *enabling difference*, which itself can be the basis of a work of relation and community – community in the sense of communication. The truth of communication comes in bearing witness. A witness is one who stands there before the others, standing for something, not just standing there as himself or herself, but for something beyond himself or herself. The work of witnessing in that sense must always be in the middle – in the between where separation allows communication with what is other than oneself, in the between where, beyond separation, community can come to be.

The enabling separation of Church and State points to the promise of a necessary worldly involvement for the Church, but the modality of the involvement is all important. It cannot be a secret will to power masked as agapeic generosity – this would be a perversion.

It concerns bearing witness to the availability of the divine for the human. Most often this communication has again a certain *incognito* aspect – it does not insist on drawing attention to itself, it does not insist on itself. This does not mean capitulation to evil, for the need for witness can find itself placed in danger with regard to certain situations. Something is beyond negotiation. Were there to be negotiations then the inner truth of the religious community would be corrupted. The witness draws fire upon himself or herself in certain circumstances. There is witness to the limit of martyrdom. This is the witness even unto death.

V

What of the dialogue of the culture and the Church? There are a number of possibilities here. The Church can be tempted to turn into itself, especially if it feels that the reigning culture is a hostile other over against it – we have seen this in responses where everything modern was conceived as an “over against.” The same thing can happen from the standpoint of a culture that defines itself in its rejection of its need of religious community: a culture satisfied with itself, refusing any engagement with religion, except when by some contingency it strays beyond the officially sanctioned apartheid. The two sides can feed on this sense of “over againstness,” confirming each in their mutual distrust. Of course, there can be situations of genuine hostility, and then the religious community must witness against some idol that parades in the prevailing culture, witness fearlessly, even if in fear and trembling. But to generalize this feeling of “over againstness” is too negative. There must be more constructive possibilities of engagement.

Any engagement takes place in the middle space *between* Church and culture, and this middle space can be differently stressed and qualified. One such stress is when one of the partners in the interplay *subsumes* the other as the subordinate partner. Consider arrangements in modernity where the Church is to be the minor party in a social arrangement where the State bestows on it a secularly sanctioned place without a more overarching social totality. Consider Hobbes’s subordination of all spiritual authority to political sovereignty – political sovereignty must be one and undivided. One thinks of the politically approved Church in China today. But this is a very old

tension. The political sovereign determines the ultimate terms of the interplay, and the Church is the servant of the sovereign.

There can be here a kind of secularist totalitarianism – and it need not be in a totalitarian state either. Culture is set over against the Church with the goal of the enfeeblement of the Church. This can be done with a benign smile, as when the real point of “privatization” is the denial to religion of any place in public life – once again an intimacy without the universal, not the intimate universal. We see not a few signs of this in the Western world. While the privacy of religion is important – there is nothing more intimate – to cut it off from public manifestation in a variety of modalities would be to produce an autism of the religious.

Of course, in a more theocratic arrangement, it can be the religious powers that function as the subsuming force. This tendency perhaps is most present today in radical Islam. No doubt there were tendencies in this direction in earlier versions of Christianity, but now these tendencies seem not to figure in the same way. Possible here is an expression of the urgency of religious ultimacy, often in fiery form, against the perceived corruptions of the world. This can burst forth with a shocking passion, shocking to those whose religious passion has been enfeebled. As one might crudely put it, there is fire in the belly – and this fire is something we must ponder, both politically and religiously – and not only this fire, but also the general enfeebling of the passion of the religious in the West. Passion is not necessarily an irrational surge of devouring fire; it may be the dynamism of a love that must be out with itself – proclaiming itself.

The danger here, as with all great passion, is that the passion is not properly purified, religiously speaking, and it is the carrier of a secret will to power – and sometimes perhaps not so secret – that wants to assert itself over against corrupt culture, and overcome it. No religion can throw the first stone here. The religion that throws the first stone confirms the corruption and may well, in due time, find itself stoned.

In these possibilities just discussed, something of the *double relation* in the middle space between Church and culture is compromised. The religious community, it is said, is to be in the world but not of it. It is in the midst but as a witness to what is above – it is a “*meta*” in the double meaning of this Greek word: for “*meta*” means both “beyond, over and above” as well as “in the midst.” At one and

the same time, the religious community in the world is both inside and outside, and by thus being double, perhaps it is more truly catholic. It is in the midst of time, but its final allegiance is not to the State or one's own people, or family, but God first and foremost, and then to the neighbour as oneself. Those who love immanent gods cannot but here suspect a kind of treason. I think of the ancient world when the Christian was branded an atheist because of a refusal to bow to the Emperor as god, or to the gods of the State, or the people, or the local place. Then as now one has to live out a life between Caesar and Christ but with eyes and ears and heart on Christ.

This will be named as a sign of contradiction, a contradiction rejected by those who would reduce the doubleness to the singularity of immanence totally at home with itself. For the Christian this position of "being between" is rather to be singularly stretched between immanence and transcendence. A different universality is promised in that middle space – not an immanent universal, not a merely transcendent universal univocalized into some fixed place beyond, but an intimate universal, a metaxological universal. There is suffering under this sign of contradiction. There is also the danger of being torn between the two, the danger of the collapse of one into the other, the danger of the sublation of one into the other. But the two remain two as long as we are in time. The City of God is not the City of Man, either from a theocratic point of view, or the viewpoint of a secular totalitarianism.

When religion is politically subsumed, it is not properly free to be a witness of what is above us – it is so swallowed within the immanence of political power that this witness is stifled or strangled. When religion theocratically subsumes the political, it claims to be sovereign of the immanent totality – but now religion becomes a "within" which is in danger of mistaking itself for the "beyond" – mistaking itself for the God who exceeds all our claims to appropriation. It becomes tempted with its own will to power, albeit justifying itself theologically. In this will to power it loses its theological justification – which is to witness, in the humility of agapeic service, to the divine power as beyond all will to power

VI

Rather than "over againstness" in fixed difference that denies

relation; rather than subsumption which denies true difference in overweening relation; rather than reduction which collapses both difference and relation; rather than all these, whether from the side of Church or culture, perhaps one might argue for a *plurivocal intermediation* between the two. I explain.

Plurivocal: there are many voices in this interchange. Moreover, there is something to be affirmed about this plurality. It is not a fall from the one – it may be a turn of the many to the One (*uni-versum*). If so, it is not a matter of one voice containing all the voices within itself – either by guile, or by shouting louder than the rest, or by silencing the dissidents. We have to live with this between situation: between time and eternity within the Church, between the Church and the constructions of time, the City of Man, some of which constructions in their own *incognito* way may be secret servants of the City of God. But it takes finesse (recalling an earlier theme) to know which is which. An institution with the identity card “City of God” may be entirely ungodly; while a group with the identification badge “City of Man” may be home to the nameless Samaritans who enact the mercy of the Most High and pass *incognito* along the way. Religious finesse is needed to tell the difference, and since most of us, maybe all of us, are lacking in religious finesse, it is best to cultivate humility and proper tolerance. Religious finesse is reluctant to say “no” to the strange other. For the God for all the others and ourselves may have passed before us, passed by us, in that stranger. And we risk letting it pass by, rather than welcoming it.

There is also this other form of “being between” here: the religious community has to maintain its own fidelity to its call, and yet at the same time it is turned not just inward but outward to the whole world, and indeed beyond the world. Again, it is must be inside and must be outside – it must often be both at once – and this is in the world. And being in the world, it must be beyond, in being witness to what the world can never completely contain. This is a tall order, an order it could not fulfil through itself alone.

If we are turned thus in this middle space with respect to public life, more than anything we requires judgment – wise judgment concerning what is fitting in the middle space. This is as much a matter of religious as political judgment. Aristotle talks about ethical *phronesis* (practical wisdom), but there are religious and political forms of *phronesis* also. All of these require finesse. This also means

that just as there is no merely neutral public space, there is no neutral general orientation in matters of public policy. *Deeming the fitting*: this will depend on the specifics of a situation and the peculiarities of a local culture. What is fitting in a Belgian context (to refer to our present place) is not always the same as what is fitting in an American or Japanese or African context. Judgment, religious and political, is required to deem the fitting.

Nevertheless, for the community of agapeic service there are constant areas of concern where the fitting is to be pursued. Thus there are commitments to the service of the poor, and social services generally that come to the aid of the disadvantaged. There are engagements that bear on matters of peace and justice. Education is another area: there are concerns that the young generation is appropriately educated. There are issues concerned with health: not only ministry of the sick, but also the issue of human well-being in due respect and reverence for the body. All of these engage a religious community or Church in public commitments. How specifically these engagements are defined is a matter for concrete judgment and religious and political finesse. The religious community here is in a between position: middle between its own commitments of fidelity and its outward turn towards the world beyond itself as it is. It has to live in and negotiate this middle space: being true in fidelity to the solicitation of the divine, and yet in this fidelity turned in communication to the world. Each of these areas could merit a study in its own right, but I will remark on just one point concerning how we relate to something elemental and inescapable – our being *embodied* creatures.

Religious finesse asks an orientation of respect and reverence for the body. Issues connected with bioethics, for instance, generate sometimes very complex legal, scientific and medical arguments. But prior to these complex technicalities, there is a more elemental level of consideration that is served by religious finesse. Reverence and respect require a mindfulness other than one that is objectifying of the body, and its practical correlate, the utilitarian exploitation of the body, in abusive labor practices, in pornographic sex, in the sale of body parts, in research that turns our bodies, indeed all of aesthetic creation, into mere resources for our use. Reverence is open to the human body as already an incarnate sign of a love beyond instrumentalizing. One might also see those involved in the care of the sick as

called to behold the bodies of the patients as incarnate signs of this love beyond instrumentalizing. The least of these are incarnate signs of the divine, calling those still in robust health to the practice of a love that also signals something beyond the instrumentalizing of the others. The service of the medical healer has always been a sign of this care beyond instrumentalizing.

In the case of human beings, this care is noteworthy in the manner it takes on certain *unconditional* characteristics: those who from a biological point of view seems worthless, are deemed worthy of a sacred respect. There are critics who might bridle at a phrase like “sacred respect.” And it is only too true that there are massive trends in our time geared to the project of, so to say, *deconsecrating the human body*. The space between deconsecration and desecration is often, alas, infinitesimal. There is a loss of the finesse needed to discern the rightness of this deeming of sacred worth in the flesh itself. The profit and the loss of human lives are reckoned on a utilitarian calculus – to the profitless loss of being truthful to what we more intimately are. The flesh is not seen as a sign of God – the fleshed are not seen as signed by God.

Culture in a broad sense is concerned with the cultivation of our finesse for these signs, whether in great art, in festivals of celebration and liturgical ceremonies of praise, in philosophical reflection, in hospices of compassionate care. A culture tempted with scientific ambitions, or beset with dreams of the ultimate manipulation of the given endowments of life, has deserted the elemental reverence that places us in the space of ultimate porosity between the human and the divine. Cultivation of religious reverence keeps open this space of ultimate porosity. It seeks to dwell, asks to be allowed to dwell, in the intimate universal. The Church has to renew this dwelling, has to be renewed in this dwelling, from day to day, from age to age.

I conclude by returning to my remark at the beginning about the plurality of cultures that flow into and through the multi-national *metaxu* here in Leuven. At best here is effected some fruitful communication between home and abroad, between the local and the international, the intimate and the universal. Our situation, and perhaps especially in Europe, sometimes can be dispiriting, manifesting too often a culture of indifference to religion, indifference on the surface through it call itself tolerance, tolerance which when irritated can easily mutate into hostility. Can the bitter grapes of

corrosive skepticism yet ferment into palatable vintage? Not without the yeast of the kingdom of God. Otherwise we brew a stagnant potion without spiritual joy. In a sea of indifference, the restrained witness of religion struggles against its own spiritless spirit, unable to take fire, or to be set on fire. Of course, too much fire and one burns up, and perhaps this is also to lack in religious finesse. The many fundamentalisms abroad today do not have the proper measure of this finesse. Mirroring each other, these fundamentalisms produce simplistic univocalizations of both politics and religion. Our situation today asks for steady finesse, visionary religious finesse in the face of the reductive fires of fundamentalisms, secular and sacred.

2.

The Allure of (A)theism

DENNIS VANDEN AUWEELE

It is customary when someone meets a new person to say where they come from. In somewhat more archaic English, you might ask where the other person ‘hails from’. But ‘to hail someone’ can also be a greeting, even a well-wishing (think for instance of the German *Heil*). This means that to say where you hail from implies saying *from what place you greet someone*, and so you reveal the place out of which you start to meet the other. Paul Ricoeur is known to start his lectures on hermeneutics with the question: “*D’où parlez-vous?*” – where do you *speak* from?¹ I think this contribution will decidedly make a lot more sense if I first let you know wherefrom I speak.

Growing up in a small and rural town on the outskirts of Brussels (Belgium), I found that a sense of atheism was slowly becoming the new default religion for my immediate peers. When I was twelve, I was an altar boy at my neighborhood church and at times mused about becoming a priest. I was ridiculed for this. My friends and schoolmates thought of me as outdated and ignorant. They, like Nietzsche’s ‘last man’, had seen the light and no longer cared for archaic notions like church, God and salvation:

No shepherd and one herd! Each wants the same, each is the same, and whoever feels differently goes voluntarily into the insane asylum. ‘Formerly the whole world was insane’ – the finest ones say, blinking. One is clever and knows everything that has happened, and so there is no end to their mockery. People still quarrel but they reconcile quickly – otherwise it is bad for the stomach. One has one’s little pleasure for the day and one’s little pleasure for the night: but one honors

¹ Cf. Richard Kearney, *Anatheism. Returning to God after God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), xi.

health. 'We invented happiness' say the last human beings,
and they blink.²

Partly because of the mockery of my peers, I abandoned going to church. While I am no regular visitor of any church to this day, I do care a great deal about religion. I had when I was young, and I still have, what I like to call, with a term coined by Arthur Schopenhauer, a 'metaphysical need'. Something drives me (and I feel like I am not alone in this) beyond the always evolving but never changing day to day aspirations of some of my peers. But while Schopenhauer was rather content in giving this term a negative connotation – as being our answer to suffering and fear of death that makes us look for something unconditional – I am convinced there is more at stake here. For instance, early on I sensed that there was a potential vacuity to the life of those searching for the 'little pleasures of the day and night', which is a sort of anemic condition of daily busying about nothing substantial. In my view, this rapport to life tends to petrify any quest for an authentic sense of being human, which includes all the mess involved in being human. At the age of sixteen, I joined a new community that promised inspiration, passion and a lust for a more thoughtful existence. I became a member of a movement that was already slowly fading at that time, I became a punk. I had anarchy emblazoned upon my standard and my battle cry of *f*** authority* was fueled by a desire for rebellion and dissent. I had found passion, but that passion came at a price. As a young teenager, I soon discovered that my new community was not just blasé about religion as most of my peers (who thought of it as outdated), but they were veritably hostile towards the potential torpor of religious practices and the way religion had historically given sanction for certain human proclivities such as racism, intolerance, distrust, oppression and close-minded dogmatism.

The critique and rejection of religion was a necessary preparation for becoming a punk. There was a sense, however, in which I felt that even punk had a tendency to close in upon itself. The tyrant that was dethroned was soon replaced by another. This became evident to me in a tendency among punks to police their peers: one needs to dress,

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, edited and translated by Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 10.

think and act in a certain way in order to be a *true believer*. While gatherings were always lively, there was not always an openness to discuss matters from all possible angles. Admittedly, some of the more mindful among my new heroes did realize that punk's atheism was likely to become, much as any comprehensive world view (and any political idealism), an excuse for lack of critical self-reflection. This would have to be avoided. That is why today, if I am pressed on identifying myself as something, I would call myself an apostate atheist. Even dissent has to be rejected at times. Having now matured somewhat, I am coming to grips with the philosophical ideals that proved so central in my search as a youngster. In this, I feel that atheism and religion should aim at the same thing, namely to create a space for self-transcendence, mindfulness for what exceeds the immanent frame and openness to the marvel of creation. The punk ideology and atheism in general did not always fare well in accomplishing these ends, and neither did Catholicism. That is why I identify as punk and Catholic both, as atheist and Christian, as rebel and reconciler.

But not all Catholics or punks are shallow and dogmatist. Far from it. I feel great delight when I read those self-professed atheist writers, such as Simon Critchley, James Wood and Julia Kristeva, who take very seriously the metaphysical need of humanity. One of these, Greg Graffin, lecturer in the life sciences at University of California and lead singer of the bad – *nomen est omen* – *Bad Religion*, phrases the issue eloquently:

Creativity is a challenge. It requires us to be fully human – autonomous yet engaged, independent yet interdependent. Creativity bridges the conflict between our individuality and our sociality. (...) Life is an act of endless creativity. With all its simmering tragedy and occasional catastrophe, a human life is an amazing thing to contemplate and experience. None of us had any special plan laid out for us when we were born. By abandoning the idea that an intelligent designer created us, we can wake with each dawn and say, 'What's done is done. Now how can I make the best of the here and now?' Life is never static. Despite catastrophic tragedies, life has persisted in evolving new varieties of unimaginable forms. I find comfort in the narrative of evolutionary history. When

I create, I feel that I am a participant in the grand pageant of life, a part of the ongoing creative engine of the universe. I don't know if that feeling is enough to replace the solace of religion in the lives of most people, but it is for me.³

Having now taken some critical distance from my youthful enthusiasm, I seriously hesitate whether any sense of atheism can fully live up to the profound astonishment that our confusing human condition brings about. But a religion unperturbed by atheist doubt can fare no better. Therefore, I am looking for a sense of being religious that includes atheist doubt, one that can serve as a vehicle for the move to transcendence that accompanied my own personal odyssey. I feel that it was my profound engagement with atheism that led me to a more profound sense of theism. Religion understood accordingly would be the passion for the welcoming of the divine excess, while atheism would be its rejection, in a world that would rather dismiss such excess than be its gracious recipient.

I

What is atheism at its best? Atheism is the recognition of transcendence at work in reality, but also the subsequent rejection of that transcendence. Of course, there is a more shallow sense of atheism that would deny, rather than reject, the stirrings of transcendence. What is theism at its best then? Theism is the recognition of something transcendent at work in reality, but also the courage, or 'holy folly', to welcome that transcendence. As such, theism and atheism are a response to the transcendent in reality, one answering in acceptance and the other in rejection. A mindful dealing with our metaphysical need must take that anarchic moment of atheist rejection profoundly serious and allow for the possibility of rejecting transcendence without therewith necessarily rendering those that do so ignorant, incomplete and shallow. Contemporary atheism, however, must come to the realization that meeting divine otherness is the locale *par excellence* of religious passion, and not insist on reducing religion as a whole to violence:

³ Greg Graffin and Steve Olson, *Anarchy Evolution. Faith, Science, and Bad Religion in a World without God* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 251.

Now I don't know what stopped Jesus Christ / From turning every hungry stone into bread / And I don't remember hearin' how Moses reacted / When the innocent first born sons lay dead. / Well, I guess God was a lot more demonstrative back when he flamboyantly parted the sea. / Now everybody's prayin', don't pray on me.⁴

The claim advanced in this essay is that a more profound sense of atheism and theism can be understood not as absolute opposites of excessive self-certainty about the (non-)existence of God, but as different existential responses to the confrontation with hyperbolically excessive happenings of divine presence. By hyperbolically excessive happenings of divine presence, I mean the occurrence of something which resists (but is often reduced to) an explanatory reduction to purely immanent, empirical terms. These happenings can put the human person in a fertile state of amazement, which can engender at best a bout of salutary faith or at worst, to use a phrase of Henry David Thoreau, a sentiment of 'quiet desperation'. The confrontation with God – which is the name I have chosen to give to these happenings of divine presence – is then not a determinate happening to be understood in terms of determinate immanence or ontologically-informed analytic concepts, but something elusive not to be transfixed to the shell in which it houses. In these confrontations, there is something revealing and retracting at the same time, a divine game of hide-and-seek, or a Schellingian self-contraction that counterweights self-expansion. Much alike to Nietzsche's seductive dance with his mistress 'life' in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, whenever we grasp at transcendence, it "dodges our advance [and leaves] only the licking, fleeing, trailing tongues of her hair."⁵ The object of metaphysical inquiry is elusive, but that should not withhold from putting effort in the venture of metaphysics. Some philosophers read metaphysics as the archaic practice of apodictically certain conceptual deduction, but I find an epistemologically humble version of that practice more to the point. Plato at one point describes philosophers doing metaphysics as "really quite ridiculous – just like children after crested larks; we kept thinking we were about to catch each one of the knowledges, but they

⁴ Bad Religion, 'Don't Pray on Me'. Lyrics by Greg Graffin.

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, edited and translated by Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 181.

always got away.”⁶ I would propose to investigate the metaphysical engagement with the epiphany of transcendence much like a playful game of attempting to grasp the elusive.

Numerous contemporary philosophers with a level of sensitivity to religious issues have approached the foundational moment of religion in the confrontation with these types of divine happenings. John Caputo speaks of the ‘anarchic event’ which contain the ‘name of God’, which in turn houses the possibility of the impossible⁷ and Jean Luc Marion, to name another, speaks of the confrontation with the ‘saturated phenomenon’.⁸ One contemporary philosopher who has taken the allure of atheism profoundly seriously is Richard Kearney, who has called such happenings of divine presence ‘anatheistic wagers’, i.e. “an invitation to revisit what might be termed a primary scene of religion: the encounter with a radical Stranger who we choose, or don’t choose, to call God.”⁹ Kearney emphasizes that we can no longer speak in a traditional way about God after the legion of atrocities that were committed or condoned by these traditional ways. This is a boon to philosophical investigation, namely that in that moment of profound uncertainty in how to speak of something, we open the way for a new space of communication: “And that is, I think, a grace of philosophy. It opens a space for the questioning of God where theists and atheists may converse. It invites us to revise old interpretations and reimagine new ones.”¹⁰

Kearney advocates in favor of something which he calls ‘anatheism’. This presents us with moments of theatrical ‘anagnorisis’, i.e. the dramatic moment of discovery and critical recognition which can afford a powerful personal transformation. Our particular response to such unveilings will determine in what way we are transformed accordingly. Kearney then prescribes five essential concurrent

⁶ Plato, “Euthydemus,” in: *Plato: Collected Works*, edited by John Cooper and translated by Rosamond Kent Sprague (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 728 [291 b].

⁷ See in particular, John Caputo, *The Weakness of God* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006).

⁸ See in particular: Jean Luc Marion, *God Without Being* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Jean Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002)

⁹ Richard Kearney, *Anatheism. Returning to God after God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xvii.

characteristics of the response to the atheist wager. First, 'imagination' as the freedom to choose to welcome that moment, or the ability to see the absolute Stranger *as something we ourselves determine to see it as*; second, 'humor' as the "creative response to enigma, contradiction, and paradox"¹¹ which provides the possibility to revamp the radical estrangement of the Stranger into something more tolerable; third, 'commitment' as the making of a decision, and not endless wavering, whether or not to house the Stranger; fourth, 'discernment' as the prudence to hesitate and be wary of the potential destructiveness of absolute openness: "Reading the face of the other is difficult, often disorienting and puzzling, but it is never completely impossible. If it were, every meeting with the divine would be a blind date (...) Not every stranger is divine. There is the other who kills and the other who brings life";¹² and fifth, 'hospitality' as the profound willingness to accept the Stranger. Particularly in some of his previous works, Kearney emphasizes this fourth characteristic of discernment so as to counter the rigor of Levinas and Derrida in their unconditional acceptance of Otherness:¹³ the Stranger at the door could be an innocent fleeing the Kantian axe-wielding assassin, but also a serial killer wielding the blade himself.¹⁴

In emphasizing not just the passion of religious openness, but also the prudence of hermeneutical discernment, we can start to understand why atheism would be alluring in our confrontation with the religious other. Following a Levinasian tack, Kearney develops this hermeneutic philosophy of religion in an interpersonal and

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹² *Ibid.*, 45.

¹³ This consideration is linked to Kearney's general hermeneutical approach, which aims to counter the emphasis postmodern theology tends to put on the absolute unknowability of the Other. In *The God who may be*, Kearney emphasizes that "it is still possible to respect the otherness of the Exodic God without succumbing to the extremes of mystical postmodernism." Richard Kearney, *The God who may be. A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 34. Also, he is rather hesitant about the "metamorphosis of the messianic other into 'every other...no matter what other'. If every other is wholly other, does it still *matter* who or what exactly the other is?" *Ibid.*, 73. Against these lines of thoughts, he emphasizes that "God needs to be *recognized* for us to be able to say that it is indeed God we desire (and not some idol, simulacrum, or false prophet)." *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁴ See Kant's essay, *On a Supposed Right to lie from Altruistic Motives* (1797).

intercultural sense. I propose to look at the subject matter by means of the metaphysical confrontation with the inaugural moment of confronting the other in ourselves, i.e. those profound existential events in which one finds oneself at a crossroads and is forced to choose. In Russian literature, the great moment of atheist doubt and religious passion is often represented as taking place on a 'crossroads' (*перекресток*), i.e. the point where all possibilities converge. Fyodor Dostoevsky in particular felt that all genuine faith is to be tried by doubt: "The hosanna must be tried in the crucible of doubt."¹⁵ Perhaps an illustration can be helpful. The German Romantic philosopher poet Friedrich von Hardenberg, better known as Novalis, lost his betrothed to tuberculosis. When holding a wake at her grave, a mystical experience befell him and he subsequently wrote the *Hymnen an die Nacht*. This poem was written in response to the Enlightenment's emphasis on autonomous self-creation. Novalis felt that autonomy was not the proper response to the loss of a loved one: how can he autonomously transform his sorrow for his lost love? Instead, Novalis turns to the 'night' for solace, a mystical moment of self-loss and faithful acceptance of redemption to come: "*Hin floh die irdische Herrlichkeit und meine Trauer mit ihr – zusammen floss die Wehmuth in eine neue, unergründliche Welt – das Nachtbegeisterung.*"¹⁶

The apparent dichotomy between 'light' and 'night' is not to be interpreted as framing night (religion) and day (atheism) as polar opposites. This confuses the fact that both are attempts to deal with a certain event that rebuts simple explanation or mundane indifference. Admittedly, there is a kind of radical atheism that would venture to deny the profound disturbance in the happening of lost love. This sense of, what I like to call, 'shallow' atheism refuses to even accept the hyperbolic happening as hyperbolic. Those 'shallow' atheists are not haunted by Edgar Allan Poe's raven, tormenting the narrator with that simple word spoken, that he is to be reunited with his beloved Lenore, 'nevermore'. But in that unwillingness to recognize the disturbing aspect of hyperbolic presence, the very life blood of profound existence eviscerates. Such a 'shallow' sense of atheism attempts to cancel out the wonder, while a 'profound' atheism is in

¹⁵ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, translated by Constance Garnett (New York: Signet Classics, 2007), 743.

¹⁶ Novalis, *Hymnen an die Nacht*. In: *Gesammelte Werke* (Gütersloh: Sigbert Mohn Verlag, 1967), 83.

awe, but also 'fear and 'trembling', of that wonder. As such, a more profound sense of atheism recognizes human existence as in twilight, between darkness and light, but opts for the 'light of reason' over the 'passion of night'. Novalis, to the contrary, seeks recourse in the escape out of twilight into night: "*Da kam aus blauen Fernen von den Höhen meiner alten Seligkeit ein Dämmerungsschauer – und mit einemmale riss das Band der Geburt – des Lichtes Fessel.*"¹⁷ The profound atheist speaks of existential negation against the night, not because he does not recognize the disturbing presence of hyperbolic divinity, but because that very presence is deeply perturbing. Confronting that disturbance in ourselves can give rise to prudent discernment whether or not openness is the appropriate response. In religious openness, there is a suspension of certainty and self-afflicted chastisement of selfhood that can be assuaged by an 'existential no' to divine excess.¹⁸

What renders such a sense of profound atheism alluring is that the positive response towards hyperbolic presence requires a suspension of certainty. By this it is not meant that religion is necessarily, like numerous mystical postmodernist would make of it, a leap into the absolute unknown. The suspension of certainty amounts to a moment of profound doubt whether or not the Other we are confronting is a benevolent divine, a Pascalian mute universe or even a Cartesian *malin genie*. But there is a revelation that could take place in accepting divine self-disclosing, and accordingly choosing openness rather than self-enclosure. More often than not, such openness is repaid with disappointment, however! Every drifter we welcome into our house can be a Jean Valjean – the protagonist of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* – who robs us blind and then flees at the crack of dawn. As a prudent philosopher, would it not be better to be suspicious and quietly ignore the midnight knock at the door? Nietzsche claimed it was in fact part of the 'bad blood' of the Modern philosopher to meet otherness with suspicion: "The philosopher pretty much has a duty to a 'bad character'. It is his duty to be suspicious these days, to squint as

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ I have elsewhere developed this sense of existential 'no' in dialogue with the metaxological philosophy of William Desmond. Dennis Vanden Auweele, "Metaxological 'Yes' and Existential 'No': William Desmond and Atheism," in: *Sophia: International Journal of Philosophy and Traditions*, 52 (2013), 637-655.

maliciously as possible out of every abyss of mistrust."¹⁹ Modern man has learned that generosity is too often repaid with misfortune. As such, one could take upon oneself two distinct stances: either you are generally kind-hearted and welcoming, but also occasionally disappointed; or, you are generally distrustful and never disappointed, but at times surprised by the naive generosity of some.

For those who like certainty, the latter stance is the preferred option since, here, there are clear expectations. This means that one recognizes hyperbolic mystery, but refuses it to constitutively transform or even influence our own being. In response to the distrust of Modern man, Nietzsche opts for a sense of beyond-human generosity. But Nietzsche's sense of generosity is not the kind of generosity narrated and prescribed by this essay. For Nietzsche, generosity means the self-exposure of our strong self upon the other so as to inspire that other into a quest for strong creativity. Generosity is the Zarathustrian 'river bursting its banks', which fertilizes the world around it.²⁰ Nietzsche's generosity is a generous giving, but is there not a generosity in being willing to receive? At one point, Nietzsche's Zarathustra sings a different tune, a song of night, in which he laments that he is "light; oh that I were night (...) How I would suck at the breasts of light!"²¹ He yearns to be the recipient of a kind of passion that he does not have to muster and maintain himself. While this train of thought is nowhere explicitly continued in *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (probably forsaken), we will try to unfold this in the next section.

II

People who generally describe themselves as religious or theistic often claim a profundity which they believe to be lacking in atheistic or nihilistic people. This is, however, not always justified and even theism can be in danger of becoming a means of escape from doubt and vexation. Much like there is a sense of shallow atheism, there is

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 34 [34].

²⁰ "When your heart flows broad and full like a river, a blessing and a danger to adjacent dwellers: there is the origin of your virtue." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, translated by Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 57.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

an egregious sense of shallow theism. There can arise in any religious person a flight from the depth of existential engagement with reality in the theistic submission to simple truth. As Nietzsche would say, while these people claim to be “deep, the truth is, they are not even shallow.”²² The allure of atheism can, however, work so as to refresh the torpor and enclosure of theistic self-assurance. In other words, the profound moment of atheist doubt can open the way for an even more profound sense of theism. But what is profound religious belief in this instance? Most people would readily admit that faith is not to be relegated to a kind of ‘belief without proof’, but rather a species of ‘trust without reservation’. Faith is not ‘believing that something’, but rather a ‘believing in something’. The evolution from seeing faith as about propositional knowledge towards a more intimate awareness of the hyperbolic is generally sound but should not be pushed to extremes. By this, I mean that religion is not to become a kind of new age spiritualism that is devoid of all tradition or dogma. While the propositional dogmas and attitudes of religion are of a secondary nature to its primary function, they do have a part to play in the general project of religion. Before turning to the importance of tradition for religion, I will first clarify the generosity implied in religious hospitality.

Religion and atheism are both responses to the confrontation with an otherness that rebukes from simple explanation – one saying *oui oui*, the other *non non*. The profound sense of theism would then offer up a generous hospitality to the hyperbolic otherness. Usually, generosity is associated with a ‘giving’: the giving of something of mine to someone else. The move is then from self to other. Such generosity can succeed whether or not the other is willing to receive as the giving itself is the kernel of generosity, not the receiving. But can this not be turned around? Can there be a sense of generosity in a willingness to receive? The term ‘generosity’ derives from the Latin ‘*generosus*’ which literally depicts someone of noble birth. Those of good stock are the ones capable of giving, of bestowing themselves upon others, while the ‘plebeians’ were those, if lucky, who were destined to always be on the receiving end. For a plebs to refuse the noble’s gift would be foolhardy since this implied a deep insult to the

²² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Bernard Williams, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 121 [126].

magnanimity of the noble. Of late, we seem to have grown hesitant about a readiness to receive: we want to earn our own keep, we do not want to be indebted to anyone and we certainly will not allow anyone superiority over us in their ability to give. If there is a move between self and other, it will be instigated by the self and not by the other. In religious issues, this logic is turned upside down: the other moves to us so that we can gratefully and graciously receive its beneficence. To be found in a position of receptivity is not to modern man's taste, as to which Kant testifies: "Kneeling down or prostrating oneself on the ground, even to show your veneration from heavenly objects, is contrary to the dignity of humanity."²³

Generous openness towards hyperbolic otherness has transformative potential. It can revamp the threatening other into images with which it is easier to cope than sheer otherness. The self-revelation of the other through generous hospitality can be the occasion for a new way of understanding the other. In this moment, the other can become a gracious divine agent but it can only do so by allowing religious tradition to inform that revelation. To avoid the ever-lurking possibility for religious revelation to be traumatic, there has to be a mediating term, a way to smoothen the lines of receptivity of the human being who stands in fear and trembling before the divine other. While the function of religion as such is to cultivate the profound willingness to receive the other, the function of historical religion is to transmute the threatening other into images with which mankind can cope. To illustrate and clarify this issue, we can turn to a number of literary examples that discuss (in)authentic moments of divine self-revelation.

Franz Kafka's masterpiece *The Trial* has a brief parable called 'Before the Law' almost at the very end of the novel, which could serve to illustrate the comportment towards the religious other. While Josef K. is looking for the crime for which he is sentenced to die, he realizes that he is really searching for 'the law' that has convicted him. Obviously, from a Judaic perspective, the law (*Thora*) is of capital importance, but one pervading difficulty surrounding this issue regards how human beings can have some kind of access to the law (besides its historical revelation in Scripture). Ultimately, Josef K. will fail to gain access to the law because he does so 'in the abstract' and

²³ Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy. The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 559 [6:436].

does not realize that interpersonal relations have a pivotal part to play in this. In his quest for the law, Josef K. turns to a priest who tells him a story about a man seeking to gain entrance to the law, but his path is blocked by a gatekeeper. The gatekeeper informs the man that access to the law might be possible, but not at this time. The story continues on by the man trying to bribe, deceive and trick the gatekeeper into getting access to the law. All of these efforts fail and the man, with his dying breath, inquires why it is that no one else has sought access to the law during all the time he has attempted to trick the gatekeeper. The gatekeeper divulges that this access was only meant for him and it will be closed after his death. While seemingly nonsensical, this parable divulges a vital element about a religious report to otherness. Insofar as the man tries to instrumentally utilize the gatekeeper – as someone who just opens the door for him or as an obstacle to be passed – the law will forever remain inaccessible. To Kafka, this means that access to God can only happen via proper interpersonal relationships; more generally, this means that insofar as the religious other is approached instrumentally (self-ish), access to genuine religion remains closed. Because of a lack of openness to the transformative other, the man in Kafka's narrative is destined to remain unenlightened. The telling ending of *The Trial* is that Josef K. is put to death 'like a dog': since he has not lived up to the proper interpersonal relationships to gain access to the transcendent ('the law'), he himself is reduced to brutish animality.

A different and perhaps more informative example of religious openness and divine self-revelation occurs repeatedly in the rich and philosophically saturated work of Fyodor Dostoevsky. As with regard to our current purposes, we will be singling out his most well-known novel, *Crime and Punishment*.²⁴ The destitute law student Rodion Raskolnikov finds himself in a bind when he receives a letter from his

²⁴ Similar arguments could be made about any number of Dostoevsky's works. For instance, in *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, the suicidal protagonist is in a dream exposed to the innate goodness of humanity and refreshed; in *The Idiot*, the inability of the loveable Prince Myshkin to try his faith on 'the crucible of doubt' surrenders him to epileptic madness; in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the mystical experience of Alyosha enables him to overcome his need for worldly affirmations of his faith. For a more detailed exegesis of the issue of faith and existential struggle in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dennis Vanden Auweele, "Existential Struggles in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*," in: *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 80 (2016), 279-296.

mother that reveals to him that his sister Dunya will marry a well-off lawyer Luzhin. What Raskolnikov takes from this is that his sister plans to sacrifice her own independence so that he could continue his studies and reclaim a potentially brighter future. This instance is a brilliant illustration of Raskolnikov's general dialectic of consciousness, or as Malcolm Jones calls it 'cross-pressure':²⁵ either to instrumentally utilize other human beings as a means to an end or to respect others as intrinsically valuable. Raskolnikov plans a crime, the murder and robbery of an old woman, in order to test whether it is possible to transcend any and all moral, social and legal boundaries ('to be a Napoleon') for a greater good. Although Raskolnikov's motives remain somewhat equivocal throughout the novel (he repeatedly shifts perspective), he does seem to want to test whether there really is such a thing as God or if "the whole human race is general, isn't really a villain at all? That means that all the rest is just a load of superstition."²⁶ Resonating suspiciously of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, Raskolnikov ponders whether some extraordinary people "have the right to commit all sorts of crimes and break the law in all sorts of ways precisely because they are extraordinary."²⁷ In his confession to Sonya, Raskolnikov admits to this being his central motive for the murder: "I wanted to kill without casuistry (...) I didn't kill to help my mother (...) I didn't kill in order to get money or power (...) I simply killed (...) I wanted to know whether I was a quivering knave, or whether I had a right."²⁸

Especially throughout the second, post-murder, part of the novel, it gradually dawns on Raskolnikov that he cannot achieve the set goals because he is constantly deliriously haunted by his conscience. Raskolnikov comes to the realization of his profound guilt for committing this atrocious deed and has to find a way to atone for his sins. He is given the occasion for this by his beloved Sonya, a young lady who has turned to prostitution to provide for her family after her father has condemned them to destitution because of his drinking and inability to keep a job. After Raskolnikov showed some generosity to

²⁵ Malcolm Jones, *Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin. Readings in Dostoyevsky's Fantastic Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 77 ff.

²⁶ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, translated by David McDuff (London: Penguin books, 2006), 34.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 308.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 500.

her family early in the novel, he becomes particularly interested in Sonya. Her behaviour appears to be the polar opposite of Raskolnikov since, opposed to Raskolnikov's incessant neurotic self-elevation, she selflessly sacrifices her body and virtue for the sake of her family. Sonya's agapeic self-sacrifice reveals something to Raskolnikov which vivifies in him the hope for a rebirth. When Sonya finally reads Raskolnikov the Biblical story of Lazarus and they exchange crosses, Raskolnikov is mystically revealed something that renders the other not quite so terrifying anymore. Dostoevsky describes this transformative moment of recognition magnificently in the following encounter which takes place in utter silence:

All of a sudden, Sonya was next to him (...) She gave him a pleased, friendly smile, but, following her habit, extended her hand to him timidly (...) He had invariably taken her hand with a kind of revulsion, invariably greeted her with something akin to annoyance (...) But now their hands were not disjoined; he gave her a quick, fleeting glance, uttered no word and lowered his gaze to the ground. They were alone; no one could see them (...) How it came to pass he himself did not know, but suddenly it was as though something had snatched at him, and he was hurled to her feet. He wept, and hugged her knees. In that first split second she was afraid, and her whole face froze. She leapt up from where she was sitting and stared at him, trembling. But immediately, in that same instant, she understood everything. Her eyes began to shine with infinite happiness; she had understood, and now she was in no doubt that he loved her, loved her infinitely, and that at last it had arrived, that moment (...) What had revived them was love, the heart of the one containing an infinite source of life for the heart of the other.²⁹

Throughout Raskolnikov's ordeals caused by his neurotic self-obsession, there is never cancelled out the possibility for a rebirth and gradual renewal. Although questions can be raised about Raskolnikov's resolve, and much of his future is generally obscure, the epilogue of the story signals that a profound transformation has taken

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 654-655.

place.³⁰ Raskolnikov's salvation was always a possibility, even though he had to render himself receptive to the divine revelation. Or, as one character suggests to Raskolnikov, "God has been waiting for you in all of this."³¹

III

These literary examples serve to enlighten the point that the generosity of receiving can have the transformative, perhaps soteriological, potential for revamping the once threatening other into an agapeic divine. Kafka and Dostoevsky both turn to interpersonal relationships to be the mediating term in this encounter: the other can be a vessel for the divine to self-reveal. A different occasion for such an encounter can be had in traditional religion. There has been a tendency of late as an intellectual to feel embarrassed by some of the tenets and dogmas of one's religion. To treat, for instance, Biblical narratives as factual, historical events, seems untenable given some of the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. More so, this approach is problematic given the very nature and function of these narratives which serve as a vehicle for the encounter with transcendence.

To look for an unreserved revelation of transcendence in immanence misses the point, but to recognize a trace of transcendence in religious narratives and practices can be helpful to frame religious openness in a specific way. One example is the Christian Eucharist: here, the real presence of God is cultivated in an atmosphere which is readily recognizable. The celebration of this event renders human beings generously receptive in their openness to an evanescent epiphany of divinity emanating from the seemingly ordinary. This

³⁰ Many readers complain about the epilogue to be somewhat out of place and generally awkward. Dostoevsky constantly rewrote the book but felt significant pressure of his publisher, so might have simply 'slapped' an ending on the story. A more charitable reading would investigate whether the rebirth of Raskolnikov is not already ambiguously prepared beforehand and the epilogue simply suggests a first resolute step in the correct direction. Or, as Rowan Williams claims, the book "does not end with an unambiguous statement of Raskolnikov's repentance and conversion: he is still on the threshold of anything like recognizable Christian faith (...) There is always more to be said." Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky. Language, Faith, and Fiction* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008), 114-115.

³¹ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 548.

openness breaks any all too simple self-enclosure, even if only for a brief moment. Even though Kant has something quite different in mind, his somewhat off-key remark about ‘dinner parties’ in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Perspective* can be illustrative to this point: “Dinner parties are an extra-ordinary experience: they offer a unique opportunity to realize, and thus embody, the ideal form of humanity – if only for a blissful evening.”³² Even Kant realized that the confrontation with the ordinary can engender a profound sense of transcendence.

But is the Eucharist then just a dinner party? Yes and no. In itself, this is a rather mundane event of sharing bread and wine with a community. But by positioning ourselves as willing to receive the emanation of divinity in the ordinary, this moment is found to be enchanted as extraordinary. While the Christian version of this occasion might be unappealing to a great many these days, its general significance is confirmed by the profound attachment most if not all people attach to their traditional gatherings with their community. If, however, we evolve in such a way when such a gathering is nothing but a sharing of a meal, then we are at danger of losing the hyperbolic in, what Richard Kearney calls, “epiphanies of the everyday.”³³ Even the most mundane of events are not without the potential to inspire an encounter with the Other: “In the most quotidian, broken, inconsequential, and minute of events that the divine signals to us” and “from such instantaneous and recurring incarnation no one and no thing, no single this or that, is excluded.”³⁴ When pushed about this, Kearney would admit that God could not have been found in occasions of extreme de-humanization such as Auschwitz because the face-to-face encounter with the other requires the recognition of human dignity.

Historical religion thus repeats certain seemingly ordinary practices (the sharing of bread, the washing of feet, the coming together of a community) in order to recognize these happenings as pregnant with meaning. That meaning can arise only if the participant

³² Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*. *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, Robert Louden and Gunter Zöllner, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), [7:278].

³³ Richard Kearney, “Epiphanies of the Everyday: Toward a Micro-Eschatology,” in: *After God*, John Panteleimon Manoussakis, ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

is generously willing to receive hyperbolic value emanating from the seemingly ordinary. To those that are utterly deafened to the hyperbolic, there is little recourse. But to those who would call themselves 'profound atheists' (among which I counted myself at one point), there can occur a kind of salvific potential in opening up and generously receiving the epiphany of the ordinary. There is accordingly no need to eschew traditional religion and historical dogma to be a profound theist since these provide the occasion for an authentic engagement with the transcendent. If the stress is put, however, on the literal meaning, historical accuracy or theological significance of these events, then the sphere of authentic engagement with the other is easily abandoned. I ponder how many decent and humble churchgoers back in my hometown would know anything about transubstantiation or the real presence in the Catholic Eucharist? Should they? In matters of aesthetics, knowing too much about a piece of art can often prove a hindrance to aesthetical experience. In fact, the moment the art-scholar takes over, we are no longer in the sphere of aesthetic experience. Something similar could be said about religion: religious experience is very different from theology.

IV

In this brief contribution, I have outline two different responses to hyperbolic and divine excess, namely rejection (atheism) and acceptance (theism). Both of these responses have their allure: on the one hand, atheism profoundly rejects divine excess in a quest for selfsame certainty and, on the other hand, theism generously accepts divine excess in the hope for a transformation. Perhaps the inaugural moment of religious experience is not to be found in the majestic and the glorious, but more readily in the simple and the mundane, such as the encounter with the human other, natural beauty, profound thought and unsettling doubt.

Do we have to generate an attitude of unconditional acceptance to this Other? There are many ways to answer that question. There is no doubt that those who do just that are themselves occasions for divine transcendence. I brought to mind Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* before and signaled that the midnight knock on the door can come from a Jean Valjean who robs us blind. But forget not, when Valjean

was caught and returned to the priest who gave him shelter, that priest answered with undeserved and excessive generosity by adding to Valjean's loot. Perhaps Valjean's profound transformation into the person he will grow up to be was inspired by the excess of the priest's generosity? In other words, when we decide to let ourselves be inspired, we ourselves become an inspiration to others.

Part Two
Being Not Quite At Home

The Unbearable Present: Reflections on the Homelessness of Secular Modernity

JARED SCHUMACHER

The following essay is a reflection on the nature of 'home' as an idea constitutive of Western thought. This idea is by no means monolithic, but has gone through a variety of permutations and reconfigurations the more its past iterations have proven unsatisfactory. It will be argued that Western secular society remains committed to the Modern project to the extent that it embraces an 'optics of the transitory', but also to the extent that it locates its telos and consummation – its 'homeland' so to speak – 'in the world', conceived as a totalized secular reality. It will further be argued that, from the perspective of the Christian theological tradition, this project is destined for perpetual failure, but this failure gives rise to the possibility of conceiving things alternatively, recovering a hidden virtue in the experience of ourselves and our civilization as homeless, in as much as it clears a path for our prodigal return 'home'.

I

In his *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, Marshall Berman offers a definition of modernism understood as "the struggle to make ourselves at home in a constantly changing world."¹ Berman's definition assumes two key things about our situatedness in the world that I take as constitutive of the modern project *tout court*. The first is the fact that we are not already or unproblematically 'at home'. If that were the case, we would not have to 'struggle' to bring ourselves there, but would instead already be possessed of an easy dwelling. We see this commitment as the driving force behind what we will call modernism's 'optics of the transitory' – a way of seeing existence as in a state of perpetual flux. The second is the assumption

¹ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 6.

that 'home' names a place in the world, and therefore assumes an anthropology which sees human being as fundamentally a-being-at-home-in-the-world. Put in the more abstract language of the philosopher, 'modernism' is a project typified by the teleological commitment to home-building coupled with ontological and anthropological commitments to our in-the-world-ness. Taken together, these commitments form the conceptual basis of the modern project understood as man 'making a home in the world'.

That Western civilization is now increasingly believed to have entered a 'postmodern' moment, however, casts in doubt the postulate of the modern project's inevitability. In his famous treatment concerning the subject, Jean-François Lyotard argues that postmodernity names the time in which there is now wide-scale loss of credibility of the great metanarratives of modernity among the scientific and cultural elite of the late 20th century.² These meta-stories of reality were crucial to the self-understanding of modernity, Lyotard argues, underwriting as they did the modern project in their capacity to direct human cultural production towards one or another inevitable or necessary end. In short, these metanarratives pointed the way 'home'. In some renditions, 'home' was unlimited technological progress, in others the consummation of liberty or freedom, in still others the aggregation of encyclopedic knowledge. Lyotard's critique pours scorn on the necessity of them all. If it can safely be assumed that Berman's 'modernity' is informed by one or another of the metanarratives of scientific, technological, or material progress, any of which Lyotard discredits, then certainly the critique of modernity calls into question the validity of the modernity-as-homemaking enterprise as well.

Or does it? Berman's emphasis on 'the struggle' of homemaking gives him a defensible line of response to any Lyotardian criticism. His is not a naïve assumption of the future success of the human struggle to make ourselves at home in a constantly changing world, only a descriptive articulation of its undertaking already under way. "To be modern is to live a life of paradox and contradiction," Berman insists. "[I]t may take desperate and heroic struggles to sustain this life, and sometimes we lose..."; but given the alternative, despair, it

² Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

remains best to just “keep on keeping on.”³ Berman’s ontological perception of the modern situation sees the world “in a state of perpetual becoming,” a kind of process ontology whose end remains undefined and indefinite but whose essence can be grasped as the attempt to encourage humans to “make their way through the maelstrom and make [modernism] their own.”⁴ Perhaps we will never really arrive at home, Berman seems to suggest, but it is only human to venture the undertaking, to beat our breast in the face of life’s fury by seeking to make ourselves at home in the world.

Likewise, Lyotard himself saw the fundamental interrelation between the modern and the postmodern in subsequent years. For him, a mature postmodernity is modernity taken seriously, a kind of radicalized modernity, a redoubling of our effort in a moment of conceptual crisis.⁵ Like Berman, Lyotard ontologizes the struggle of existence and even valorizes it by adopting “agonism,”⁶ an ontology rife with contradictions, paradoxes, and aporias which might never be resolved, but one which he felt should not be abandoned in view of them, either. At the epistemological level, we are left with “islands of determinism,”⁷ themselves unstable, in a turbulent sea of indeterminate change. The postmodern condition is the human condition of fragmentary knowledge in the face of the struggle to be, a struggle to build ‘home’ (or in Lyotard’s verbiage, a discourse “regimen,”)⁸ even if only as a castle in time’s constantly shifting sands.

In the end, what separates Berman’s modern outlook from Lyotard’s postmodern one is more an inflection of attitude than anything substantial or metaphysical. The modern man maintains optimism in view of modern life’s contradictions, while the post-

³ This and the preceding quote are taken from: Berman, *All That is Solid*, 13-4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵ See Jean-François Lyotard, “Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?” in: *The Postmodern Condition*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 71-82.

⁶ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 59.

⁷ Lyotard **Error! Bookmark not defined.** initially uses the metaphor “clouds of narrative language elements,” which later becomes slightly more concretized into “islands of determinism.” Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiv; 59. The metaphor of the ‘island’ is also important to his later work. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, translated by Georges Van Den Abbeele (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 1988), 130-135.

⁸ Lyotard, *Differend*, xii-xiii.

modern man is more susceptible to despair. In view of the maelstrom, an optimistic advocate for modernity like Berman seeks to reconnect us with our own “modern roots” because he believes that “remembering the modernisms of the nineteenth century can give us the vision and courage to create the modernisms of the twenty-first. This act of remembering can help us bring modernism back to its roots, so that it can nourish and renew itself, to confront the adventures and dangers that lie ahead.”⁹

Postmodern critics like Lyotard insist that things are already too different – the world has already changed too much – for such a nostalgic remembrance. But even this criticism serves to highlight where both agree: there is no escaping the fact that the world is humanity’s ‘home’, one in which we are problematically not already ‘at home’. Whether one embraces modern constructionism or postmodern deconstructionism as the necessary course of action, both take the modern project as inevitable: man learning to dwell fully at home in a secular world, either through hope or despair. *Modern* man accepts the challenge of homemaking as his destiny, while *postmodern* man suffers it to be his fate; *modern* man holds out hope that he might yet come into his kingdom, while *postmodern* man insists he already has, a kingdom built of hour-glass sand.

II

The experience of modernity as a social epoch in which the crisis of our ‘rootlessness’ is brought manifestly to the fore has given rise to a host of philosophical reactions seeking firmer soil. For Marshall Berman it was recovering a historical perspective of the contemporary moment in light of the modernity of the past few centuries, finding roots in a putative tradition of modernism; for Lyotard, it was a radical insistence on rootlessness *as* the human condition, reclaiming – as he believed – modernism “in the nascent state,”¹⁰ and in so doing, grounding a (post)modernism for the future; for Martin Heidegger, it was a reflective returning to the question of being in order to learn how to let being be, finding a home for our roots in the firm ground of being.

⁹ Berman, *All That is Solid*, 36.

¹⁰ Lyotard, “What is Postmodernism?,” 79.

In his essay "Building Dwelling Thinking," Heidegger proposes thinking of these three terms in their fundamental interrelation and most especially in their fundamental relation to the question of being. The exigency out of which the essay arises is the modern housing crisis and what must be done to ameliorate domestic matters following the destruction of Europe and population increases in the post-World War era; but, as is typical for a work of Heidegger, more is at stake than the suggestion of a practical solution to a technical problem. At its core, the housing crisis is an existential crisis, Heidegger argues, one that can only be reckoned with as a part of a larger reflection on the meaning of existence. Thus, in order to answer the question of what building, dwelling, and thinking *are* such that a solution to the modern housing crisis might present itself, one must first come to terms with the more primary question of 'what does it mean *to be*?' Only when this foundational matter is settled can the crisis of modern settlement be adequately engaged.

But answering this question is fraught with peril. Any answer can only come in words, and language is no sure guide to being. Words that reveal might also conceal, and a mistaken word in the fundamental matters of being stands to corrupt everything built upon it. Indeed, Heidegger suggests that modern language is premised on just such a mistaken take on being, the net result of which has led ineluctably to our current sense of a "loss of rapport with things."¹¹ More colloquially put, moderns have lost touch with reality both in our language about it and, as a result, in how we live our daily lives. Heidegger takes the housing crisis as merely an epiphenomenon of this more basic cultural-linguistic problem; and while he is unconcerned fully to aetiologize this fall from a firm grasp of being's immediate presencing, he does nevertheless briefly speculate on two related causes.

First, humanity's instrumentalist posture towards language is blamed, a posture that assumes man to be the master of language rather than its midwife.¹² Seeing language as a human construct rather than as a mediation of being prevents our direct experience of being's immediacy. A second cause for our loss of rapport with things, and thus another hindrance to being's presencing, Heidegger briefly

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," in: *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper&Row, 1971), 155.

¹² *Ibid.*, 144.

articulates as a mathematical, epistemological, and methodological *abstraction* at the heart of modern science.¹³ Such a manner of knowing rescinds from being, a withdrawal from and rejection of its presencing. Despite these existential and historical sources of resistance, he nevertheless insists that if the housing crisis is to be met, it can only be met as a bringing humanity back to being, in its allowance for being to be, and in our recovery of a proper rapport with things both in our language and in our lives.

For Heidegger, being's fundamental modality is its native and essential simplicity – its “simple oneness” – which he pictures in theological terminology as “the godhead.”¹⁴ And yet, this oneness is not perceived immediately by the mind seeking a correct grasp of things.¹⁵ The very plurality of things prevents us from a simple grasp of the simple. Thus, two binaries, like two hands with opposable thumbs, are necessary to adequately grasp being as Heidegger does. The first binary he posits as “earth-sky.”¹⁶ As it is essential to earth qua *earth* that it makes sky distinct (and therefore intelligible) precisely as *sky*, so it is essential to sky to provide the limit and horizon at which earth becomes comprehensible. More than mere geography, we might speak broadly of Heidegger's ‘earth-sky’ as indicative of the structural basis of his cosmology, on par with material-spiritual or body-soul, although he himself does not push the distinction explicitly in this direction. The second binary, a logical extension and

¹³ We take this to be the practical import of Heidegger's lengthy etymological discussions of *stadio*, *spatium*, and *extensio*, and his conceptual distinction between locations, room, and space. See *Ibid.*, 151-4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 147-8.

¹⁵ It is important to understand that Heidegger concerns himself not to speak merely about a “mind” trying to get ahold of some ‘thing’ somewhere else. This form of speech tends to reproduce the very abstraction in thinking he is trying to excoriate, or rather, to expose as ex-coriated (stripped of flesh). This type of abstraction, a modern ‘mind’ divorced from the world of ‘things’, is precisely the source of the problem. Were common usage to admit it, it would be better to speak of a ‘mind-hand’ seeking a better ‘grasp’ of things as they are. Charles Taylor and Hubert Dreyfus have recently co-authored a book inspired in large part by Heidegger, seeking to reclaim a ‘contact’ epistemology as a way to overcome modern scientific abstractionism and its calculative thinking. The ‘mind-hand’ to which we gesture is but another way of perceiving ‘contact’ in a more robust philosophical ‘realism’. See Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor, *Retrieving Realism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

¹⁶ Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” 147.

complement of the former, is “mortal-divine,”¹⁷ by far the more underdeveloped pair in the essay. It is clear that this binary is intended to express the manner of the presencing of being; it is also clear that mortals are they that hold being as a being-towards-death. Heidegger believes humans to be the archetypal ‘mortals’; thus, the mortal-divine pairing exudes moral undertones.¹⁸ Heidegger glosses the divinities only as they who are “the beckoning messengers of the godhead,”¹⁹ which, if it is to be the pair of ‘mortal’, must mean something like ‘that which presences as a being-towards-life’, although he leaves this side of the binary under-articulated.²⁰

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 148-9. By ‘moral undertones’ we mean the pairing inscribes limitations on Heidegger’s conceptualization of being, and thus actionable or directional limits for certain instantiations of being. Were one to construct a systematic language of ‘ought’ from Heidegger, it must be done along ‘moral-divine’ lines.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 147.

²⁰ I suspect that this failure to specify ‘divinities’ more clearly is evidence of Heidegger’s own begrudging commitment to a problematic modern abstractionism, from the aspect of its strict separation of human being from divine being. For Heidegger, humans are, and must remain, mortal – i.e. they cannot bridge the boundary between mortality and divinity, but must ‘stay’ mortal, being as they are merely the being-towards-death. As a result, Heidegger cannot say anything about divinity without falling into incoherence; for to give content to divinity in human words would erase the strict boundary he wants to trace conceptually. And yet, to invoke the boundary as a ‘location’ of thought at all would seem to presuppose a porosity in human being, an assumption of its capability to grasp more than being-towards-death, an assumption for which Heidegger’s strict separation cannot account. If man is only mortal, why does he ‘expect’ anything from the divine? My view corresponds substantially with a reading of Heidegger such as has been done by Judith Wolfe, who emphasizes Heidegger’s rejection of traditional Catholic metaphysics and his assumption, consistent from his early work (Wolfe’s argument) to his later work (our gloss) that Heidegger, in the acceptance of a Protestant ontology, “highlights the radical otherness of the human vis-à-vis the divine...” to such an extent that they are conceived as radically divorced, and thus un-‘bridge’-able. The irony here is that Heidegger evokes the bridge as a positive metaphor in his description of human dwelling. See Judith Wolfe, *Heidegger’s Eschatology: Theological Horizons in Martin Heidegger’s Early Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 45ff. Our reading is also consistent with Wolfe’s further judgment that “Heidegger’s radical apophaticism regarding the nature of the god to come is at basic odds with the Christian orientation by and towards a revelation of God that has already occurred.” C.f. Judith Wolfe, “Religion in Heidegger’s Black Notebooks,” in: *Black Thoughts: Heidegger and the Future of Theology*, Mårten Björk and Jayne Svenungsson, eds.

In any case, when adequately grasped, being is held in a fourfold manner, what he calls “the simple oneness of the four,” or, taken together, “the fourfold.”²¹ Human being is therefore a fourfold staying with the fourfold presencing of being in its mortal modality. Seen from this perspective, human being is understood as a *dwelling* with and in being, a “staying with things” as they presence themselves in a fourfold interrelation.²² Human dwelling is taking up one’s abode in being, actualizing a human nature in “care” towards being as it presences; otherwise put, a “shepherd[ing] of being.”²³

At this point, we might wonder, why does this metaphysical mumbo-jumbo matter? According to Heidegger, to answer the question of how we should build houses – indeed, what houses are in the first place – requires an account of the purpose of those houses as means towards the actualization of human dwelling. Man builds in order to dwell, as dwelling is the ‘goal’ of building. But, as Heidegger is shrewd to mention, building is *already* a form of dwelling, a “space-making” and “care-taking” of being in its mortal modality.²⁴ Man does not first build and then dwell, but human being is a complex coming-to-dwell *also* in its activity of building.

Likewise, dwelling as a ‘staying with things’ requires a constant process of thinking about being as it presences. In order to stay with a perpetually fugitive being – that is, in order to dwell *on earth* – man must be in a continual process of thoughtful reflection. This process of thought is more than “calculative thinking,”²⁵ i.e. a technological or instrumentalist thinking about achieving pre-specified and static ends, but requires a continual process of meditation, a thinking open to future instantiations of being’s presencing.

(London: Palgrave, 2017), pre-publication draft consulted online: https://www.academia.edu/31139442/Religion_in_Heideggers_Black_not_ebooks (accessed 6 February 2017).

²¹ Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” 148.

²² *Ibid.*, 149.

²³ Heidegger takes up ‘care’ as proper to human nature as early as *Being and Time*. The notion of ‘shepherd of being’ comes from his “Letter on Humanism,” in: *Pathmarks*, William McNeill, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 252.

²⁴ Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” 149; 155-6.

²⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, translated by John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper&Row, 1966), 46.

Thus, 'Building Dwelling Thinking' represents the process of intellectual movement from an activity—namely, building—through its anthropological purpose—namely, dwelling—to its source—or in Aristotelian terms, its final end—meditating on being, or learning how to let being be as it should.²⁶ In the last analysis, to dwell is to inhabit the earth in such a way that it makes possible being's future in-dwelling;²⁷ to dwell is to clear space for the presencing of being in the human activities of thinking and building. Likewise, to think is to dwell in view of the possibility of being's expected arrival.

What Heidegger's essay exposes is a belief that modern technological thinking has colonized not just the academic sciences but all of human life to such an extent that the very possibility of meditation has been disregarded. *Building* has eclipsed *dwelling*, just as *calculation* has eclipsed *meditation* as the definitive human task. His essay—indeed his entire oeuvre—can be understood as the attempt to recover this other, more receptive, manner of being human, to recover an authentic thinking such that home-building again becomes a means of dwelling, which itself anticipates and 'makes room' for being's anticipated arrival. Like Berman and Lyotard, Heidegger is seeking a better understanding of human historical existence as the root to overcoming modern problems. What the three share in common is the modern assumption of home-building as the essential human endeavor, and a commitment to that building being fully 'on earth', conceived as a constantly changing reality. However, Heidegger at least senses the need to break out of what Charles Taylor has aptly called "the immanent frame" through meditative thought, even if, as we will now argue, his own thinking is incapable of doing so.²⁸

²⁶ The application of Aristotelian criteria to Heidegger is objectionable precisely because, as his *Discourse of Thinking* shows, he is trying to move beyond these very criteria. Although we leave the argument to one side, we nevertheless believe it possible to argue that Heidegger himself remains broadly within the Aristotelian framework, and when he does leave it, he does so to his own detriment, falling into contradiction.

²⁷ On Heidegger's conception of in-dwelling, see: *Discourse on Thinking*, 81-3.

²⁸ See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 539ff.

III

Heidegger concludes his essay with an existential reflection on what he calls the modern 'plight of dwelling':

However hard and bitter, however hampering and threatening the lack of houses remains, the *real plight of dwelling* does not lie merely in a lack of houses....The real dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they *must ever learn to dwell*. What if man's homelessness consisted in this, that man still does not even think of the *real* plight of dwelling as *the* plight? Yet as soon as man *gives thought* to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer. Rightly considered and kept well in mind, it is the sole summons that *calls* mortals into their dwelling. But how else can mortals answer this summons than by trying on *their* part, on their own, to bring dwelling to the fullness of its nature? This they accomplish when they build out of dwelling, and think for the sake of dwelling.²⁹

For Heidegger, the experience of modernity as a 'homelessness' exposes the plight of dwelling as fundamental to the human condition. To be human in the world is to be not-yet-at-home, to have roots which are not yet in their native soil, so to speak. But what then does it mean to be 'at home' for Heidegger? Where is our homeland, and which our native soil? It seems clear to us that Heidegger names 'thinking' as a kind of meditative and hopeful expectation of the future in-breaking of being as the viaduct through which we return home, the practice through which dwelling again becomes possible as a taking-root. But it is less clear *where* this thinking occurs, or whether it even can. Is our true home in being itself? This seems to be the ineluctable conclusion of his dialectic. But if so, then does not man's coming-to-be-in-the-world preclude the very possibility of his actually being with being itself? On the one hand, Heidegger insists on a *natural* plight of dwelling; on the other hand, he insists that man is already in the world, and thus already to some extent naturally at home. Is man a being-at-home-in-the-world, or is he not?

²⁹ Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," 159. Emphasis in the original.

The modern plight of dwelling thus has two faces, one sourced from a deficit in human nature (its existential face) and the other a result of a false and inauthentic abstraction from an adequate understanding of what it means to be human (its mask). To be human is to be not yet fully rooted, and thus there is what we might call a 'natural' plight of dwelling. But this plight is exacerbated by false forms of dwelling, premised on false forms of thinking and building, which do not adequately understand man's proper root in being.

As the above quote manifests, Heidegger holds the experience of rootlessness as basic to the human condition. But, by virtue of his own strict conception of humanity as a mortal 'being-towards-death', Heidegger seems to us bereft of the conceptual resources necessary to indicate a home that might satisfy us, a transcendence beyond the world. He correctly describes man's natural homelessness and the human need to grow into being in order to fully be-come, and yet he cannot picture this anywhere except 'on earth', conceived as a secular and immanent totality. Thus, he thinks only of earthly soil as the primary location for the totality of human growth. But if man is naturally planted on the earth, does it make sense to call him rootless or homeless in the world? More problematically still, does not a tree grow, not simply down, but—as his own "earth-sky" metaphor would seem to suggest—also up?³⁰

Only by recovering the upper horizon of 'earth-sky' and 'mortal-divine' can human nature again be meditatively understood such that space is made for the full stature of man's growth, through dwelling, in the fourfold oneness of being. Seen this way, human nature has a kind of double soil, of which modern language has trained him to be ignorant: 'the soil of the earth', into which he must sink his natural roots, *and* the 'soil of the sky', into which his growth becomes more

³⁰ At one point, Heidegger seems to be aware of the problem, but his solution is seemingly to re-inscribe the harsh boundaries that isolate human beings from Being itself. "But if dwelling preserves the fourfold, where does it keep the fourfold's nature? How do mortals make their dwelling such a preserving? Mortals would never be capable of it if dwelling were merely a staying on earth under the sky, before the divinities, among mortals. Rather, dwelling itself is always a staying with things. Dwelling, as preserving, keeps the fourfold in that with which mortals stay: in things." Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," 149.

than a mere preparation for death,³¹ but becomes instead a learning to dwell and live in the divine house of being. We argue that human being takes root in the world as a growth towards that Being which is beyond it. While man is naturally planted ‘on earth’, as Heidegger saw, man is simultaneously an ‘up’-rooted being, a being whose roots paradoxically grow *up* as well as *down*. For what is the act of bearing fruit if not a tree planting its seed in the sky? Heidegger was conscious of modern man’s rootedness in earthly existence, but not committed to his up-rootedness in Being.

Growing beyond Heidegger thus requires us to affirm the contingency of human existence and the earthly soil of our natural roots, but also to maintain, against the prevailing secular currents of the day, a soil in the sky that alone can quench our existential thirst for a home beyond our mundane “mortality.”³²

IV

The loss of transcendence that characterizes our age has resulted in a commitment to political secularism which functions both to re-inscribe the modern transitory optics and to limit our political aspirations to purely immanent concerns. In a recent interview concerning his new book *The Shipwrecked Mind: On Political Reaction*,³³ the intellectual historian Mark Lilla makes a conceptual distinction between types of response to civilizational and cultural crises that is helpful in demonstrating how secular constriction functions in practice. According to Lilla, once civilizational or cultural crises

³¹ *Ibid.* Heidegger characterizes mortality as the activation of a nature capable of death *towards* death; and, while he thinks that this way of viewing the mortality of human nature does not necessarily result in nihilism, we would argue to the contrary, since his ontology has no room for personal or bodily resurrection, no conception of the activation of death as a means to life.

³² Here we follow Mircea Eliade in seeing man as inescapably “*homo religiosus*,” even in his secular conception. As such he betrays, against his own judgments, “an unquenchable ontological thirst” for divine being, a fundamentally religious desire. While Eliade does differentiate the secular from the religious modalities of being, his conception of religious “survivals” among the secularists is what we mean to indicate here. See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, translated by Willard Trask (New York: Harvest Books, 1959), 64.

³³ David Skinner, “The Reaction Faction: A Chat with Mark Lilla,” *Humanities* 38.1 (Winter 2017), 10-11, 41.

achieve a level of criticality such that faith in our current grasp of political things can no longer be maintained, two responses are offered to us from out of our Western cultural imaginary. The first he calls the "Ulysses option."³⁴ Receiving its point of reference from the Homeric tale, this response to crisis seeks, in the face of overwhelming conflict or uncertainty, to "return home."³⁵ The idea here is that a course of collective action has led us away from what really matters, forcing us to exist as aliens in a foreign land. The moral task is thus seen as a home-coming, a going back to where we naturally belong. Lilla sees radical Islamism as a type of reactionary Ulyssean ideology, as it attempts to go back in time to some purer ideological moment to plant roots in the putative native soil of Islamic tradition. The second option Lilla dubs "the Aeneas one,"³⁶ following Virgil's lead. Here is the belief that the civilization of the past has been extirpated and "cannot be reconstituted."³⁷ The moral task is thus to found a new civilization, just as Aeneas founded Rome after the fall of Troy. Lilla describes its rationale as a belief that "the essence of the past must be planted in the future, where it will give rise to a new, magnificent, and conquering force that will overcome the corrupt present and create a future as radiant as what once was."³⁸ The example he gives as typifying this option is fascism, although we will argue in a moment that the future-compulsion of the Aeneid ideology can be applied more broadly to include less obvious forms of tyrannical governmentality.

What both of these options share is the belief that we are not presently at home; where they differ is over the very possibility of return. Ulysses sees home-coming as a distinct possibility because of the initial venturing away, whereas Aeneas witnesses the destruction of his ancient homestead. For one it is a simple matter of return; for the other, there can be no going back. Lilla believes that both are examples of what he calls political "reaction," a reflexive response to the political and ideological revolutionary "actions" of the 17th and

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

18th centuries.³⁹ As such, they are best understood as counter-revolutionary enterprises. As Lilla understands them, both reactionary options share the conviction that Revolutionary politics has shipwrecked the polis, and they seek to redirect political action away from the principles upon which the new modern order was established. But they are just as radical as the revolutionaries in their belief that political action is required to save (what remains of) the city; or as Lilla puts it, both think “that history has changed human nature and that action in history can restore it to what it should be.”⁴⁰ It should be noticed that, as Lilla characterizes them, both the Ulysses and Aeneas options accept a fundamentally revolutionary anthropology just to the extent that human nature itself is conceived as capable of essential change.

Lilla’s own sympathies lie with the Revolution. *The Shipwrecked Mind* is an analysis of political reaction and its alternate account of “history” as having gone off the rails, but also an implicit rejection of any nostalgia for the past.⁴¹ Given that the Revolution happened and cannot be undone, there remains little point in reveries of the *Ancien Régime*, his book would suggest. Precisely for this reason, the Revolutionary mindset shares much in common with the Aeneas option. Indeed, more than mere similarity, the Revolutionary perspective *is* the Aeneas option, merely with a different understanding of what survived the destruction of the Troy to be carried off into the future. As we see it, the Revolutionary perspective intrinsic to political modernism willed the destruction of the old city out of an abundance of optimism in human progress and faith in scientific achievement to usher in a better future, only to be betrayed by the recalcitrance of human nature to fundamental change. What remains of the old city to found a better future is thus the act of betrayal itself, not repenting in the face of manifest calamity at what the Revolutionary impulse has wrought in the world, from the Reign of Terror to Hiroshima and beyond. The revolutionary perspective’s Aeneid insistence that there is ‘no going back’—requiring us, as Berman said, to ‘keep on keeping on’—ironically constitutes its reactionarism.

³⁹ Mark Lilla, *The Shipwrecked Mind* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2016), ix-xxi.

⁴⁰ Skinner, “The Reaction Faction,” 41.

⁴¹ Our reading of Lilla concurs with that performed by Mene Ukuieberuwa, “The Great Debunking,” *The New Criterion*, 35.4 (Dec. 2016), 92-4.

To his credit, Lilla is too pragmatic, skeptical, and historically informed a thinker to go in fully for Revolutionary zeal.⁴² His earlier work, *The Reckless Mind*, can be read as a solemn warning to intellectuals on the reactionary right and the revolutionary left against placing too great a faith in political ideology. The book chronicles famous modern and postmodern intellectuals—many leading voices on the political ‘left’—whose political ideologies helped to justify various forms of oppression and tyranny in the 20th century. And yet, in a new ‘Afterword’ to the second edition, Lilla reflects on how much has changed in the years since the book’s first publication, years which included 9/11, the ‘War on Terror’, the rise of ‘Trump-ism’, and the maturing of reactionary nationalistic movements across Europe and Asia. Perhaps sensing the growing existential threat to his preferred political ideology that these intervening events presage, Lilla writes a convoluted yet unmistakable justification for a chastened continuance of the Revolutionary ideology as the only sensible way forward. Indeed, he praises the rejection of the ‘old ideologies’ accomplished in the Revolution, but changes the terms of his critical appraisal in suggestive ways.

In his original conclusion to the book, Lilla warned political thinkers against “the allure of an idea,”⁴³ by which he meant falling prey to political idealism, allowing a human utopic dream of the perfect polis to dictate our political actions and motivations. Unbridled love for one’s political ‘idea’ is what Lilla originally believed to be the ultimate cause of modern intellectual recklessness, blinding intellectuals to their own manipulation by various forms of tyranny. And only by checking such ideologically-inspired ‘eros’, first in the self and then in social institutions, can the tyrannical potential of the political sphere be tamed. His original claim was thus that ideologies

⁴² Lilla, *The Shipwrecked Mind*, ix. At one point, he even claims that the revolutionary spirit “may have died out,” implying that it is no longer a viable possibility, but this is discredited by his fight to breathe new life into philosophical liberalism understood as a rejection of political theology. Our claim is that Lilla functionally hides his own ideological presuppositions by critiquing pre-modern political theology and post-revolutionary ideologies, then feigning as if ‘the revolutionary spirit’ was simply a past phenomenon that has no historical or ideological link to the novel forms of tyranny that the ‘revolutionary spirit’ of his own liberalism has generated in the world.

⁴³ Mark Lilla, *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2016), 216.

were to blame for intellectual recklessness, as they were manifestations of an uncritical political devotion.

However, the intervening years seem to have clarified for Lilla the socio-ethical function of ideology, as his newer 'Afterword' manifests. The ascendance of reactionary movements has forced Lilla to concede the important ethical role that political ideologies in general continue to play, something he was initially hesitant to do because of their propensity to encourage intellectual recklessness. As he now correctly discerns, however, such ideologies are perennial, because they "operate by holding us in their grasp with pictures of reality that both explain it and motivate us to act."⁴⁴ In other words, without something like an ideology, truly collective action as a future-oriented enterprise becomes impossible. Actions require ends, and political action, just like political reaction, requires the coordination of collective activity according to some sort of schema that will be seen as binding, understood in both senses of the term: as linking person to person and as establishing an obligatory moral framework for a society. So 'ideology' must be recovered as a meaningful category, something Lilla has learned from his more recent work on political reaction, even if as a thought-form necessary to resist reactionarism itself. Lilla's new scapegoat for modern intellectual recklessness therefore becomes 'dogma', a shift that the title of his new 'Afterword' ('Sola Fide') is meant to drive home. While Lilla remains mindful that ideologies can "inspire lies," nevertheless he argues:

But what is a lie? It is a false pretense to speaking truth about the world—and thus betrays a recognition that people are after it. Dogmas inspire instead ignorance and indifference. They convince people that a single idea or principle is sacred and all they need to know in order to act in the world.... Because ideology makes a claim about the way the world actually works, it invites and resists refutation. A dogma does not. It kills curiosity and intellectual ambition by rendering them pointless. Our unreflective creed is little different from Luther's *sola fide*: give individuals maximum

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 222.

freedom in every aspect of their lives and all will be well.
And if not, then *pereat mundus*.⁴⁵

Lilla is suggesting that, although ideologies can be used to bad ends, they remain necessary in pursuit of collective truth as potentially falsifiable and thus also realizable goals for action. Dogmas, to the contrary, are characterized as anti-rational constructs, fictive authorities, appeals to which squander human collective pursuits by drowning the difficult task of philosophy in a sea of irrational faith. What Lilla critiques in this paragraph as “our unreflective creed” he glosses as the postmodern dogma which has arisen in recent years, comprised of “basic liberal principles like the sanctity of the individual, the priority of freedom, and distrust of public authority,” mixed with broadly neo-liberal economic objectives that he ultimately believes are holdovers from older, now discredited post-revolutionary ideologizations.⁴⁶ Lilla maintains that this *mélange* of holdovers from the Revolution constitutes a “soft dogma” that has arisen in the wake of the postmodern critique of Enlightenment modernity and the triumph of capitalism over socialism witnessed in the end of the Cold War.⁴⁷ Correctly seeing that reactionarism is a response to this politically toxic mix of post-liberal political malaise, but bent on rejecting the reactionary desire to include the revolutionary mindset itself in its critique, Lilla argues against both the reactionary solution and the inertia of postmodernity which called it forth by characterizing both as ‘dogmatic’, the former in its ‘anti-rationalism’ (which he believes is evinced in its rejection of the advances of the Enlightenment), and the latter in its *laissez-faire* intellectual lassitude, taking ‘on faith’ as it does the inevitability of what the Revolution, only through great travail, had birthed into the world.

This defense of revolutionary political ideology against a soporific dogmatism appropriates the thought-forms of Lilla’s other major book, *The Stillborn God*. In that work, his embrace of philosophical modernism and its culmination in political revolution is equally palpable. The book begins with the rather limpid claim that it “contains no revelations about the hidden course of history, identifies

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 223-5.

no dragons to be slain, has nothing to celebrate or promote, offers no plan of action.”⁴⁸ If that were indeed the case, we might then be justified in wondering what good would come from reading it, especially now that Lilla himself has learned the need for ideologies as putative plans of action in serious political thinking. However, this claim is immediately called into question a few sentences later, when the reader is pressured by Lilla to choose between “two grand traditions of thought, two ways of envisaging the human condition.”⁴⁹ These two traditions are Christian political theology and secular political philosophy, the former of which he believes to be dogmatic and irrational, while the latter is clearly his preferred position in the book.

It is here, we would like to suggest, that Lilla’s distinction between Aeneas and Ulysses is most diagnostically helpful. The Revolutionary mindset is fundamentally Aeneid in its rejection of the possibility of ever repenting and going home, a return which would mean a recognition that theology, as history has shown, is requisite for the maintenance of the just polis. Going back to theology would be a betrayal of that for which the Revolution fought, which Lilla takes to be the exclusion of theological authority from politics. Juxtaposed to revolution, the reactionary mindset is Ulyssean in its insistence that returning home remains a distinct possibility. This fact explains why so many of the reactionary thinkers that Lilla critiques—Heidegger among them—were drawn to the language of theology, realizing as they did that it is only sheer prejudice which excludes it from consideration. From the revolutionary perspective, ‘there is no going back’, because going back would require a distinctly theological act, namely repentance. It thus must insist upon lying on the ideological bed it has made for itself, however uncomfortable.

Lilla finds the ‘bed’ of modern politics in Thomas Hobbes, who “changed the subject” of political legitimacy, grounding its conception of authority no longer through theological appeals to revelation but through an immanent and “humanistic political anthropology.”⁵⁰ Despite his protestations to the contrary,⁵¹ Lilla clearly casts his lot

⁴⁸ Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 12-3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 313.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 302-3. Lilla adopts the detached tone of ‘historian of ideas’ frequently, especially at those points when he is most subtly pressuring the reader towards

with this revolution in political thought and its conceptual grounding in humanistic liberalism against the older theo-political tradition, preferring to see man and human society as an immanent totality irrespective of any putative divine ends or purposes. This is why he insists upon maintaining what he calls Hobbes' "Great Separation" in modern politics, inaugurating as it did the isolation of theology from purely secular political discourse.⁵² For Lilla, political theology indeed remains a dragon to be, if not slain, at least indefinitely quarantined. We *must* lie in the bed of our immanent secular humanism.

There are at least two main problems with Lilla's juxtaposition of the irrational dogma of political theology against the immanent ideology of modern political philosophy. The first is that it operates on a caricature of what dogma is.⁵³ While it is true that Christian dogmas make truth-claims, not all of which are immediately or materially falsifiable, these claims are—at least from the perspective of most mainstream lines of Christian theology—held to be consistent with reason, as, for example, the papal encyclical *Fides et Ratio* formally insists. As such, aspects of those claims that do impinge upon history and materiality *are* falsifiable, and thus meet Lilla's standard for a positive conception of ideology. In short, dogma also 'invites and resists refutation', and therefore is capable of being equally as 'ideological' in the good sense of the term.

Relatedly, the second problem is that of the selection of the principles used to justify the Revolution as an advancement in history, rather than a declination, as the reactionaries hold. Whatever list of things Lilla puts forward as the advancements of modern political thought,⁵⁴ the selection of this list will be—from the perspective of the purely immanent schema he insists upon in his work—fundamentally

appropriating the revolutionary standpoint. Cf. "The Lure of Syracuse," in: *The Reckless Mind*, 193-216.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 55-103.

⁵³ For a robust understanding of dogma that meets Lilla's criteria for good 'ideology', see: Avery Dulles, S.J. *The Survival of Dogma* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), esp. 152-170.

⁵⁴ Such a list could be readily distilled from *The Stillborn God*, 91-103; 304-5. It would include the rejection of metaphysical and theological argumentations for determining political courses of action, the acceptance of human rights, and tolerance as a primary political virtue. What is most interesting to observe is that these are closely related to the "soft dogma" of postmodern polis that Lilla critiqued above.

as arbitrary as anything professed by any political theology. As such it can only be maintained 'sola fide', unless, perhaps, it is willing to avail itself of a consistently immanent politics whose definition of justice follows Thrasymachus' 'might equals right.' In either case, Lilla's liberal political philosophy cannot support the weight of its own ideological measures. Any concession to ideology makes liberalism a kind of political "dogma" in its own right; but without the moral values provided by such an ideology, immanent liberalism decays into either tyranny or anarchy, and can provide no purely immanent reason why it would be bad if it did.⁵⁵

V

G.K. Chesterton helps us to understand more fully why the broadly democratic and modern philosophical project that Lilla holds—when limiting itself to an immanent framework—becomes unstable and irrational, devolving into tyranny. In his essay *What's Wrong with the World*, Chesterton lays out the case against the political pragmatism of his day, one which maintained the same pragmatic separation of theological-metaphysical ends from political decision-making as that celebrated by Lilla's secular liberalism. Briefly stated, his criticism is this: that in its systematic exclusion of religion from the public sphere, liberal-pragmatic politics forces itself into a performative contradiction, becoming itself dogmatic—and thus theological. Or as Chesterton puts it, modern politics "is a fight of creeds masquerading as policies....Theology is not (as some suppose) expunged as an error. It is merely concealed, like a sin."⁵⁶ The attempt to remain neutral with respect to metaphysical and theological controversies in political action is ironically *already* to have pronounced upon their relevance to the action in question. Such a

⁵⁵ For an analysis of liberalism's genesis in 'Christian soil', detachment from that soil, and decay into an incomprehensible faith system or *Weltanschauung* as a result of its deracination, see: John Hallowell, *The Decline of Liberalism as an Ideology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002). My critique here that liberal ideology must necessarily become a 'faith' to guide future action is compatible with Charles Taylor's understanding of immanent positions presuming "anticipatory confidence" in themselves. See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 551.

⁵⁶ G.K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World* (London: Cassell and Company, 1910), 17.

pronouncement can only be done from a theological perspective, when done wittingly; but when not done in a considered manner, such exclusion devolves to what Chesterton calls 'prejudice'. The excision of religion from politics encouraged by the 'creedless vagueness' of modern politics, far from operating as a buffer between hostile theo-political traditions (as Lilla believes it does),⁵⁷ actually radicalizes prejudice in the modern era through a denial of its own—to re-appropriate Lilla's language—'soft dogma'. As Chesterton puts it:

There are two things, and two things only, for the human mind, a dogma and a prejudice. The Middle Ages were a rational epoch, an age of doctrine. Our age is, at its best, a poetical epoch, an age of prejudice. A doctrine is a definite point; a prejudice is a direction. That an ox may be eaten, while a man should not be eaten, is a doctrine. That as little as possible of anything should be eaten is a prejudice; which is also sometimes called an ideal. Now a direction is always far more fantastic [i.e. irrational] than a plan. I would rather have the most archaic map of the road to Brighton than a general recommendation to turn to the left. Straight lines that are not parallel must meet at last; but curves may recoil forever. A pair of lovers might walk along the frontier of France and Germany, one on the one side and one on the other, so long as they were not vaguely told to keep away from each other. And this is a strictly true parable of the effect of our modern vagueness in losing and separating men as in a mist. It is not merely true that a creed unites men. Nay, a difference of creed unites men—so long as it is a clear difference. A boundary unites.⁵⁸

Chesterton marks the modern era not as an age of reason, but an age of prejudice in its constriction of political discourse to a purely immanent framework. In so doing, the politics of modern liberalism has been forced to conceal its 'theology'—its understanding of the supreme ends of all creaturely life—in order to remain superficially

⁵⁷ See Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, 304.

⁵⁸ Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World*, 18-9.

neutral to questions of theological ultimacy. However, as even Lilla now sees, without the clear 'point' of an ultimate plan, collective activity in search of truth cannot be organized. Moreover, the concealment of liberal-pragmatic 'theology' has meant the fostering of prejudice and the further cultivation of the postmodern 'soft dogma' that Lilla has himself critiqued.

With these critical insights into the tacit creedalism of modernity, Chesterton can be seen to preempt Lyotard's postmodern critique by over fifty years. What Chesterton correctly saw was that modern politics was a creed masquerading as a pragmatic policy, hiding its theology and its sins along with it. But unlike Lyotard, who thought the answer was to achieve greater neutrality through a hyper-critical disavowal of any metanarrativity, Chesterton understood that a creed or dogma is necessary for making sense of the human endeavor as a guide for action, as a metaphysical map of reality marking our historical position and our collective destination. It is impossible to have a political ethos without both a map and goal. It is only a dogma, understood as an 'ideal' for action, that enables meaningful discussion, even healthy disagreement, by making manifest the putative ends of collective life.⁵⁹ But 'ideals' devolve to 'prejudices' when the theological and metaphysical aspects of these ideologies are secreted from view, thus becoming unchallengeable. When one's cultural creed becomes 'creedlessness', the human mind increasingly resorts to prejudice in a last-ditch effort to maintain a sense of direction in a dislocated world.⁶⁰ And because prejudice is cancerous to reason and political life, resentment and despair creep in. If all we have to hope for in terms of a better political future is the 'humanistic political anthropology' which Lilla offers us, with its immanent conceptualization of human beings left to their own devices, then we see little reason to hope for a better future. For man proves himself in

⁵⁹ This is what Chesterton means when he claims "that prejudices are divergent, whereas creeds are always in collision. Believers bump into each other; whereas bigots keep out of each other's way. A creed is a collective thing, and even its sins are sociable. A prejudice is a private thing, and even its tolerance is misanthropic." Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World*, 21.

⁶⁰ William Cavanaugh's genealogical work reconstructing the so-called 'myth of religious violence' is one prominent example of secular prejudice against theology and religion. See William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

history as a being capable of reason and irrationality, civilization and barbarity. Only a creed in Chesterton's sense can adjudicate between the two.

Lilla would re-inscribe the creedless creed of modernism, maintaining the revolutionary mindset despite evidence of its own historical corruptibility. In this way, his own position becomes reactionary, adopting the Aeneas option in its prejudiced rejection of the possible validity of any political theology; more still, it can even be seen as Ulyssean from the perspective of its return to the now-decrepit ideology of liberalism's 'Great Separation', as if it housed the final truth about man's political being. Far from being an original 'action' in history, the revolutionary mindset is exposed as premised on a reactionary ideological framework.⁶¹ Lilla's example shows us Chesterton is right when he argues that:

in history there is no Revolution that is not a Restoration....
[T]he modern movement which many would count the most anarchic of all is in this sense the most conservative of all. Never was the past more venerated by men than it was by the French Revolutionists. They invoked the little republics of antiquity with the complete confidence of one who invokes the gods.⁶²

All revolutionary thought is reactionary to the extent that it takes a historical being—man—and seeks to restore him to his rightful place in cosmos, a place he seems to have lost. But the ideological characterization of man as a historical being, a being-in-the-world who through his own action can bring things back into alignment—i.e. man as a being both not naturally at home and yet capable of making a home in the world—is a postulate of the theo-political tradition itself, unique to the historical West.⁶³ Lilla's doctrinaire

⁶¹ This point was central to Nietzsche's radical critique of liberalism, and was further clarified by Romano Guardini, *The End of the Modern World*, translated by Joseph Theman and Herbert Burke (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1956), esp. 122-5.

⁶² Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World*, 28.

⁶³ Space prevents us from a further elaboration of this point. For those interested in pursuing this line of inquiry are encouraged to consult: Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

insistence upon the 'Great Separation' is only possible, ironically, when grounded in the theo-political tradition his project rejects.

VI

We are now in a position to link our earlier summary of (post)-modernism understood as a dual commitment to home-building and our secular in-the-world-ness with Chesterton's critique. In a passage which reveals Chesterton's judgment against the social philosophy of what we now know as (post)modernity, he writes:

Man has always lost his way. He has been a tramp ever since Eden; but he always knew, or thought he knew, what he was looking for. Every man has a house somewhere in the elaborate cosmos; his house waits for him waist deep in slow Norfolk rivers or sunning itself upon Sussex downs. Man has always been looking for that home which is the subject matter of this book. But in the bleak and blinding hail of skepticism to which he has been now so long subjected, he has begun for the first time to be chilled, not merely in his hopes, but in his desires. For the first time in history he begins really to doubt the object of his wanderings on the earth. He has always lost his way; but now he has lost his address.⁶⁴

The soft-dogmatic approach of modern politics has artificially constricted human life to the secular sphere, limiting the horizon of man's being to a *mere* being 'in the world'. What Chesterton understands is that, absent a theological 'home', the modern 'optics of the transitory' reflects back on humanity in a way that becomes oppressive, and prohibits even temporal or natural dwelling from taking place. Without an ultimate address, humanity's historical peregrination is pointless, and even his earthly home loses meaning. Modern man experiences himself to a certain extent as naturally homeless in the world, a point on which all of the thinkers we have engaged, including Chesterton, agree; but when the modern individual is told that the world is her *only* natural habitat, the only

⁶⁴ Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World*, 65-6.

soil into which she might grow, her natural homelessness is pitted against her worldliness in a way which inspires nihilistic despair. Humanity might be content to wander as a pilgrim on earth if her citizenship is secure in the sky. But if she is characterized simply as the citizen of an historically contingent earthly city, a sandcastle-kingdom which is radiant one day and gone the next, all of her moral and political action becomes either an unjustifiable historical prejudice that postmodern deconstruction will expose as but a time-bound fluctuation in will-power, or—what amounts to the same thing—a romantic embrace of the soft dogma of the ultimate absurdity of existence. Action in history loses its coherence and motivational power when divested of an account of a home beyond the world.⁶⁵ The microcosm of man's earthly "home" is necessarily scaled to its place in the macrocosm of divine reality.⁶⁶

We might summarize the foregoing by insisting that what separates Chesterton from the other modern thinkers we have engaged is his Ulyssean restoration of the theological ideal of Home. What is wrong with the world of today, Chesterton claims, is its false account of our ultimate 'home', premised as it is on a limited and limiting description of human nature as purely immanent. According to him, "the only logical cure for all this is the assertion of a human ideal."⁶⁷ This ideal includes recovering man's essential religious orientation, his eternal destination, his home 'address'. It also means overcoming false characterizations of human nature as a brute fact or purely temporary evolutionary phenomenon. Each of the earlier

⁶⁵ Nietzsche himself grasps this point, when saying, "All living things require an atmosphere around them, a mysterious misty vapour; if they are deprived of this envelope, if a religion, an art, a genius is condemned to revolve as a star without atmosphere, we should no longer be surprised if they quickly wither and grow hard and unfruitful." Nietzsche well understood that liberalism sucks the air out of the room, rendering modern life oppressive and barren. We thus agree with him that recovering an "atmosphere" for human life is our "untimely" task. However, Nietzsche failed to see that his own *Übermensch* was the apotheosis, not the rejection, of secular political anthropology. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, edited by Daniel Breazeale and translated by R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 97.

⁶⁶ This point appeals to Eliade's conclusion that "man's dwelling is a microcosm" of the worldly "macrocosm," and man's "house" enables this dwelling to fructify. See Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 172-3.

⁶⁷ Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World*, 22.

thinkers we encountered relied in one way or another on just such a modern limitation imposed on human nature.

However, Chesterton's commitment to a theological vision of reality broadens his perspective. This theological view enables him to hold in tension what he elsewhere calls "the double spiritual need in man."⁶⁸ Man is not an immanent secular totality, but goes and grows in two directions at once. Like Heidegger's understanding of being, this duality is a complex vision of human nature, composed of matter and spirit, past and future. Man needs all aspects of his existence to be unified into 'simple oneness', to make sense of himself in history, and to remember his metaphysical home address.

Rather than seeing the Aeneas and Ulysses options as types of reactionarianism following Lilla, we see them as characterizing fundamental attitudes to 'home', understood as the ultimate destination at which reflective historical action is aimed. The Aeneas ideology believes we are ultimately homeless, or at least, what claims to home can be validly made must be premised on a rejection of our theological past, a rejection of our natural home. The shortcoming of the Aeneas option is its encouragement to forgetfulness, its belief that we must be willing to sacrifice everything from the past for the future to flourish. The Ulysses ideology, to the contrary, believes that returning home is always a live possibility, a possibility reified by remembrance.⁶⁹ But Lilla's example shows us the potential danger of an uncritical use of 'remembrance'. What do we do when our ideological 'home' was built on poor foundations, on a false past? The benefit of Aeneas is the ability to go back to ground, to re-found home if its past iterations have proven un-dwellable. Ulysses can be motivated to return, but this impulse is problematic when radical change is needed; Aeneas can be motivated to change, but how can we learn to dwell within an 'optics of the transitory' that sees Being itself through the lens of a process ontology? What is needed today is an image of return which

⁶⁸ G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Garden City: Image Books, 1959), 10.

⁶⁹ Interestingly, Heidegger comes very close to formulating things exactly this way when arguing that when someone gives meditative thought to a bridge, even from miles away, that person is nearer to the bridge than someone who unthinkingly uses it daily. What we call remembrance, but Heidegger "meditative thought," is the action necessary to bring us to a "correct grasp of things," back in "contact" with reality (in Taylor's and Dreyfus' sense, c.f. *supra*), even from a distance. Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," 154.

is not simplistic, and an image of change which can remain – which is to say, the balancing of Aeneas and Ulysses.

VII

We should make clear that Chesterton's recovery of the Ulysses option is not a condemnation of the true goods that motivated the historical Revolution, any more than it is a pronouncement against the Aeneas option itself as a potentially valid political possibility. If our true home is in heaven, then we avoid the temptation of characterizing our earthly pilgrimage as a civilizational construction project, committing ourselves to simply one political ideology or site for 'home'. Despite seemingly clear statements to the contrary, Chesterton is not an anti-modern 'reactionary', in Lilla's pejorative sense of the word.⁷⁰ His well-known defense of democracy as a valid form of government is one example of his modern outlook. Moreover, he describes his recovery of the correct idea of home as a recovery of true 'liberty' based on primordial human 'equality', rather than as a simple return to past political formations.⁷¹ As he avers, "the need here is a need of complete freedom for restoration as well as revolution."⁷² His is not an all-out reaction against revolution.

Like Lilla, Chesterton was eminently wary of political tyranny, a very modern concern. But unlike Lilla, Chesterton was capable of desecrating that modern ideology is itself tyrannical when it is premised on a prejudice against theology. What enabled Chesterton—writing *before* either of the Great Wars had exposed the abject falsehood of modern liberalism's optimistic conception of man—to see modern prejudice more clearly than Lilla, who has at his disposal time's recent testimony against revolutionary optimism? It was in the first instance his commitment to seeing modernity as a growth, even if cancerous, out of the soil of Western history, and not as a thunderbolt from the blue. Linked organically to the theological past, Enlightenment modernity—growing out of the "loam of Christian religion and

⁷⁰ Undoubtedly, Lilla would cast him as such. He devotes an entire chapter to relativizing Catholic historiography such as Chesterton would no doubt maintain. See: Lilla, *The Shipwrecked Mind*, 67-85.

⁷¹ Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World*, 36-43. Indeed, he invokes the modern triad of freedom, equality, and fraternity repeatedly throughout the book.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 32.

tradition" as it did⁷³—was a fruit fallen from the Christian tree, however spoiled in its fall. Chesterton's reiteration of the Christian narrative of the Fall gave him the critical distance necessary to see the problem of the purely Whiggish view of history underwriting modern liberalism. There can be no purely immanent inevitability in history, as human history is both open to real human freedom of choice *and* tainted by human sin.

On the contrary, Lilla's support for the Revolutionary rejection of the theo-political tradition in a Hobbesian 'Great Separation' can only be justified through a discredited reliance on the general trend of a Whiggish view of history, however chastened, if it is not to be justified by theological appeal. But such reliance creates problems of legitimation for his purely immanent political project.

This exposes the subtle irony, the performative contradiction, when Lilla argues that "we need reminding" of the true nature of our collective past if we are to avoid falling prey to the soft dogma of (post)modern "individualism" and recover a robust sense of the purposes of political community.⁷⁴ Such a Ulyssean remembrance is only possible if one is willing to justify a preferred account of what needs remembering from the past with appeals to something like the concept of "the meaning" of history, a myth-like account which transcends a purely immanent history and which he has elsewhere declared to be not just impossible but "insidious."⁷⁵ Without such an appeal, his act of remembrance takes on the character of a naïve faith that politics will turn out better if theology is excluded. As his new 'Afterword' is meant to blame such naïve faith for modern tyranny, the irony is staggering.

Both having an ultimate account of the meaning of human political existence (Christian political theology) *and* not-having such an account (secular philosophy) have produced political tyrannies in

⁷³ This verbiage is a quotation from Lilla, who rejects all such accounts of the Enlightenment that would blame modern tyranny on the Revolution. See Lilla, *The Reckless Mind*, 199-200.

⁷⁴ Lilla, *The Reckless Mind*, 227.

⁷⁵ Lilla, *The Shipwrecked Mind*, 85. As Löwith has argued, the enterprise of "philosophy of history" only makes sense as an enterprise within an *already* Christian "theology of history," one which operates in the background of even secular philosophy by making sense of our search for "the meaning" of history. See Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 1-2.

the course of human history. Choosing one over the other as the best way forward is either an arbitrary decision or an act of faith, neither of which can be justified from within Lilla's schema. It is political liberalism's inability to grasp this fundamental contradiction that creates the conditions necessary for postmodern "soft dogma" to arise in the first place.

By operating beyond Ulysses and Aeneas, Chesterton is able to balance the insights of both ideological perspectives. Indeed, Chesterton's theologically sensitive position enables him to catch hold of a third possibility, what we could call the 'Prodigal option', integrating the insights of the others. Receiving its light from the biblical parable,⁷⁶ this third option recognizes both the possibility of returning home (like Ulysses) *and* the possibility that such a return is complicated by historical contingency (like Aeneas). It is not a matter of a *simple* return to an original position. Half of 'home' has been misspent abroad in reckless living, and the relationships to which one goes back are not to be taken for granted. Home has changed, a birthright has been squandered, but something of home nevertheless remains. The prodigal returns not in glory, but as one prepared to lie in the bed of the hirelings. That the prodigal receives the welcome of a son's triumphant return is a theological postulate available to those with faith in Divine Revelation; but that his material condition at home would be no worse, and perhaps even better, than life among the ruins of his earlier ambitions is the outcome of simple comparative reasoning.

In the type of the Prodigal, revolutionary action might again become restoration, just as return becomes an act making all things new. If humanistic secularism only offers us a choice between the revolutionary or the reactionary options, then perhaps it is best to decline both; nevertheless, we might maintain the good of each by seeing ourselves as prodigals at the crux of a decisive moment, in search of a way back home.

VIII

This paper has focused on two key aspects of the (post)modern condition: the paradoxical experience of natural homelessness in the

⁷⁶ Luke 15:11-32.

world and the project of homebuilding as a worldly endeavor. Locked solely within the ideological space of 'the immanent frame', the fundamentally human experience of homelessness in the world creates an overwhelming anxiety in man, who cannot be certain of the meaning of his natural disorientation. Far from motivating the adventure of home-building, the anxiety caused by the disjunctive realization of a 'natural' homelessness can drive humanity to despair, contrary to the assumptions of modernity. If the world is home, why are we not at home in it? If we are already at home, why must we act to build one? Those who overcome this anxiety through a heroic engagement in the enterprise of homebuilding despite its seeming absurdity are met with the further perplexity over the pattern according to which home should be built. Conceived purely as a human construct, home can be anything man can imagine. Justifying one shape against another is impossible. And yet man senses that home must have a definite shape, just as the polis must conform to the demands of a justice higher than Thrasymachus'. Limited to the immanent, we are at an impasse.

But if we were to reclaim the possibility of a theological point of view and learn to see our ultimate Home in the heavens, both the conditionality of human historical existence and a charged affirmation of the eternal importance of earthly endeavors can again be held in tension. Contingency need not be reduced to meaninglessness, and provisionality need not be played off against finality. Recovering what theologian William Cavanaugh has called a "theopolitical imagination" enables the maintenance of this fecund tension, rendering possible an experience of the world as home in the penultimate sense.⁷⁷ Such a Prodigal mindset is capable of motivating a return (like Ulysses), but is also sensitive to the need for criticism and change (like Aeneas). Our supernatural Home need not denigrate our natural 'in-the-worldness', even as it re-orientes our home-building enterprise.

This paper has been working towards an explanation of secularism from a decidedly theological point of view. We claimed that modern homelessness is the cultural experience of a theological truth: the world both is and is not man's home. Uprooted from its theological embedding, which is to say, reduced to secularism's 'humanistic political anthropology', this truth prevents us from conceptualizing

⁷⁷ William Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007).

home as both a past *donum* and a graced human endeavor. Far from motivating secular action and limiting irrational appeals to transcendence, the Great Separation of secular modernity actually incites prejudice, at best, and at worst encourages nihilistic despair. Only a recovery of the theological embedding of modernity promises a way forward which does not require us to lose sight of the lessons of the past.

As this paper also seeks to address the nature of the diverse manifestations of secularism in our day, however, we turn in conclusion to a comparative analysis of modern anthropologies as typified in their influential literary imaginings. These haunting images are invoked both to confirm our analysis of the tragic aspect of modern immanence and the superiority of a 'prodigal' return, but also to nuance, however partially, the varieties of secularism at large today.⁷⁸

The literary depiction of the secular ghost which haunts the American milieu is F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. The novel famously ends with its narrator (Nick Carraway) walking through the barren home of its titular character, Jay Gatsby, recently deceased. Despite its opulence, the house is a hollow shell, whose only real importance was the incubation of Gatsby's American 'greatness'. Reflecting on the tragedy of his death, but transcendentalizing the figure of Gatsby to speak as the *Zeitgeist* of the ambitions of his era, Nick Carraway recalls:

And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's

⁷⁸ While any number of specters from a variety of world literature might be adequate to the task, these depictions are culled from this author's experiential background, having lived extensively both in America and on the Continent.

no matter, tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther...And one fine morning—

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.⁷⁹

Gatsby, the image of American greatness, is characterized as a secular Ulysses, rowing against the currents of reality in search of an impossible ideal, a home forever beyond his reach.

This fundamentally tragic anthropology is mirrored on the Continent by the despairing resignation of Walter Benjamin's influential interpretation of painter Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*. While reflecting on the concept of history and its uses in modern politics, Benjamin reads Klee's *Angelus* as a commentary on the human condition, reading into it the crisis of his time (WWII), indeed the crisis of all time. In Thesis IX of his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', he declares:

A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.⁸⁰

Despite the differences, I suggest that what we possess in both *Gatsby*'s closing lines and Benjamin's angel of history are tragico-poetic ghosts which haunt the modern world, images in which

⁷⁹ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2001), 115.

⁸⁰ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in: *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 253.

immaterial desire is depicted as locked in an eternal struggle with material history. Benjamin gives us an Angel, facing rearward towards the past, whose singular desire is to reprimatinate the train-wreck of time. But the winds of judgment prevent his resurrective aid. He is the Aeneas of yore, driven from home, trying ever to pick up the pieces of the past. But he is always an hour late. And, as if to deride his passion, the storm piles the debris of time ever higher at his feet, leaving him helpless and his desire betrayed. This hurricane Benjamin calls 'progress', a comment doubtlessly directed towards the failed ambitions of twentieth-century humanity. In *Gatsby*, we have the mirror opposite. Fitzgerald gives us a hero facing ever forward towards a much-desired future, but whose every effort to attain it brings him another step away from his aim; the only progress he can make is retrograde.

What tension there is in these diverse images, there remains a striking similarity. In both cases, there is the tragic aspect of desire thwarted by time and the conditions of material existence. Whether desire is for the future or the past—whether we are Aeneas or Ulysses—the forces of nature seem pressured in the opposite direction. Both images arrive at a tacit agreement: we are condemned to the present, racked in a fundamental opposition—our will against the present state of things. Thus, both are images of modern discontentment, the unbearable present.⁸¹

Chesterton accepts the complications of material history, but gives us an image of his own that, by virtue of its embedding in the

⁸¹ It must surely be this similarity that inspired political philosopher Jean Bethke Elshtain to have both *Gatsby's* conclusion and Benjamin's *Angel* hanging over her work desk. Reflecting on the place of these quotes in the work of his mother, Eric Elshtain has said that they share a "regard [for] the difficult position we as humans try to make for ourselves between the tug of the past and push towards the future." C.f. Eric Elshtain, "Foreword," in: *Whose Will Be Done?: Essays on Sovereignty and Religion*, John Dyck, et al., eds. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), ix. More specifically, Pericles Lewis has also speculated that these two images represent the dark side of the modernist movement, namely the "fear that the individual human being has lost control of time." He maintains that the standard lodestars of "time, progress, history" central to modern optimism are called into question and disavowed by these images. Unsurprisingly, these were the exact concepts which Lyotard's postmodern analysis was meant to implicate. See Pericles Lewis, "Introduction," in: *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 32-3.

theological tradition, enables something more than despair. Accessing the prodigal mindset, he reflects on the human condition:

For some strange reason man must always thus plant his fruit trees in a graveyard. Man can only find life among the dead. Man is a misshapen monster, with his feet set forward and his face turned back. He can make the future luxuriant and gigantic, so long as he is thinking about the past. When he tries to think about the future itself, his mind diminishes to a pin point with imbecility, which some call Nirvana. Tomorrow is the Gorgon; a man must only see it mirrored in the shining shield of yesterday. If he sees it directly he is turned to stone. This has been the fate of all those who have really seen fate and futurity as clear and inevitable.⁸²

True, Chesterton would say to his secular interlocutors, man is a contorted monstrosity. But his unique physiology tells the tale of his past, his fall from grace; and when we take this past into account by facing it squarely, our feet are paradoxically set in the proper direction for future action. We need only turn back to head in the right direction. Revolution and restoration cohere in our culture's prodigal return. In praying Chesterton's *Angelus*, we need not be haunted by Benjamin's. The soil of the earth is indeed a graveyard; but the tree of man has been known to bear strange fruit, fruit ready for the soil of the sky.

⁸² Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World*, 29.

Between Homelessness and Community in a Secular Age

ROBERT AARON WESSMAN

The Trinity is one of the most important and fundamental Christian doctrines: the belief that God is three divine ‘persons’ in one divine being. The implications of this doctrine mean that, not only is God best understood as a communion, or *communio*, of persons, but that, as some theologians have argued, all of reality, by analogy, has been created to model this same communion of love.¹ These Trinitarian implications lead to other theological consequences with which scholars have long wrestled. For instance, David L. Schindler, a contemporary theologian, posits that within this *communio* of love the human person is constitutively in relationship with God, other human beings, and all of creation.² According to Schindler, when these constitutive relations are maintained, human beings are most at ‘home.’ ‘Homelessness,’ as understood by Schindler, exists in varying degrees whenever these constitutive relations are not upheld, i.e., whenever a person’s relationship to God, to others, and to all of creation fails to maintain *communio*. ‘Homelessness’ can be, according to Schindler, one of the main existential crises that modern human beings encounter. Causing this sense of ‘homelessness,’ argues Schindler, are any number of contemporary cultural orders: the order

¹ See, for instance, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, translated by D.C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004).

² For more on Schindler’s understanding of an ontology based on *communio*, see David L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996). Schindler utilizes much of the thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988), one of the 20th century’s most influential theologians. For an introduction to Balthasar’s understanding of ontology, see Aiden Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

within the university, the order of the economy, the order of society as a result of some of the aspects of secularization, and even particular 'trends' in theology.³

In this paper, I will explore how living in several different cultural environments, with each manifesting certain aspects of a secular culture, have impacted both my experience of communion, i.e., a sense of being at 'home,' and have contributed to its opposite, an experience of 'homelessness.' I will also describe how living a sense of *communio* is possible in a 'secular age,'⁴ but that it does seem to require significant effort to attain. To navigate this exploration of 'homelessness' I will compare my experience of living in the United States with that of living in Belgium. I will begin by exploring the period of my life when I was studying theology in the seminary in preparation for priesthood ordination in the Roman Catholic Church. Here, I will investigate issues such as common identity, mentorship, and communal worship. Following this, I will examine my life as a missionary priest the two years prior to my arrival in Leuven, Belgium. I will focus on the threats to community that I witnessed, my experience of creating Catholic communities, and the ability of the church to be a community, offering a different 'narrative' to the secularized, and sometimes non-believing, world around her.⁵

³ David L. Schindler, "Homelessness and the Modern Condition: The Family, Evangelization, and the Global Economy," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, 3, no. 4 (Fall 2000), 37-49.

⁴ I am borrowing the term 'secular age' from Charles Taylor. Taylor defines 'secular,' when referring to a 'secular age,' as a change in the conditions of belief, the background and culture in which people can make a choice to believe, where belief in God is contested and no longer axiomatic. When referring to 'secular' and 'secularization,' I will be using this definition of secular. This understanding of 'secular' can be distinguished from two others. The first is that 'secular' simply refers to a more historical distinction between sacred duties and vocations of priests and religious, as compared to the more mundane (secular) duties and vocations of everyday life (e.g., a teacher, blacksmith, farmer, etc.). The other definition of secular refers to a kind of growing 'space' in modernity where religion no longer has an impact, and where people and society function without any reference to God. This definition of 'secular' includes the understanding of 'secularism,' where people make a conscious effort to rid all public spaces of any reference to religion or to God. See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 1-22.

⁵ On the importance of 'narrative' in the formation of the identities of human beings, see Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*

Finally, I will conclude by evaluating the current context in which I live, where I have been studying theology at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. I will bring these experiences into dialogue with some of the similar themes previously explored, with a focus on Catholic identity in general, and priestly identity, in particular.

Before beginning my reflection there are a few caveats worth mentioning. It is my hope that these reflections are read by, and helpful to, Christians who are trying to make sense of what it means to live in a secular age, as well as people of good will interested in issues related to secularization. Making comparisons between my experiences in the United States with those in Belgium is not done to demean one context and praise another, it is simply done to highlight some of the different struggles that might exist, as well as some of the benefits I have encountered that have assisted me in living a life of faith as a Catholic in a secular age. If I am critical of a particular context, my intention is not to diminish the efforts of the many people striving to live meaningful lives, and even lives of committed faith, in these different contexts. To the contrary, as I will discuss, it is the witness and support of others that have made possible any faithfulness of my own. With that said, finally, it is worth noting that I intend, as I am sure is already obvious, to be highly autobiographical with this writing.⁶ Yet, these reflections have been inspired from

(Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013). I do not want to give the impression, here, that the church perfectly demonstrates all of the qualities of a healthy community. The reality is that the church is made up of imperfect human beings, and those imperfections are sometimes more visibly demonstrated than whatever virtuous actions her members may exhibit. However, it is my belief, and the belief of most Christians, that the church, being the 'body' of Jesus Christ, is more than just a human reality. It is her foundation in Christ that allows her to be a community in any theologically meaningful way. For a discussion of the meaning and significance of faith in Jesus Christ for the formation of an individual and of community, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Engagement with God: The Drama of Christian Discipleship*, translated by R. John Halliburton (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008).

⁶ It was the hope of the editor of this volume to include essays that were more autobiographical, and therefore, more personal in tone. Secularization has been studied in various ways through careful and meticulous sociological and theological analysis. There is much to be gleaned from this. The desire of those involved in this project, however, was to utilize the more theoretical research that is available in order to describe our own 'contextualized' experiences of secularization. There are, of course, many risks in employing this method. One is

various sources that I have read which have informed my views about what it means to live in a secular age. These sources will be revealed in the ways in which I have internalized, reflected upon, and allowed them to serve as a lens through which I interpret my experiences.

I

I remember seeing the Romanesque sandstone structures of Saint Meinrad Seminary as I arrived on orientation day, realizing that this would be my home for the next four years or so. This prospect was exciting to me. After completing my novitiate with the Glenmary Home Missioners (the Catholic missionary religious order to which I currently belong) and making my first oath, I was eager to begin studying theology in a formal setting.⁷ Yet, I had my reservations about attending Saint Meinrad. I wondered whether attending a seminary in a town of less than one thousand people would expose me to the international and universal nature of theology. I also wondered whether being part of a seminary community consisting mainly, if not solely, of seminarians and formators (most of whom were priests) would not be too constraining, isolating, and confining. It was a relief to me that within just a few weeks of being present on that hill in southern Indiana (the seminarians often quipped that it was the 'holy hill'), which had hosted a community of Benedictine monks since the mid-nineteenth century, that it became a real home for me. This home supplied me with a new perspective on life, and on the culture in which I lived, as well as provided an antidote to many of the challenges that living in a secular age often seemed to pose.

Perhaps it is the breakdown of common metanarratives, combined with a lack of a common epistemological framework;⁸ or

that it goes slightly against the current of contemporary academic research. Another is that it requires the author to be quite vulnerable. Hopefully, the contents of this essay justify taking these risks.

⁷ For an introduction to the charism and founder of the Glenmary Home Missioners, see Christopher J. Kauffman, *Mission to Rural America: The Story of W. Howard Bishop, Founder of Glenmary* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991).

⁸ Charles Taylor, in his work *A Secular Age*, engages each of these themes. He claims that, ultimately, human beings are people of a story. These stories determine how they see the world, and can become part of the common 'social imaginary.' Taylor desires to present a different sort of narrative to counter those narratives that exist today, which he calls 'subtraction theories,' that, according to

perhaps it is the ascension of the priority of the 'autonomous' individual over the community.⁹ However, when I reflect on living as a Catholic in a secular age, one of the main challenges that seems to arise is the existential feeling, and sometimes the reality, of wandering somewhat alone through life.¹⁰ This feeling of being alone seems to be manifested in general in the broader culture by the growing number

him, insufficiently explain the reality of secularization. Faced with these competing narratives, not only the religious person, but, according to Taylor, all people in our current age, constantly question, doubt and rethink their positions (or worldviews) because of the multitude of competing narratives that exist. He calls this encounter with the multiplicity of narratives 'fragilization.' See *A Secular Age*, 28, 304, 573. I am indebted to James K.A. Smith for his concise and helpful introduction to Taylor's work, *How (Not) to be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014).

⁹ For more on the discussion of the way in which the individual self gains autonomous standing in society, as well as the way in which people tend to think first of themselves as individuals, and only later, as part of a community, see Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 473-485. Taylor is quick to note, however, that even in the 'Age of Authenticity,' where the 'self' is concerned with expression and authenticity, it is not necessarily the case that individuation will arise. This is still possible, of course, but Taylor often says that the Age of Authenticity is best explained by an emphasis on the individual's need to express herself, while not necessarily implying that a person will do this without involvement with, and connection to, different communities. Many people, in desiring to express their individual self, will do so in the context of a religious group or tradition. See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 516.

¹⁰ This does not seem to be a unique experience for many people living in a secular age. For instance, one can see in the life of T.S. Eliot similar tendencies towards solipsism. For a concise biography of Eliot, see Russell Kirk, *Eliot and His Age: T.S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2008). The experience of wandering alone does not discount the fact that I have been supported and sustained by a loving family. Nor does it discredit the many people who have graced me with friendship, and chosen to journey with me. Perhaps there is something ultimately 'lonely' about being human in general. The 'uniqueness' of each human being, which modern people often celebrate, is worthy of celebration, yet it can also be an existentially isolating realization. If I am unique, then it means that it is not self-evident that others will understand me. I then have to work at trying to communicate myself to others, hoping that some kind of encounter is possible. On the connection between 'loneliness' and the life of a Christian, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Loneliness in the Church," in: *Explorations in Theology, volume IV: Spirit and Institution*, translated by Edward T. Oakes, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 261-298.

of people who struggle with loneliness and depression, the increasing inability of nation-states to build a common consensus among its citizens,¹¹ or the struggle of community-oriented organizations, such as the church, to actually succeed in their goal of building healthy, sustainable, and attractive communities.¹²

However, one aspect of the seminary that seemed to mitigate this tendency towards solipsism and unhealthy individualism was its ability to unite people under a similar cause. For instance, for the first time in my life, I found myself within a community of individuals who were all pursuing the same goal, namely, mutual discernment of a call to the priesthood. Within this overarching goal, it seemed that, in varying degrees, we all desired to know our Catholic tradition more thoroughly, as well as to know God, however much this is possible, at a deeper and more profound level. Living in a community that shared numerous overarching goals was unprecedented in my life, and it helped to create a sense of being at home in a somewhat disintegrating world.¹³ These shared goals impacted the intensity of our classroom discussions, motivated our conversations at meals, and provided an impetus for us to break through the oftentimes superficiality of certain human encounters and relationships.

¹¹ For more on the struggle for nations to build a common consensus and maintain their identity, see William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2002), 3, 44-46.

¹² American sociologist Robert Wuthnow notes that one of the factors that make it more difficult for religious congregations to sustain community is that many young people are choosing to marry later in life. The postponement of marriage is often connected to a postponement of involvement within a religious community. Wuthnow notes that young people still desire community, but that it will be necessary to rethink how religious congregations can sustain and foster community. See *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty- Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 18, 54.

¹³ It was perhaps the 'transcendent' and elusive quality of these goals, as well, that made this experience unprecedented for me. The notion that one can discern whether God is calling him or her to something in life is intimately related to the Christian tradition. Yet this does not mean that the understanding of 'vocation' or 'calling' ever eludes its mysterious character. Struggling to understand, and struggling to discern, one's vocation, within a community of people engaged in a similar process, have a particularly unifying quality.

Also significant in supporting these common goals, as well as what I think was essential to counteracting the tendencies in each seminarian to overemphasize the independent and isolated pursuit of his goals, was the system of mentorship that existed in the seminary.¹⁴ There was a committed group of people who genuinely desired not only to serve as professionals in their jobs of education and administration, but who sought to mentor, guide and form the many seminarians present.

For example, it was common for students and faculty, as well as administrative members, to share meals together, attend social events, and to pray together, while maintaining healthy professional boundaries in those relationships. Those seminarians who took advantage of this arrangement would see their lives profoundly changed. I look back on this time in my life, and realize that I was given a gift that so few people encounter: I was placed within a community of people who desired that I become, as much as was possible, the most prepared, well-adjusted, and informed candidate for the priesthood. This meant some real emotional, spiritual, academic, and psychological work on my part; but I was not alone in having to make this progress. I knew that I was cared for. I knew that I was not floating alone on a raft in the midst of a vast sea of unbelief, but rather, that the raft was occupied by many others who also believed and, at times, I did not have to do the navigating or even the rowing.

Perhaps the most influential community-forming aspect of studying in the seminary, of which I would be remiss if I did not mention, was our entering into worship together.¹⁵ I believe, and the

¹⁴ Taylor's discussion of the modern 'buffered self' is helpful in highlighting a challenge confronted by individuals who journey through life in the modern era. The 'buffered self,' contrasted with the pre-modern 'porous self,' is one that is disengaged and oftentimes isolated from outside influences. What is important for the 'buffered self' is that which arises from within, rather than outside of the self. Therefore, it is oftentimes the case that the 'buffered self' will not allow others too much influence on it, and so tends not to remain open to insights, guidance and help from others. See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 37-38.

¹⁵ For an introduction to the Christian understanding of worship, see Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, translated by J.R. Foster and Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), especially 284-293; *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, translated by John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000).

long-standing tradition of the Catholic Church has maintained, that human beings are created to worship God.¹⁶ The act of worshipping God reveals to human beings who they have been created to be, and it facilitates building the *communio* of love that is so essential to an experience of being at 'home'.¹⁷ Clearly, more needs to be explored about the relationship between being at 'home' and worship than can be done here. It is at least worth noting, however, that it seems the current secular climate in the United States is one that perhaps does not deter human beings from worshipping but, rather, has a tendency to replace the true end of that worship with something or someone other than the God who has been revealed in Jesus Christ.¹⁸ One only has to think of the 'worship' of the 'god' of football that takes place on most Sunday mornings in the United States, or the prophetic, divine voice many attribute to their favorite talk-show host or news anchor, to discover examples of this neo-worship in secular society.

In the seminary, however, united around the Trinitarian God, who Catholics believe is the true end of all worship, especially when united in the celebration of daily Eucharist, many seminarians found a new source of community that was lasting, meaningful, and real. It is one thing to have community around a common football team; it is another to have community around a loving God who, through his grace, secures and strengthens the bonds of unity that maintain the community.¹⁹ Our common worship was the key that opened our hearts to one another and to the world around us, so that we would

¹⁶ See Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), nos. 44-45.

¹⁷ On the relationship between worship and secularization, see David L. Schindler, "Liturgy and the Integrity of Cosmic Order: The Theology of Alexander Schmemmann," in: *Ordering Love: Liberal Societies and the Memory of God* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 288-309.

¹⁸ American theologian William Cavanaugh has contributed to this theory. For helpful introductions to these themes, see William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); *Field Hospital: The Church's Engagement with a Wounded World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

¹⁹ This statement is not intended to diminish the quality of community that is formed around sporting activities, and other activities, of a similar kind. It simply invites the question as to whether these forms of community, and this type of 'worship,' are *ultimately* fulfilling for human beings.

be prepared to serve and love the world more fully. Everything else we did during our years in the seminary was meant, like blood moves to and from the heart, to flow out from and back into our prayer.²⁰ This, to me, made formation in the priesthood possible, studying theology possible, and on some days, just getting out of bed possible.²¹

Lest my reflections on life in the seminary seem too idealized, like the description of some perfect society, it is important to note that the seminary was no less filled with sinners than the surrounding world. Seminarians, including me, just like everyone else who accepts following the Christian way of life, have to go through the process of conversion that is central to that life. They are just as affected by the culture of individualism and narcissism that is often prevalent in secular culture (and can be part of any culture for that matter). Just as we came together to worship God, we also cursed and turned our back on God, and even hurt our fellow brothers who were in formation with us.

With that being said, it was, to me, the order of seminary life that modeled a process that had the potential to provide for a renewed sense of community, and to counteract some of these less desirable human tendencies. Seminary life did, at times, at least in part, accomplish this end of deepening our experience of *communio*. For most of us, when we left the seminary, there was a daunting feeling that we were being thrust out into a world that was not necessarily going to be modeled after life in the seminary and, in some ways, would be modeled in such a way as to counteract the wisdom acquired from the life-giving community that we had come to experience and, oftentimes, cherish. I would discover that, in some ways, my first assignment as a priest was one such experience.

II

More than four years of preparation for the priesthood had been

²⁰ For a spiritually enriching exposition of the image of Jesus as the 'heart' of the world, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, translated by Erasmo S. Leiva (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1979).

²¹ For the connection between prayer and theology, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Theology and Sanctity," in: *Explorations in Theology, volume I: The Word Made Flesh*, translated by A.V. Littledale and Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 181-209.

completed and I was now ordained a priest of the Roman Catholic Church and given my first assignment to serve in the 'mission territory' of East Tennessee.²² Being part of the Glenmary Home Missioners, a religious order whose main charism is to establish a Catholic presence in rural, non-Catholic and poor counties of the United States, I was asked to serve in East Tennessee, an area whose counties, to some degree, matched this description well. Along with fitting this description, these areas are historically Protestant, and maintain a fairly high number of un-churched people in general (i.e., people who perhaps had heard of aspects of the Christian narrative, but who do not attend church services on a regular basis). Geographically, the area is gorgeous and breathtaking, being part of the foothills of the Great Smokey Mountains. Moreover, the area is populated by many determined, resourceful and admirable people, many whom I am honored to call friends. I learned much from them and will be forever thankful that I had the opportunity to share my first years as a priest with them. These redemptive aspects of the area were matched, unfortunately, with certain less-desirable qualities present in the culture.

The usual maladies confronting people in rural America could be found in these areas.²³ There was declining economic activity, causing many people to either leave the area or commute long distances in order to work. Though there were many committed, bright and zealous teachers and professionals involved in education, it was difficult to create a culture where the connection between education and opportunity could be made. There were the usual problems of

²² By 'mission territory,' I am referring to an area of the United States that has no official Roman Catholic parish in general, along with very few Roman Catholics, in particular. After the developments of Roman Catholic mission theology of the 20th century, Catholics now view all areas of life as places where 'mission' is to take place. Being able to delineate particular areas with a greater missionary need, however, is still helpful to the church, and to missionary communities, such as Glenmary. Therefore, the term 'mission territory' is still appropriate. For a helpful overview of the developments of mission theology at the Second Vatican Council, see Stephen B. Bevans, "Revisiting Mission at Vatican II: Theology and Practice for Today's Missionary Church," *Theological Studies*, 74, no. 2 (2013): 261-283.

²³ An insightful sociological study of rural America can be found in Robert Wuthnow, *Small Town America: Finding Community, Shaping the Future* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

stagnation, people receiving checks from the government with little incentive to work, or those who had given up the battle trying to find dignified employment that provided a living wage. To pass the time and drown the feelings of depression and desperation, many people imbibed prescription drugs acquired illegally from the infamous 'trail' that stretched from the hands of doctors in Florida, who granted 'unnecessary' prescriptions to patients, who in turn sold their pills illegally to others, which finally found their way to the doorsteps of the people I was called to serve in the mountains of Appalachia.²⁴ This merely compounded the ills of many, for the culture of illegal narcotics often destroyed families and placed those who were supposed to be responsible for the family, in jail. This led to many children being sent to the foster care system, or being raised by their grandparents. It became all too common for me, when I visited the public schools, to hear from students that they had now 'moved in with grandma', because both of their parents were either in jail, or missing.

Perhaps the greatest ill facing many of the people of the area, and which affected me as well, was the tendency towards individualism and isolation that existed within the local culture. Part of the cause of these cultural tendencies was the result of the historical constitution of the area.²⁵ Many people who settled these areas of the United States did so in order create 'space' for themselves. They fled the increasingly overpopulated, colonial cities for various reasons, and settled these areas in order to be generally self-sufficient, by living off of the land, while hoping to be left alone by the government. There were religious causes to these cultural aspects of individualism as well. The traditional Protestant forms of Christianity that evolved emphasized the need for personal salvation and redemption to the extent that it often overshadowed the fundamental communal aspects

²⁴ For more information on this infamous 'trail,' see Laura Ungar, "Florida fuels prescription-drug abuse epidemic," *Courier-Journal*, October, 2011, <http://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/local/2016/08/25/florida-fuels-prescription-drug-abuse-epidemic-archive/89299090/> (accessed September 23rd, 2016).

²⁵ For a helpful introduction to the history of Appalachia, see Harry M. Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area*. New afterward by James K. Caudill (Ashland: Jesse Stuart Foundation, 2001). See also, Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell, eds., *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

of Christianity.²⁶ The rugged terrain, coupled with windy and somewhat precarious roads, limited mobility and also increased the isolation of many, especially the elderly. Finally, a certain suspicion of outsiders, sometimes rightly justified, kept many non-native people from settling into the area, or at least motivated them to settle in their own sections of the county, which prohibited the mutual transmission of ideas and information that could possibly have been beneficial and helpful to all involved parties.²⁷ All of these realities formed the culture to which I was called to navigate, learn from, and ultimately serve, in my first assignment as a priest.

Much as was the case in the seminary, the first antidote I discovered to the individualism that infected the culture of the county was the small community of missionaries that Glenmary had sent to serve this area. At any given time, there were usually four to five of us living together in two small, neighboring houses. An intimate group of celibate men living together in an intentional community, though it has been practiced extensively throughout the history of Christianity, does not come without its challenges.²⁸ We had to cope with issues as petty as who will clean which part of the house or how food should be cooked, to more significant theological debates, personal visions of ministry, or differing philosophies of life in general.

Yet we strove to make this kind of community possible. We prayed together three times a day, with the Eucharist being, once again, the source of cohesion for our community. We cooked meals for each other, shared domestic responsibilities, collaborated in ministry, and recreated together, often going on day-trips to explore different

²⁶ There has been considerable research conducted on the connection between some forms of Protestantism and individualism. For instance, see Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 230-234.

²⁷ There is a history in Appalachia of outside companies buying up land and mineral rights without contributing to the development of the area, leading to higher levels of poverty. See, for instance, Grace Toney Edwards, et al., eds., *A Handbook to Appalachia: An Introduction to the Region* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

²⁸ For example, Jesus sent out his disciples in small communities to do their missionary work (cf. Luke 10:1), and Benedict of Nursia (480-543) created a 'rule' in order to help communities of Christians live together. Various forms of community life have been maintained throughout the history of Christianity. See, for instance, C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

areas of Tennessee. In order to discuss some of the larger issues that confronted us as a community and in our ministry, we would take nearly two full days together quarterly and meet with an outside facilitator who helped us discern what we thought God was possibly doing in our lives and in the lives of the people we served. These meetings were intense, emotional and provocative, but I believe they were precious to us all. They provided a space for us to be honest, vulnerable, and accountable to each other, accountable to the people we served and, hopefully, accountable to God.

Along with the struggle to create community among ourselves, we all encountered, in varying degrees, the struggle to create community with those people whom we were called to serve. As a priest, along with the other missionaries with whom I served, it was the attempt to form a church with the local people that became central to our work as missionaries.²⁹

The idea of 'church' is a complex reality, but it at least, in part, means forming a community of people where unity can exist within diversity. This community consists of seemingly unrelated and disconnected people who come together and, through nothing less than supernatural grace, a community, a body, is formed – what we in the Christian tradition call the Body of Christ.³⁰ As can be gleaned

²⁹ The way that the Body of Christ serves to counteract many of the challenges of living in a secular age is addressed by many theologians. One in particular, Stanley Hauerwas, highlights how the Church is the community around Jesus Christ who forms, and transforms her. Jesus instills in Christians a certain way of life, and a certain ethic, that serve in founding a contrasting social body to many cultural realities in the United States, and in other cultural contexts. See Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), especially chapter four.

³⁰ Christians believe that grace is necessary for the formation of community, because of the underlying anthropological presuppositions they hold. According to the Christian tradition, human beings, though created 'good' by a loving God, suffer from the consequences of the 'fall' on account of human sinful action, and therefore, have a difficulty knowing what is morally right, as well as being able to act morally. The debate concerning the extent of the effects of the 'fall' is a perennial one in Christianity that has yet to be resolved. However, due to the effects of the fall, living and being in community become more challenging, and require the grace of God, which is a gift given so as to assist people to know and to do the good. For a discussion of the effects of the 'fall' on the human condition, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory IV: The Action*, translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 183-201.

from what was written above about the culture of the area, creating this 'body' was never an easy task. The importance of community became one of the consistent themes of my homilies. Strengthening community at its foundations in families in the hopes of this spilling over into our own church and the broader society occupied much of my ministry and counseling. Providing the people of the church with communal tasks and ministry that allowed them to work together became central to the vision of our mission. Finally, simply eating meals together – where food was shared among strangers, and where people from various backgrounds, with heretofore parallel histories, now found their lives intersecting – provided the opportunity for us all to see that journeying alone, disconnected and isolated, was perhaps not the way in which human beings were created to live.³¹ From all of these efforts, many found that in the church they were far more at 'home' as human beings.³²

In my first assignment as a missionary in East Tennessee, I found that one of the central challenges of the church's mission, when encountering the effects of living in a secular age, was creating community. I would find that the struggle to create community was also present when I made the journey across the Atlantic and found myself living in Leuven, Belgium.

³¹ The significance of eating meals together takes on further meaning in light of the Christian tradition, because of the importance Christians place on the Eucharist. At Jesus' last supper (the Eucharist) with his disciples, he gave of himself to his disciples, and continues to share himself with his followers today, where in the elements of bread and wine, he gives his followers his body and blood (the Eucharist) to be consumed. See Mark 14: 12-26. See also, John 6. Every meal that Christians share together, in light of the Last Supper, takes on new meaning, if at least by way of analogy.

³² Many sociologists of religion mention that functional differentiation is one of the markers of a secular age. This differentiation consists of not only a decline, or freedom from, religious influence in certain areas of society (such as government, schools, the economy, etc.), but also the multiplication of places where people go to accomplish the many tasks of daily life. Differentiation has a tendency to create the sense that people no longer share common space, that people's lives are too complicated and disconnected, and therefore, it is much more difficult to find common ground on which to form relationships. For more on this idea, see Rob Warner, *Secularization and Its Discontents* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 26-27.

III

Being trained as a missionary priest, I was taught to make judgments cautiously concerning cultures that were not my own, to be sensitive to those things I do not understand, and if something I encounter is radically different from my previous experience, to accept it as a learning opportunity and a moment for personal growth.³³ It is with these principles in mind that I proceed to discuss the final culture of secularization in this essay: my experience of living within the secular culture that is Leuven and its surrounding areas. Given that I have lived here for only about two years, my reflections will be limited and, by the time this is read by others, it is likely that my thoughts will have developed or changed. Nevertheless, I will do my best to reflect upon the experiences I have had thus far, keeping the issue of community in the forefront of my reflections.

Much has been written on the importance of symbols and images in the formation of culture and community, as well as their meaning, interpretation and significance within those communities.³⁴ I do not wish to revisit this here entirely. I would like to, however, focus on one symbolic element of the Catholic priest: his clerical attire.

In the United States, clerical attire, especially that of the Roman collar, communicates different meanings to people, often based on certain espoused theological presuppositions and prior experiences. Clerical attire might be seen as a statement of Catholic orthodoxy and a pride for the vocation of the priesthood, or it might represent male oppression, a return to the “days before Vatican II,” or a flaunting of power and authority – even clericalism.³⁵ In the mission of East

³³ There has been a growing emphasis on the need for missionaries of the Catholic Church to be sensitive to the diversity of cultures that exist. See, for instance, Stephen B. Bevans, ed., *Mission and Culture: The Louis J. Luzbetak Lectures* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012).

³⁴ For instance, see Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), especially 23-30.

³⁵ It is important to note that the Roman Catholic Church is a hierarchical church. This means that clerics, i.e., deacons, priests, bishops, and lay people, are part of what constitute the church. However, there has been a growing emphasis, in recent years, on the importance of lay people in the life of the church, as well as on the importance of lay involvement in the church’s mission in the world. The church desires for a kind of mutual relationship between clerics and lay people, rather than relationships of animosity or competition. Each way of life is thought

Tennessee, the symbol was often well received, being associated with someone who is a minister for Christ. It also elicited, however, certain espoused anti-Catholic sentiments that had been propagated in those areas. In the seminary, clerical attire was often associated with a certain respect, and probably, much like the military, was a sign and reward for accomplishment and commitment. In general, I think, at its most innocuous level (and this has mainly been the meaning that I attribute to it in my life), it is a way to make visible one's profession, commitment, and calling, so that those who wish to associate with this way of life, for whatever reason and in whatever way, can do so.³⁶ Seeing how many of the people in Leuven have responded to this symbol has been an informative experience for me.

I have often felt that, when wearing my clerical attire in Leuven, I am perceived as being completely out of place.³⁷ I am like a sign of contradiction creating a cognitive dissonance in the lives of those who encounter me. Walking the streets of Leuven – under the magnificent churches whose splendid architecture speaks of glory, faith and commitment, yet whose sanctuaries are now more likely to hold

to support the other. However, 'clericalism,' in its many forms, exists when one group seeks special privilege due to their role or function in the church, or where one group misuses their power and authority for their own ends. On the different roles in the church, as well as the relationship between lay people and clerics, see *Lumen Gentium* (Hereafter, cited as *LG*.) All translations of conciliar documents are taken from Austin Flannery, O.P., ed. *The Vatican Collection: Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, new revised edition, 2 vols. (Northport, New York, and Dublin, Ireland: Costello Publishing Company, 2004).

³⁶ For instance, I have found, while wearing my clerical attire in the airport, that people respond to it in various ways. Some people will ask me to hear their confession, or confide in me their anxieties about the trip they are taking, while we are waiting to board the plane. Other people, who have had mixed experiences with the church, will speak to me of their disappointment or frustrations. Some people will even use me as a 'lightening rod,' directing their anger with the church towards me.

³⁷ Harvey Cox, in his work *A Secular City*, writes that often those whose role it is to speak of God, and especially those who do so while dressing up in religious attire, can appear to much of the world as representing some lost time in history, or even more humorously, part of a circus act that exists to keep people amused. The religious 'icon' can try as hard as he or she is able to convince them that something important is at stake, but it is often to no avail. See, for instance, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), 291-294.

museum exhibits or serve as concert halls, rather than hold Masses filled with the faithful who desire to meet Christ – I almost get the feeling that people think that I, too, should be in a museum. I perceive they think that perhaps I have wandered out of the museum and need to be returned to my proper place, a place in history, or where I can be comfortably observed as a symbol of something in which people used to believe.³⁸ Oftentimes, when I am walking to the library, people on the street will completely stop walking and stare at me as I pass by. They will not say anything. They just stare. At first this made me slightly angry and uncomfortable, but I have determined to give a small wave of the hand, a gesture of greeting, and keep on walking. Others will strike up a conversation, and I am entertained with questions such as, “Do you really believe in God?” or “I didn’t think that priests existed anymore.” My favorite is when people ask me: “Are you going to a costume party later in the evening?”

Not all of the responses to the clerical attire are negative. Sometimes, as I walk by some of the older Belgians, I perceive that they give me a secretive nod and wink of approval, not wanting anyone else to know that they still believe in the faith of the church: the faith that inspired the Flemish Masters to create some of the greatest artwork in the history of the church and the world; or the faith that motivated people to place one giant stone upon another to give rise to beautiful churches that the entire world still enjoys today – even after almost a millennia has passed since their construction. Regardless of the reaction I receive, it is clear that this religious symbol cannot help but evoke a reaction from people as we live together in a secular age.

³⁸ Sociologist of religion José Casanova has researched the differences between secularization in the United States and in Europe. He has come to the conclusion that part of the difference between the two contexts includes a kind of phenomenological interpretation of modernity held by the people in the various contexts. This means, according to Casanova, that for most western Europeans, being ‘modern’ necessarily implies being non-religious. When Europeans come across some kind of active or public form of religiosity, as in the case of seeing a priest wearing a collar, they are shocked and, in general, confused, interpreting this as being something unbecoming of modern people. Whereas in the United States, generally speaking, people understand that being modern and being religious do not have to be in conflict. See José Casanova, “The Secular and Secularisms,” *Social Research*, 76, no. 4 (2009), 1051-1057.

I have to admit, however, that the different reactions I do receive come across as somewhat strange. Part of the peculiarity is that just a few decades ago Belgium was one of the most Catholic countries in Europe. It is even more perplexing, in that I am studying at a *Catholic* university. All of these responses seem to be informed by the local history and cultural development. I do not purport to understand why the symbol of the priesthood has been lost and forgotten in Belgium, or why it holds the meaning (or lack of meaning) that it does today. Nor do I fully know the history of how things came to develop this way in a land that was once predominantly Catholic.

Yet there is a sense of irony in this predicament. For wearing clerical attire often makes me feel out of place and as one separated from the group. *And* yet it is a symbol that, at least in part, is meant to provide people with a sense of feeling at ‘home,’ as being part of something universal, trans-historical, and even eternal.³⁹ Despite the mixed responses and thoughts that are elicited, I still think there is value in reminding those who live in a secular culture that there exist people who still believe in those ‘myths’ of Christianity, and who still believe that they (the ‘myths’) are vitally and essentially important – that they say something true about all of reality. I know, too, that for many Catholics who struggle to live their faith, the clerical symbol serves as a sign that makes them proud to be Catholic, and encourages them to strive to live their faith more boldly.

More than ever before in my life, living in Belgium has inspired me to reflect extensively on the biblical experience of the Jewish people who were forced to live in exile.⁴⁰ The struggle to maintain

³⁹ The Roman Catholic Church is understood to be a universal – meaning worldwide and all-inclusive – form of religion. The priesthood, and similarly, priestly attire, can be symbols of that universality and inclusivity. They, of course, are not always perceived this way, sometimes on account of the failures or sinfulness of priests.

⁴⁰ The issue of ‘exile’ has been prominent in many theological discussions in recent years, likely as a result of theological reflection being done as Christianity in the Western world attempts to respond to the changes in the conditions of belief, as well as, in many cases, a decline in religious practice and influence. Therefore, ‘exile’ refers to the existential feeling that one is no longer at ‘home’ in his or her surroundings. In other words, there seems to be a growing experience that the Western world has lost its Christian heritage and is rather a place where Christians find themselves in tension or at odds with the surrounding culture. See, for instance, Terrence Merrigan, “The Exile of the Religious Subject: A

one's identity and faith, the desire to be able to pass on those belief systems which are dear to one's family in the midst of an often countering culture, and the need simply to remember the stories, images and characters of one's narrative, become a daily effort living in a place where this narrative is no longer held. When the psalmist speaks of not being able to play their (Israel's) songs of praise on alien soil, I can empathize.⁴¹

Perhaps more than any other place that I have lived, my experience of trying to maintain a life of faith has been challenged more in Leuven than in any other context. Being trained as a priest, and even more as a missionary I, perhaps naively, thought I would have been well prepared to study theology in Belgium, and so I discerned with my religious community that this would be the best place to undergo my studies. I figured that there is no better place to study theology than where Christian identity is being tested and questioned daily. Leuven has proved to be a wonderful place to study theology, but my ability to be a faithful and joyful priest has certainly been challenged. This is not, as I have observed, an experience unique to me.

For instance, I think there is a common struggle that unites many non-native Catholics living in Leuven. I see it in the faces of students who arrive in Leuven to study theology at the beginning of each semester. I meet many of them at the local English-speaking community of St. Kwinten's where I help out with priestly ministry. There is often a white chalkiness to their faces, and their eyes are glazed over in bewilderment: they are perplexed, disillusioned, and confused. It is at that moment where I try to befriend them, extend to them a further welcome to our community, and introduce them to a few other Catholics with whom they might commiserate. For they are, most often in my opinion, struggling to live as faithful Catholics in a

Newmanian Perspective on Religion in Contemporary Society," in: *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, S. Hellemans and P. Jonkers, eds. (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015), 193-222; Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens*; or Balthasar, "Loneliness in the Church," 275-284. Balthasar describes this existential feeling of being in 'exile' as the Church's experience of 'loneliness' in the world. It is the challenge for all Christians, according to Balthasar, not to allow this feeling of 'loneliness' to inhibit them from the necessary movement out of the church and into engagement with the world.

⁴¹ See, for instance, Psalm 137.

land of exile. To do so with any degree of success requires community. Being connected to the community at St. Kwinten's has helped me, and so I hope that it will do the same for them.

Yet it is not just the foreigners who struggle with their faith. I have been graced to meet many native people, both in the professional setting in the theology and philosophy faculties, as well as on the more informal setting of the parish, who desire to live their Catholic faith fervently, and who are deeply concerned with the state of Catholicism in Belgium in particular, and the status of religion in general. I have gained much from their insights, their wisdom, and quite frankly, from their suffering: suffering that has come from observing the way in which the culture of secularization, and sometimes, 'secularism', has wreaked havoc on the faith of their friends, their family, and especially their children. I am always inspired to hear how they have persevered, how they, too, still believe, and how they continue to ask the tough questions, and pray for answers from some greater source of Wisdom.

It seems that many of us 'exiles' have learned to unite, support one another, and seek new perspectives about the place where we live. As opposed to the seminary, when community was pre-formed and where like-minded people were automatically placed together, in Leuven, we have to seek out our support, accountability, and our community. Perhaps this is why for many of us, the community that we do form is so precious. And why, I believe, we become so defensive when it is threatened. I think it is, too, why we take our liturgy, our parish, and our prayer so seriously. These are cultural markers that give us the sense of being at home, at least to some degree, in a place where homelessness and exile seem to be a way of life. I would say, though, that at least for me, and I think for many of the people I have met on this journey, that they are thankful for the challenge that living in this kind of secular culture has provided them, and that their faith is stronger and healthier for it.

IV

At least for myself, the jury is still out on whether or not human

beings have arrived at a better place while living in a secular age.⁴² What interests me far more than this question is, rather, what are the challenges that arise from living in a secular age and how those challenges can be met. One of the specific challenges that I have reflected upon in this essay is whether community, and therefore a sense of being at 'home,' is possible in a secular age. I believe that ultimately it is possible. I hope that my reflections have highlighted some of the threats towards community that can be experienced living in different secular cultures. I also hope that I have indicated that regardless of where one lives, creating community is possible, but that it is also necessary, for one to live a healthy, full life. Creating this community, however, will not be easy. People of the Christian background, and all people in general, will likely struggle to meet this ideal of forming healthy communities. It is my hope, however, that these brief reflections show that it is both a necessary and worthy struggle, and one that can be, at times, overcome.

⁴² See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, for more insight into this question. Taylor's opinion is that any narrative that claims the Western world has somehow arrived at a better place now that religion is less influential in society is making a hasty conclusion. He calls these conclusions 'subtraction stories' and commits his 800 plus page tome to arguing against these subtraction stories.

5.

Reflections towards a Christian Spirituality of Pilgrimage and Service

PHILIP GONZALES

At the time of death – that is the one action
(And the time of death is every moment)
Which shall fructify in the lives of others:
And do not think of the fruit of action.
Fare forward.

T.S. Eliot¹

In our secularized postmodern global world of speed, travel, bilocationary cybernetic movement, technological advance, progress, capital, business, growth and mobility: how can one ever be at home? In a world of utter up-rootedness and fast-paced acceleration filled with 'time-ridden faces distracted from distraction by distraction,' is it possible to *be* at home?² In a secularized and de-desacralized world, where we are told that the horizon of the divine has been blotted out (Nietzsche), and thus, all things have become possible (Dostoevsky): how is it possible to find a way, a way *to be* at home? Yet what does it mean *to be* at home, what does it mean to take-up-roots, to dwell, *to be* rooted? Is there such a thing as home, as *being* rooted, if as Rilke says, 'we live, forever saying farewell'?³ Or is the inverse also the case? That is, in a world of homogenized 'time-ridden' fast-paced mobilized faces do we feel too at home, too secure, too complacent, too permanent, too divine? Have we not built a grandiose secular city – a *civitas terrena* – on the monotonous idol of advancement; an advancement which forever remains the same, because all there is, is the advancing of advancement. That is to say, that the twin idols of financial and scientific progress (for you cannot have one without the

¹ T.S. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages." in: *The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, INC., 1952), 134.

² T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton," in: *The Complete Poems and Plays*, 120.

³ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, translated by C.F. MacIntyre (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 65.

other in today's world) have wholly become the primary way in which we experience time, namely, as quantitative gain ('time is money'). In a word, time is no longer religious and thus it is no longer the moving image of eternity: it is secularized/immanentized. Yet what is gained and what is lost? For in this experience of time there is nothing new. It is the *same* change, the *same* progress, the *same* advancement of technology and capitol in the name of acquisition and gain. Because all there is gain and mastery of *this* Babylonian world. Life becomes, or is, an infinite secularized project of progress, mastery, self-service and gain. Life is no longer a pilgrim's progress. In other words, time is no longer the time of service, the *time of and for sacrifice*. In such a world do we no longer know how to truly bid farewell? And thus do we no longer love the passing gift of life and the passing of the gift of other fellow travelers in their shimmering and unrepeatable poverty of transience and passage? This is to say, it is only when life is lived as a *way of passage* that all things are created anew (Revelation 21:5), and one finds the answer to the question of *being* understood as a *way*. It is only in virtue of an acceptance and a receiving of the analogical and paradoxical structure of the Christian experience of *being* in the world, and not of this world, that the passing of this world can be experienced as a pilgrimage and way of love and service *for this world*. Which, in the acceptance of its passing away and poverty, is created anew. In other words, the response being offered, in this essay, to the conundrum of our current secularized world of displacement, and yet permanent and continual advancement, is a reflection *on* and *towards* a Christian spirituality of pilgrimage and service.

In order to elaborate on the above mystery and thematic I will proceed in three steps: First, seeing how part of the task of these collections of essays is testimonial, that is, a reflection on the Ricoeurian theme of '*D'où parlez-vous?*', 'Where do you speak from', I will begin by contextualizing my life as an academic, husband, father and Catholic.⁴ In doing so, I will explain how it was (and is) through a Christian spirituality of pilgrimage that I have found a unifying, dynamic and/or moving center around which the various poles of my life turn as a counter to the current secular world order. Second, I will

⁴ Richard Kearney relates that when he arrived in Paris in 1977, to study under Paul Ricoeur, that this was the first question that Ricoeur asked to everyone in his seminar. See, Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), xi.

then turn to an elaboration of the connection between an analogical metaphysics of creation and spirituality. Third, I conclude with reflections on or towards an interpretation of an analogical self of pilgrimage and doxological service as a counter to the current *novus ordo seculorum*.

I

‘Where do you speak from?’ To reflect upon these words is to reflect upon the situated and finite condition of life, of living, of thought. It is to reflect on the uniqueness and singularity of the place, and places, from which one speaks. Further, it is to reflect upon the many commitments, desires, aspirations, traditions and prejudices from which one speaks; from the where, from the within, from which one speaks – between – *in medias res*. To think upon thought and life in this manner is to reflect upon thought and life as a story: thought as a storied existence. However, not just any story, but ‘my’ story. Nevertheless, it is a story that is not a possession, not an acquisition, not a property, but a story which *I am* (think of Marcel’s profound distinction between being and having). It is a story that I am within, a story which is still *being performed* and its ending is yet to be decided, determined. Nonetheless, what gives one the ‘credentials’ to write upon one’s life, to tell something of one’s personal life? Does that not always involve a sense of self-worth, that *I have* something worthwhile to say? And further, what place does it have in the disinterested scientific objectivity of today’s specialized world of academia? However, I have been invited to write a partly personal piece and to reflect upon the ‘where’ from whence I speak and the effect that our secularized and globalized world has upon *me*, and ‘my’ experience of living in multiple places, of being at home and not being at home. My task, which I seek here, then, truly desires to be humble. Nevertheless, there is also a twofold risk. First, because at stake in this essay is not simply an objective academic piece. But rather at stake is a piece of myself that is seeking to be laid bare. In being laid bare it is always open to the possibility of misinterpretation and mistranslation. Second, because my task and purpose here truly desires to be humble, there is still the temptation of pride – the presence of pride – if we are to believe the great spiritual writers. Perhaps, this piece exhibits an

imperceptible pride of which I am not aware, but should be. If so, that is not my intention.

Lastly, in seeking to answer the question of the 'where' from whence I speak, then, it must be said, that this questions can only be answered through the gift of faith in Christ which I have received, as an answer given by one *struggling* to live a Catholic life of faith amidst the unprecedented challenges of the twenty-first century. It means telling – partly – a story of a struggle to find a mediating center around which the various, and seemingly, incommensurable aspects of my life turn. And this means thinking *within* the 'thing itself' which, in this case, is a thinking towards a Christian spirituality of pilgrimage and service. In others words, I desire to speak about and to the *poverty of Christian experience*. In the first part of this essay I turn to the poverty of 'my' Christian experience, a poverty which I have barely scratched the surface of. For the moment I believe to *possess* Christian poverty it vanishes and is taken away, because it is no longer experienced as a way.⁵ The Christian poverty of a pilgrim, then, is only had through giving it away, it is only had in a life that loses itself on the way.

II

As both a student and a professor inhabiting the world of our contemporary secularized academy my life has been one of incessant movement and relocation over the past fourteen years. Thus from the time of my undergraduate years, commencing at Thomas More College of Liberal Arts, Merrimack New Hampshire (September 2002), to the completion of my doctorate in philosophy at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium (June 2015), to my first University appointment at the University of Dallas (August 2015), I

⁵ Think, for example, of the words of the mid-20th Century French Catholic Madeline Delbr el (1904-1964), who writes, "The Christian examines his Christian life. He asks himself about God, about God's importance, about God's place, about how he seeks God's protection. He then begins to realize how easy it is to lose God in Christian life or to lose him in Christ; and then how easy it is to lose Christ in Christianity; how easy it is for Christianity to continue on at first without God and then without Christ. Finally, he has the vertiginous realization how easily such breakdowns can occur." Madeline Delbr el, *We, the Ordinary People of the Streets*, translated by David Louis Schindler Jr. and Charles Mann (Eerdmans, UK: Grand Rapids/Cambridge, 2000), 194. I am indebted to my dear friend Patrick Ryan Cooper for introducing the extraordinary writings of Delbr el to me.

have moved a total of seven times and lived in four countries (United States, Italy, Belgium, France, and back to the United States). Over this time I was married to the love of my life, Sarah Schofield Gonzales (May 2006), and have had four little girls, Sophia (age 8), Anastasia (age 6) and twin girls Melanie and Serafina (ages 4). Amidst struggling to complete my degrees, working at Chavagnes International College in France, while writing my doctoral dissertation, and doing my best to raise a young family and be a good husband amid the financial pressures of our globalized world (and, in this, the financial pressures are the *same* despite what country one is living in: it is *one* secular economic *civitas terrena*); one nagging question has always perplexed me: where, if anywhere, do the poles of my life meet in our current world of secularization? To answer this question I do not intend to focus on the differences of the effects of secularization on the various countries which I have lived in, but rather to tell something of my personal story that has spanned the spaces of secularization in the above mentioned countries. However, I will suggest in passing, that Charles Taylor is on to something with his understanding of the 'immanent frame'; a frame which, in my experience, passes beyond national boundaries and is thus a social, economic and global framing and/or construct.

But back to my question: it would seem that there are so many different selves in me, the student, the professor, the academic, the husband, the father and the Christian. Where if anyway do these staging's and masks of the self meet? Does philosophy have anything to do with my belief in Christ and Christianity or is it a 'secularizable' activity able to fit within the 'immanent frame' of our secularized world? Can magisterial philosophical and theological texts tell me anything about what it means to try and love my wife and my children? Does my research have an effect upon my life and teaching and does my teaching have an effect upon my research? How do these various selves meet and how do they mingle: in compartmentalized disinterest, in schizophrenic war or in polyphonic harmony? Is there such a thing as a whole man, an integral man? And how can I give myself fully to all of these various aspects of my life, without letting certain aspects down, without letting myself down? And to make it more complex and compound: this is a self which is no longer one self, but many selves; a self of others and a self upon whom others are so dependent, especially, wife and children. I was, I *am*, to paraphrase

the words of the great Charles Péguy, a father of a family, those great adventures of the modern world! Yet, I am only one man that needs to be many men, a man responsible for numerous others: wife, children and students (and my intellectual obligations of writing and research). How can I be all things to all men (1 Cor. 9:19-23), when I barely know who I am, let alone how I am *to be true* to the many blessings, people and opportunities which I have been given? All of these questions, and many others, surfaced from the time of my marriage and university years, up until this very moment of writing this essay. Is there a unifying, yet dynamic factor, around which these questions turn? And, further, how are these questions to be answered in a world where there seems to be nothing more than fast-paced conformity to advancement and 'getting ahead' (for this is so even for academics, 'publish or perish' – in your area of 'specialty' and compartmentalization).

However, I could not accept this, and I do not accept this. Something within me revolted against a schizophrenic and compartmentalized understanding of the self. There had to be something which could allow me to live an integral life, there had to be a harmony *between* my many selves (intellectual/academic, husband/father, student/professor) that was neither discord nor compartmentalization, there had to be a *way* to give myself to all these difficult demands, however imperfectly it was given, it had to be given, *it has to be given*.

All of these questions emerged over the, as of yet, most eventful years of my life. They further emerged within the inescapable context and material conditions of our twenty-first century world and the pressures of today's economized academia. This is, these questions emerged within our socio-economic and cultural conditions of dominating advancement, incessant moving and the financial pressures put on young families today within our 'immanent frame'. Thus it seemed that there was not enough time for me to really give of myself. Everything was/is advancing so rapidly. For one has to take time in order to give, but if the time that is given is wholly the homogenized secular time of advancement and gain (the advancement of my 'career' without which I cannot support my family: because *time is money*), then there seems to be no time for myself, my many selves, to give to others what *must* be given. Could

or can time be saved and thus also myself, my many selves, a self that is now tied to the salvation of others?

The financial burdens of trying to support a young family, while also trying to move forward in my academic life amidst continual relocation brought me back to my childhood, that is, to the gift of faith, 'my' faith in Christ. Was I, am I to really *live* this faith? Was I to commit to it in *all* of the various aspects of my life, despite the fact that such a thing is now so terribly out of fashion? A decision was demanded, but a decision takes time, needs time, but when a decision *needs* to be made the point is, is that time is running out. This is why a decision is always a kind of splitting, a dividing of time into the moment before and the moment after through which the decision is released and rings, in one way or another, throughout the time *after* the decision. It was a decision which concerned it seemed, on the surface, myself, my many selves, and the harmony of myself. However, in reality, this decision was really no longer a decision about me, but about the others, the others who had become – and are continually becoming – more truly myself than me. Time must be saved, a time for others and that meant bringing into harmony my many selves under the rubric of my faith. Time must be given to philosophy, to my career, to my *vocation*, to my students, *to my family*. Which meant, that if I was going to respond to the secularized world in which I found myself: a world of self-service, gain and advancement, a world of movement and fast-paced mobility, a world of pressure, a world in which there is no time for Christ or faith, then, my time could no longer be 'mine,' 'my own.' And nor could it be the time of advancement and gain. This implied that all of the various aspects of my life, and my many selves, all had to manifest service to Christ, through service to others. Time could no longer be my time, nor the time of the *novus ordo seculorum*, it needed to be the time of Christ, a time of consecration. Because he has claimed all time since the time of his Incarnation: splitting time into a before and an after, a Yes or a No between the open and full-time of service and self-sacrifice and the secular time of homogenized conformity, gain, mastery and self-service.

III

Yet how was/am I to do this? The simple Christian answer, which is in no way easy to enact, consisted in an acceptance of my own

poverty, my own weakness, my own insufficiency, my own sinfulness. I could only be all things to all men by realizing that I could not be all things to all men (2 Corinthians 12:9-11). In other words, it was only when I began to see the poverty of myself and my inability to fully give of myself that I was able to *begin* to give. I needed to become a pilgrim, I needed to see – I need to see – that I am only on the way towards this harmony of the self, my many selves. I am only *beginning* to love and serve others. The harmony that I was searching for was not a standing-center or a fixed-locus within myself, the harmony was/is the harmony of the *way* (a towards). For when Christ *is the Way*, then the whole way is sanctified. It is thus only through accepting the grace of the way that the way is sanctified. It is only through *being* a pilgrim that time is saved and consecrated for others. Moments of time become, not moments of gain and advancement, but moments of death and resurrection. What do I mean? When life is understood as a passing, and a passage, then each moment is embraced and seized in its unrepeatable freshness. The moment that is passing thus must be seized as a moment of beauty, of transience, of service; a moment which can never be duplicated; for each moment demands a decision for or against service, for or against others, for or against Christ. The moment and the present, thought in this Christian way, is then the polar opposite of the Proustian moment of the ‘...incurable imperfection in the very essence of the present moment.’⁶ Nor is the pilgrim moment of service within the passing of this world a Gnostic flight from this world. It is rather a loving of creation and others in their unrepeatable passing. Every moment should be – but cannot be because of sinfulness – a moment of death to self which bears fruit in the lives of others. Every moment when lived this way is a moment of death *and* resurrection: it is open time, time saved. It is time consecrated for service to others, it is the time of the self-understood as a pilgrim – a pilgrim’s progress, where life becomes a doxological act of service. The self is unified by the moving harmony of the *way*, a self that is within itself by virtue of being beyond itself, expressed in living a Christian spirituality of pilgrimage obtained in passing momentary sparks of service. Thus in moments of passing service the way of Christ is manifested in all aspects of the self, in a

⁶ Cited in Walter Benjamin, “The Image of Proust,” in: *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt and translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 203.

selfseeking and struggling to live for others on the way towards Christ in the passing of his shimmering creation. Because Christ is the way, the entire way becomes sanctified, especially, the daily drudgery and vicissitudes of life when moments are seized for nameless acts (Wordsworth) of service, patience and love. Thus, in short, is the way which I have found to *begin* harmonizing and giving of myself, my many selves. In this way, each aspect of myself seeks to bespeak the way of Christ: whether as a student, a professor, a philosopher, a husband or a father: all acts seek to be given for the glory of Christ. The unity of the self thus resides in the moving outwards of the self, and its pilgrim time of consecration, in a response to the calling of Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Life seeks to become a doxological act of service for others in the very beauty and sorrow of the passing flashes of wealth in poverty, which is this world, metaphysically conceived through the eyes of faith.

Yet because more often than not these moments are left unseized and ignored, in my life, in *our* lives, then each new day it is necessary to begin again on the way; for a pilgrim's progress is, more often than not, a pilgrim's regress. But that is why the pilgrim above all is the one that lives within, and upon, the childishness of hope; that tomorrow will be better, even if only barely. Because, as Péguy boldly says, "What surprises me, says God, is hope. And I can't get over it. This little girl hope who seems like nothing at all. This little girl hope. Immortal."⁷ The *experience* of a Christian spirituality of pilgrimage and service is thus one permeated with the poverty of the self, of a continual falling on the way and getting up again in an attempt to embrace the world for what it *is*, that is, to embrace it as a new creation. Yet the only way to do this is to return to one's infirmity, to one's weakness, need and lack of self-sufficiency. One must struggle to return to being-a-child; for unless you become like little children then you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3). The Christian pilgrim then struggles to walk in the newness and poverty of a child, wholly dependent, trustful, full of hope. To seek to become like a little child is thus to seek to realize that you are not your own and that you are held in existence by another, that you were called before you responded, that you were loved before you loved

⁷ Charles Péguy, *Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, translated by David Louis Schindler, Jr. (London: Continuum, 2005), 5.

(John 4: 19). To do this is to walk counter to our current secularized world of homogenized advancement, gain, pressure, mastery and self-sufficiency. For, in the former, gain is had only in gain and, in the latter, gain is only had in loss, in a losing of one's life in order to save it. The child-pilgrim thus walks in the poverty of his existence in hope that each day the self will be lost more and more on the way, in ecstatic moments and bursts of doxological service. So that one day the self will be able to say in a wholly humble, trembling and stammering voice that it is not I that lives, but Christ that lives within me (Galatians 2:20). The Christian pilgrim is the one that deeply realizes that there is, in the words of the famed ending of Léon Bloy's *The Women Who Was Poor*, only one mistake in life, namely, not being a saint. Yet, Christian sanctity, for the poor pilgrim, is not a state but a way, a way in which the whole of one's life is integrated within and along the movement of the way given within, and through, the gift of Christ's calling name.

IV

In the forgoing I have sought to briefly situate and articulate the where from whence I speak. In doing so, I sought to tell a partial meditative and meandering story of my struggle to integrate various aspects of my life into a moving Christian spirituality of pilgrimage and service, in a testimonial response to our current secular and homogenized world of advancement and mastery. Now I would like to switch the register to a Christian metaphysical description of the pilgrimage spirituality sketched above. In the following I will seek to lay bare, in a more systematic fashion, the Christian metaphysical presuppositions of a Christian spirituality of pilgrimage and service. I will do this in two steps: First, I will argue for the necessity of an analogical metaphysics of creation as the general condition of possibility for an authentic Christian orthodox experience of God, in spirituality. Second, I will show how an analogical metaphysics unites, in an analogical unity-in-difference, nature and grace thereby making an integration of philosophy and Christianity possible and thus, concomitantly, the integration of one's intellectual life, teaching and research with one's faith in Christ.

Prior to arguing for the necessity of the *analogia entis* as a safeguard and condition for any authentic orthodox Christian

spirituality it first needs to be stated, in condensed form, what I mean by the *analogia entis*. I am using the metaphysical term in the way that it was idiosyncratically espoused by the extraordinary twentieth-century Jesuit philosopher and theologian, Erich Przywara.⁸ And by this I mean that the *analogia entis* expresses, on a metaphysically descriptive plane, the fundamental Christian belief of creation *ex nihilo*. This is to say, that the world is not God and God is not the world. They are metaphysically and ontologically different. The *analogia entis* is thus, as Przywara clearly saw, expressive of the truth that whatever similarity there is between God and creation the dissimilarity is always greater, as the Fourth Lateran Council states.⁹ Moreover, along with interpreting the *analogia entis* in the vein of Przywara I further see the *analogia entis* to be, as David Bentley Hart perspicuously remarks, "...shorthand for the tradition of Christian metaphysics that, developing from the time of the New Testament through the patristic and medieval periods, succeeded in uniting a metaphysics of participation to the biblical doctrine of creation...."¹⁰ In sum, the *analogia entis* instantiates a Christian metaphysics of creation and participation which wholly safeguards the qualitative difference between the Christian God of creation *ex nihilo* and the creature, created out of nothing.

Why then is this significant for an authentic and orthodox Christian spirituality? The answer is both simple and profound, in its utter simplicity. If God is truly and fully qualitatively different from creation, then the creature can never become God. Rather the relation between God and the creature always remains a *relation* of the created and Uncreated. This applies to the most exalted mystical state of a *unio caritatis*. That is, no matter how high a state of mystical union obtained between God and the creature it never ceases to be a created *participation* in the supernatural life of God. O'Regan succinctly sums

⁸ See, in general, Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, translated by John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014).

⁹ The text from the Fourth Lateran Council reads: "...inter creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo norari, quin inter eos non maior sit dissimilitudo notanda." Denz, 432.

¹⁰ David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 241.

up why the *analogia entis* is constitutive of orthodox Christian spirituality and experience when he states:

Nor finally, despite a high sense of human participation in the divine life, especially the divine life of the Trinity, does Catholicism support, either in the case of humanity in general, those with special charisms or those who engage in the mystical life, a view that would lessen the incommensurable distance between the divine and the human, the creator and the created. For instance, with the possible exception of Meister Eckhart, who focuses on the uncreated ground of the human soul and the indistinction between human beings as sons and the divine Logos, one would be hard pressed to name a single mystical theologian in the Catholic tradition who fails to assert that grace is a condition of human being's participation in the life of the Trinity. The ontological gap between uncreated and created remains intact, as does the ontological gap between creator and creation. The Victorines (twelfth century), William Saint Thierry (twelfth century), Bonaventure (thirteenth century), and Ruysbroeck (fourteenth century) all provide examples. But even in the Dionysian tradition in general, not excepting Scotus Eriugena, who was an influence on Eckhart, participation in the divine life supposes that participating human being is created.¹¹

Any Christian spirituality or mystical theology, in the orthodox Christian tradition, must abide by the truth of an analogical metaphysics of biblical creation and participation which never collapses the experience of God, in grace, into a mystically pantheistic or theopanistic experience of God. Whatever authentic experience the creature has of God must include an experience of God beyond all experience and idolatrous encapsulation. Correlatively, it must include a deep sense of being a creature, even if elevated and divinized as sons of God. God, in the Catholic tradition of spirituality and mystical theology, *Is* and remains the *Deus semper maior*. To keep

¹¹ Cyril O'Regan, *Gnostic Return in Modernity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), 193-194.

with the image of pilgrimage, the way is never closed between God and man. The distance of the way is the condition of the *commercium* between God and his creatures. Because the way is the never-to-be closed distance of love which is only there to forever be traversed in an endless pilgrimage of love, service and glorification. No experience, no mystical union, no spirituality can ever close the distance between God and creation, because this difference and distance is the very possibility of loves free traversal beyond any idolatrous *identitas entis*. To say it otherwise, this distance is the very expression of God's free, non-necessitated love which alone lets creation be what is other to God. However, paradoxically, it is the very transcendence, exteriority and distance of God which allows for his proximity and indwelling within creation and thus creation's participated divinization which is both an elevation of creaturely status, as well as an intensification of the Christian experience of the participated poverty of being-a-creature. A metaphysics of creation and participation, or the *analogia entis*, is thus the condition without which there is no authentic and orthodox Christian spirituality.

Three conclusions can be drawn from the above. First, without the *analogia entis*, understood as a Christian metaphysical description of the reality of the interval and/or difference between God and the creature, spirituality collapses into a heterodox experience of the divine which is permeated with the sense of identity and fusion. Second, metaphysics and spirituality should reinforce one another. This is to say, that Christian experience should speak to the beautiful poverty of being-a-creature which is expressed in a graced and experiential response to the every-dawning glory of the ever-greater Christian God of creation and redemption. Christian metaphysics should thus, importantly, arise out of the experiential dimensions of the creature's experience of being-a-creature in relation to the Christian God that is both *in-and-beyond* creaturely experience. Moreover, the poverty of Christian experience needs to also be grounded in the loving distance of metaphysical analogical speculation which safeguards the exteriority and transcendence of the Christian God who is both *in-and-beyond* creation. Three, a Christian spirituality of pilgrimage and service aptly speaks to the truth of the *analogia entis* and the *analogia entis* aptly speaks to the truth of the experience of being-a-creature. Why? Because the creature, will always remain a creature, and God who will always remain God. They

are forever separated by an abyss. Yet this very abyss is the abyss of the distance and freedom of love. Man's very being is an ecstatic being of journeying service and pilgrimage into the very living infinity of the Christian God (this will be developed more in the conclusion). This holds in the passage and passing of the gift of God's glorious creation which is only in a participatory being called forth from nothing. As well as *in patria* where God's unending glory is served and sung, sung and served. Creation and the creature are ever, and always, a hymn of pilgrimage to God, where the Christian truth of the *analogia entis* holds sway.

The question of nature and grace in Catholic philosophy and theology, from the time of the twentieth century to the present, has been of utmost importance to Catholic self-interpretation. Indeed, it can be said that this very question acts as a hermeneutic key to nearly every seminal Christian doctrine. However, this is not the time nor the place to rehearse this debate here. What I am interested in here is an analogical interpretation and integration of nature and grace and how this works itself out in philosophy – a Christian philosophy – fueled by spirituality. This is to say, I am interested in describing, on an analogically metaphysical front, my integration of faith and philosophy spoken about above, contra the prevailing trend of secularization. For it was only when I discovered the wonders of the Christian truth of the *analogia entis* that my faith become fully integrated into my philosophy and thus also into the entirety of my self, my many selves.

What then is the relation between nature and grace and how does an integrated view of nature/grace militate against an interpretation of philosophy as a wholly disinterested rationalistic and secularized 'view from nowhere'? For if philosophy is a disinterested 'view from nowhere', then it is able to be portioned off from the rest of one's life. It is able to become a mere area of research and academic compartmentalized specialization. Yet such a modern Enlightenment view, so prevalent today, wholly forgets that for the venerable ancient and Christian tradition philosophy was a spiritual exercise. In a word, philosophy was a living participation in Wisdom: philo(Sophia). Such a sapiential vision of philosophy is fully safeguarded by, and through, an analogical ordering of the natural to the supernatural which returns philosophy to the springs of spiritual practice, or, spirituality.

In the above, it was seen that the heart of the *analogia entis* laid in the truth that it is expressive of a Christian metaphysics of creation and participation. Creation and the creature thus hang suspended between God and nothing. Creation and the creature exist in a movement of flickering arising from nothing, into a participatory creaturely share in the life of the Christian God of creation and redemption, the natural and supernatural, being and grace. In such a view there are certain presuppositions at work which must be brought-into-view. First, being is accepted as created and it is therefore understood as contingent and thus non-absolute. Second, because being arises wholly from the freedom and non-necessitated love of God then created being is an unmerited gift. Third, because it is the Christian God of both creation and redemption being spoken about here then the natural and supernatural are viewed as flowing from the *one causality of God*. This is to say, that all thinking of being, undertaken here, resides under the banner of the one historical and concrete order of grace and redemption, orchestrated by the Christian God of being and grace. Implied in all of this is the fact that the very essence of creation and the creature is provisional and relational. Creation and the creature are, in their very essence, ordered towards the supernatural. Creation and the creature are the presupposed groundless/ground of the supernatural. Creation's and the creature's analogical ordering and desire for the supernatural are a response to the call of the one Christian God of creation and redemption. Gift is thus laid upon gift. Creation and the creature are an *exitus et reditus*. Creation and the creature, as created, are a relational openness which is ordered towards supernatural completion which perfects and does not destroy the relational essence of creation. Creation and the creature are opened because opened. In a word, creation and the creature are a pilgrimage towards God.

In such a view philosophy, understood as a creaturely activity, is only itself in what is other to itself. That is, it is itself through a creaturely participation in the grace of the Christian God. An analogical metaphysics of creation is expressive of the transitive, provisional, groundless and relational truth of creaturely being. Creaturely being is only fully itself when it is super-formed by the grace of the supernatural, without which the one final end of the creature remains obscured and hidden. In an analogical metaphysics of creation and participation there is no neutral ground of a pure

nature or universal reason. Reason and being are graced and thus are situated in the one concrete order of grace and redemption. An analogical metaphysics of creation and redemption is thus, ultimately, a Christian story and grammar of being: a storied narrative of being.

How then do these seemingly abstruse metaphysical reflections about nature and grace affect the practice of Christian philosophizing? The answer is that the personal act of philosophizing becomes, or is, a Christian spiritual and sapiential practice. The desire and eros which drives philosophy is the very same desire of one's faith which is likewise compelled in love for the mystery of the Absolute. They are one in an analogical unity-in-difference, as they are both ordered towards, and by, the same end, namely, by the one Christian God of being *and* grace. Philosophizing is a *fides quaerens intellectum*. Which means it is nourished by the whole of the Christian life (prayer, sacraments, practices, forms of life and an ecclesial tradition etc.). Christian philosophy and philosophizing is thus an integral act rooted in the historical and trans-natural state of Christian being, acted upon by the one causality of the Christian God. Philosophizing is then the very incarnation of the story of the Christian pilgrimage of being. This is to say, that Christian philosophy is only itself when it is understood as always already on the way towards the supernatural, guided by the light of the supernatural. The Christian philosopher is then anything but a split personality of thinker and believer, he is rather the *thinker as believer*. The Christian philosopher thus, as Hans Urs von Balthasar rightly says, breaks open all finite creaturely truth in order to capture all things for Christ (2 Corinthians 10:12): relativizing all things for Christ.¹² And this cannot be done unless philosophy surpasses a mere abstract and theoretical exercise and becomes a spiritual exercise, which speaks from within the integral and spiritual truth of the poverty of Christian being. This view thus flatly contradicts a secularized or neutral interpretation of philosophy.

V

A Christian analogical metaphysics of creation and participation is a vision and interpretation of being which sees being as a relational

¹² Hans Urs von Balthasar, "On the Tasks of Catholic Philosophy in Our Time," *Communio*, 20 (1993), 147-87.

moving site of *commercium* between man and the one Christian God. Creaturely being is thus wholly groundless, contingent, transitive, provisional, participatory and relative. In such a view man's being is ecstatic, man's being is itself by ever being beyond itself, in a relational movement of transcendence. In a word, the Christian analogical self is eschatological, in the Johannine sense of, what we are is yet to be revealed (1 John 3:2). Yet what does this mean and in what manner does the Christian analogical self dwell? The answer: in the manner of a pilgrim self which loses its life in order to save it. The time of the Christian self is thus the time of *becoming* and *receiving* the 'what' which has yet to be revealed *within* the time of creation and redemption. The what of the self which is yet to be revealed is only obtained by the self of the way – the Christian pilgrim – who seeks to live life, not for himself in the time of gain and mastery, but in the time of consecrated service. That is, the time of the way within the saving time of creation and redemption enacted by Christ, the Son of the living God. The Christian analogical self is the Christian pilgrim who lives both within and beyond, a within and beyond exemplified in the intensity and sparking moments of Christian service. Such a self is not an established and fixed foundational self, inhabiting the homogeneous time of secularized sameness and gain. Rather such a self is the self of creation and continual re-creation through a being called by Christ to moments of free service. The analogical Christian self is the self fueled by the spiritual fire of a Christian spirituality of pilgrimage and service. This self bespeaks the integration of the way of being and grace, metaphysics and spirituality within the storied order of creation and redemption enacted by the one dramatic causality of the Christian God.

The analogical self is thus the self which continually traverses the space of distance of God's love which creation itself is. In this traversal of the distance of love, within creation, the self seeks to embrace every moment of love and service for fellow travelers as a moment of serving glorification. God is loved, then, within creation and creation is the way towards the Christian God who is both in and beyond creation. An analogical Christian self and a Christian spirituality of pilgrimage and service is thus the dramatic story of the poverty of the Christian *experience* of the distance of love between God and man and between man and his fellow creatures. Here the very self seeks to become a doxological performance of pilgrimaging service for God

and his creatures. The end result being, that all things pass away, except the one thing which remains, namely, the *way of love*, service and glorification which, in this life, is imaged analogically, darkly and imperfectly in flashing moments of service. Yet this way of love will be fully revealed, *in patria*, as the eternal way of love, service and glory which is sung and enacted in the burning adoration of the Christian Trinitarian God of Love, at whose center – as Dante reminds – is the flesh of Christ, through whom all things have been made new. Such truth remains entirely foreign, strange, out of place, and even outright rejected and mocked in a world of secularized advancement, gain and mastery. As such, this truth demands to be humbly attested to and offered as an alternative road to the road beset by an intense bifurcation of the secular self and the lack of any moving integration or answer to the question of the meaning of the being of the self – and each person's many selves – in our homogenized world of late Capitalist advancement. In sum, this is what this essay has hoped to do, namely, to speak to the truth of the poverty of the Christian experience of a spirituality of being a pilgrim, on both a personal and metaphysical front. This essay thus moved towards a story of an enfleshed moving unity of spirituality and an analogical metaphysics of creation as a counter-image to the faceless and abstract reality of a post-Christian secularized world and, its seemingly all-pervasive 'immanent frame'.

Part Three
Being Self, Being Other, and Being Plural

6.

The Sense of Being Religious from the Viewpoint of Betweenness: How Can the Japanese Sense of Being Human and Religious be Meaningful for the West?

TAKESHI MORISATO

I was asked to write about the sense of being religious in the cultural context of contemporary Japan and communicate some of its significance to the hearts of secularizing Europe. My immediate response to this task was a great doubt. I was – and still am – not entirely sure if I would be qualified to speak about what is the Japanese sense of being human and the general sense of being religious in their contemporary society. I was born as the first son to my Japanese parents in Mexico City in the 1980s and when I was five years old, my family moved back to Tokyo. From early on, I always had some sense of being different from the rest of my schoolmates.¹ When I was nineteen years old, I was greatly disappointed with the lack of creativity and intellectual freedom in Japanese secondary and post-secondary education. Since then, and for more than thirteen years, I have been studying the history of western philosophy in North American and European universities.

My educational background, too, is a mixture of domestic and foreign influences apropos of the ethos of Japan. I am mainly trained in the discipline that I would call ‘history of western philosophy’ with some North American bent toward the holistic ideal of a liberal arts education. Only recently for my doctoral project in Leuven (Belgium), have specialized in the field of comparative philosophy of religion and concentrated my research interests in the works of Tanabe Hajime and William Desmond.

¹ My elementary and junior high school teachers used to ask us to raise our hands if any of us were born outside Japan and I was only one to speak for my temporary dual citizenship.

What complicates the issue in relation to the question of the human and its relation to the religious sphere is that I have been baptized as a Christian in a Presbyterian church in the United States yet my family temple (with which I am in close contact as the eldest male member of my family) belongs to the Rinzaï sect of Zen Buddhism in Fukagawa, Tokyo. This short autobiography should suffice to show that I am somewhat an outsider to the cultural climate of modern Japan as well as to the contemporary disenchantment of the West.

The westernized part of my 'self' can also cast a shadow on the possible importance of talking about the Japanese understanding of being religious to the western audience. How could any of what I am going to say in the eastern cultural context be meaningful to my colleagues in the field of philosophy who grew up mostly in Europe or North America? How could this be anything more than a temporary satisfaction to their curiosities? How, in fact, do we import or export a sense of authenticity in one cultural context to another without doing any violence to either one of them? In what sense, can anything be really philosophical beyond the confines of the intellectual vocabularies that are constitutive of the (western and possibly the only) history of philosophy? The Judeo-Christian tradition has claimed the ultimate legitimacy of one faith while eastern religious traditions seem to have accepted their world of many faiths. The former seems to sing the irreducible singularity of a finite individual as a divine creation while the latter claims the truth of any self as essentially having no-self. In light of these stark differences in their basic assumptions about the divine absolute and its relation to the human relative, how can we begin to compare two different senses of being human and/or religious at all?

I always seem to fall short of coming up with good answers to these questions. When I think about my fidelity to two distinct intellectual traditions, I seem to simply keep swinging back and forth between the western and the Japanese side of things. This double strangeness to the eastern and the western worldview, however, is not all devoid of my profound intimacy in both. In fact, the sense of being an outsider to one side is explicable only in relation to my embeddedness in the other; and this peculiar state of being in the between can sometimes surprise us with an awfully lucid self-awareness. That is, each of us can actually come to recognize that this

intimate strangeness paradoxically qualifies us to make sense of what takes place in one world for the sake of another. Precisely because the sense of strangeness to my intimate relations with two cultural spheres of human existence is neither separable from nor exhaustively explicable by them, I can begin to make sense of what each side wants to say about the basic conditions of being human and communicate its significance to the other.² The intimate strangeness, in short, can thrust us beyond the confines of cultural, linguistic, historical, and even religious boundaries, thereby driving us to a meaningful dialogue on the truth about the pluri-vocal world and ourselves.

There is a hint of metaphysical hope in this self-awareness. Perhaps we can call it a metaxological hope. And with that hope, I venture in this chapter to investigate the significance of being religious in relation to the Japanese notion of being ethical for western readers. Of course, to map out the clear understanding of a concept in the general context of contemporary Japanese culture, we need more than my fragmentary self-reflections. Hence, I would like first, to consult Watsuji Tetsurō's *Ethics as the Study of the Human* and introduce his critical analysis of the fundamental concepts pertaining to the Sino-Japanese understanding of ethics. This brief introduction to Watsuji's concise methodological reflections on the study of ethics (as a response to the western notion of 'self' through the perspective of eastern intellectual traditions) will provide us a foothold from which we can approach the Japanese sense of what it means to be human (*ningen* 人間). In relation to this specific presentation of the notion of the ethical, I will further clarify the peculiar sense of religiosity that emerges from it and address the problems and concerns that Japanese society could face in the foreseeable future.

² How dare I speak about the Japanese sense of being human and its relation to the sense of being religious? How dare I speak through the works of a thinker in whom I have never specialized? My response to these critical questions is to emphasize the strength of my peculiar position as a Japanese intellectual thoroughly trained in the western intellectual tradition. As a certain distance is necessary for appreciating a large masterpiece in painting (especially of Monet or van Gogh), my in-between position in relation to Japanese and western cultures can again allow me to reflect on the philosophical question of what it means for the Japanese to be human and also to ask how it relates to their unique sense of being religious without getting caught into the extreme positions of Orientalism or Occidentalism. I believe there is this valuable implication in the metaxological sense of 'infinite strangeness' for the method of doing comparative philosophy.

These problems for my fellow Japanese may not have exactly the same downfalls that we are or will be facing in the West. Nor will they be univocally valuable for our current analysis of secularization in reference to the Judeo-Christian tradition. However, a lack of vigilance is the universal ingredient for our future pitfalls in any culture. I hope to show in the end that my reflections on what we can learn from the problems in the Japanese understanding of human/religious existence can suggest some insight to some of us that are struggling to maintain our integrity of religious faith(s) in the West. What I am asking here is a small dosage of compassion necessary for treating our neighbor's problems as our own; and only with that kind of generous transcendence beyond each of our own cultural boundaries, this article could be worthy of anyone's time and consideration.

I

A question still remains: Why do I choose Watsuji's short methodological reflection on Ethics rather than the texts that the other central figures in the Kyoto School (i.e., Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani) have written especially for elucidating the inter-relation between religion and philosophy? How can a Tanabe specialist end up talking about Watsuji as a way to deal with the meaning of being human in its relativity to the peculiar sense of religiosity in the context of contemporary Japanese society? There are several good reasons. First, unlike the founding members of the Kyoto school, who never shy away from the metaphysical language of western philosophers, Watsuji exhibits an extraordinary attentiveness to the historical contexts in which Sino-Japanese philosophical expressions have been used prior to (and even in the midst of) his engagement with the western philosophical notions. This hermeneutic approach to the ways in which different notions are expressed in Japanese language is indispensable for anyone who is willing to explore the philosophical significance of human existence within the historical, cultural and linguistic confines of Japanese intellectual tradition. In this sense, even if I were to refer to Nishida or Tanabe to talk about what they thought as the significance of human existence in reference to the Zen or Pure Land/Shin Buddhist traditions, I particularly find it of extreme importance to pass through Watsuji's discussions on ethics.

Second, the peculiar sense of religiosity and non-religiosity in contemporary Japanese society themselves make me second-guess the legitimacy of using Nishida's or Tanabe's philosophy of religion as the representative voice that speaks for these senses. In other words, in reflecting on the general sense of being religious in context of contemporary Japanese society, I find it much more favorable to opt for Watsuji's hermeneutical style of thinking. Let me elaborate on this point a little bit more in the following. Nishida and Tanabe (along with Nishitani and Ueda Shizuteru) are generally considered to be the smack center of the Kyoto School philosophy. The way in which some scholars categorize them under the same school (despite some serious disagreement between the two co-founders) is the notion of absolute nothingness and their metaphysical thinking that brings the very notion(s) originated in the eastern intellectual tradition to the forefront of the world philosophical discourse. The manner in which Watsuji delivers his philosophical thinking is quite different from these philosophers of nothingness and his styles of writing too is much more neatly organized or thematically coherent. His beautiful writings sometimes remind me of what Tanabe once described Hatano Seiichi's writing to Nishitani, 'knapp und klar', and yet much more with poetic caliber than the Christian thinker. Because of these distinct styles of delivering his thoughts, Watsuji has made many scholars to regard him as an "associate member,"³ rather than the central figure of the Kyoto School philosophy and this outside status to the Kyoto School philosophy (of religion) is particularly important for this paper.

If I were to generalize somewhat boldly the distinction between the ways in which Nishida and Tanabe tried to understand the "stimulating ambivalence"⁴ of the inter-relation between philosophy and religion, I would say that Nishida drew inspiration from Zen

³ For the 'peripheral' status of Watsuji in relation to the rest of the Kyoto School thinkers, see James M. Shields, "The Art of *Aidaqara*: Ethics, Aesthetics, and the Question of an Ontology of Social Existence in Watsuji Tetsurō's *Rinrigaku*," in: *Asian Philosophy*, 19 (2009), 3, esp. 277n.

⁴ Cf. Bret Davis, "The Stimulating Doubleness of the Japanese Philosophy of Religion: Thinking through Nishida and Zen," in: 日本の宗教哲学における刺激的な両義性 – 西田と禅を中心に, *The World-Significance of Japanese Philosophy: Its Receptions and Future Overseas* 日本哲学の国際性 – 海外における受容と展望, James Heisig, ed. (Tokyo: Risōsha, 2006), 300.

Buddhist tradition for his establishment of the famous ‘logic of locus’ (i.e., *basho* 場所) while Tanabe owed his later metanoetic philosophy of religion much more to the Pure Land/Shin tradition of Japanese Mahayana Buddhism (and in reference to the Pure Land notion of the other power, he formulated the renewed understanding of the divine ultimate as the nothingness-qua-love). Given that each of these two sects of Mahayana Buddhism constitutes one of the largest religious organizations in Japan, it seems appropriate to approach either one or both of these thinkers for illuminating what it means for them to be religious and subsequently carving out their notion(s) of what it means to be human. But I find this method of interpreting the Japanese philosophy to be quite misleading (if not entirely detrimental) for explicating the current situation of religious awareness and/or religious belonging(s) shared among Japanese people to the western readers unfamiliar to our life in the east.

II

Also, what is important for properly understanding the sense of the religious among Japanese people is to give up the popular understanding of *either/or*. We (as those who belong to the western intellectual tradition) often subscribe ourselves to this dualistic mode of thinking. This is especially the case when we think about the sense of being religious (or not being religious) in reference to our lives in the West. E.g., one can be *either* Christian *or* Muslim, Catholic *or* Protestant, Baptist *or* Presbyterian, religious *or* secular, so on and so forth.⁵ In most cases, it is impossible to say that one belongs to both sides of these opposing terms at the same time (and this is precisely the reason why I would never say to most of my friends in North America that I am both Christian and Buddhist). The situation is quite

⁵ This dualistic framework makes most sense when we talk about our religious belonging (or lack thereof) in the west but occasionally we do face a strenuous situation where we have a tremendous difficulty in holding onto such a rigid distinction. So, for instance, as Marcel Gauchet rightly pointed out, the proliferation of immigrants in Europe from the eastern block can make the European cease to feel comfortable in holding onto the *either/or* of being religious or secular (or more precisely Christian or not Christian) because there is the strong Christian influence on our basic value as the foundation of our societal self-organization.

different in eastern cultures. Especially in Japan, most people are living under the historical-cultural heritage of the *danka* system (Jpn. *danka seido* 檀家制度). This means that each household is likely to belong to one of the thirteen schools of Mahayana Buddhism (which can be further divided into 56 branches) and a particular temple that belongs to this school takes care of the funeral and the subsequent rituals or memorial services in Japan. Again if you are prone to the dualistic framework of thinking, you must continue to remind yourself to move beyond it. Even when we think about this single system of Buddhist rituals, we would have to give up the idea that one family belongs to one school or system of belief. For instance, as I have mentioned earlier, my family temple belongs to the Rinzai Zen school (which has 15 different branches) and all my ancestors on my father side are buried in the graveyard next to the temple. But my mother comes from a family that belongs to Nichiren School. Hence, when my grandparents from her side passed away, we all had to visit a different temple for the funerals and memorial services and this temple delivers teachings and rituals that are quite different from those of the Rinzai Zen.

Now I am not entirely finished with the description of the complexity pertaining to religious faiths and praxes in Japan. In addition to the heterogeneous mixture of diverse Buddhist teachings, there is a long line of practices and rituals that are kept in accord with the Shintō tradition and additionally, many of the values and ways of thinking that have influenced the formations of all the religious practices are also derived from different adaptations of Confucianism. In this sense, when we think about the problem of religiosity in context of Japanese culture, we do have to think about *both* harmony *and* disharmony of these multiple philosophico-religious belongings. Then, the problem of referring to the works of Nishida and Tanabe for elucidating the sense of the religious in the context of Japanese culture is precisely that they tend to be seen as mainly shedding light on a specific set of religious beliefs and practices (i.e., Zen and Pure Land/Shin Buddhism). Hence, when these elucidations are presented to the general audience in the West, it could be misinterpreted as presenting the religious doctrine that opposes other modes of religious beliefs and practices existing in Japan.

III

Additionally, the general sense of being religious in the context of contemporary Japanese society seems to be quite different from what I have observed and experienced in the West. When I think about the influence of Christianity in North America and Europe, it is hard to imagine that those who claim to have faith would fail to exhibit any knowledge of the Bible. At least, they seem to be able to recite one or two parables that they think carry some essential teachings of their religious doctrines. Even if one claims to be a critical atheist, so long as one graduates from the liberal arts college, it seems very likely that one has been exposed to the works of the usual suspects in the history of western philosophy (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, et al.). In this case, one's exposure to the metaphysical worldview and the basic teachings of Christianity is much more substantial than some of the critics of religions might want to admit.

When we talk about the sense of being religious in the context of Japanese culture, the situation is quite different. So, for instance, my family members occasionally meet at our family temple for various rituals and memorial services and most of them are unlikely to have read any texts of the important thinkers from their religious tradition (e.g., Ikkyū 一休, Hakuin 白隠, et al.) and even if some of them are exposed to these writings, it is highly unlikely that they have read them as a part of their secondary or post-secondary education (unless they went to a specific school established and managed by the Rizai Zen Buddhists). The similar situation can be said about those who belong to the larger sect of the Pure Land/Shin Buddhist tradition. Despite recent popularization of Honen 法然, Shinran 親鸞 and other prominent thinkers from their school of thought and faith, I am quite skeptical that they have read carefully of any of these thinkers or are capable of reciting a crucial passage or two from their works.⁶ Also,

⁶ I highly doubt that the majority of those who belong to Zen or Pure Land Buddhist tradition have read the works of the Kyoto School thinkers such as Nishida, Tanabe, Nishitani, and Ueda as a part of their philosophico-religious education. I am by no means optimistic about a high convergence between those who proclaim their faith in Christianity and those who have read classical and contemporary Christian thinkers. But the alarming low rate between those who believe and those who cultivate their minds in relation to their faiths could be a

most of these people usually go to the Shintō Shrine in the beginning of the year and this ritual is called *hatsumōde* (which literally means the “first shintō shrine visit”). Once again, it is quite unlikely that most people who go to *hatsumōde* know the origin of this ritual or its doctrinal significance (if any) in relation to the Shintō system of beliefs. This must sound extremely strange to some of my religious friends from the West since this is like saying that millions of people visit the Church for Christmas even though most of them do not really know the significance of the Nativity, or the basic teachings of Christianity.

IV

So, are Japanese people religious? If we have to insist on using the dualistic framework of determining an answer to this question – the framework in which we presuppose that one cannot belong to more than one religious masters – and also if the condition for the possibility of becoming religious is to know and to affirm the essential teachings of a religious tradition, then I would have to say that most of my Japanese family and friends are not religious. But to me, as a member of Japanese civilization, I find it inappropriate to adopt the same underlying assumption for asking the question to the Japanese people or describing the sense of the religious that I would apply to my family and friends. They may not know what Ikkyū or Hakuin said about the Buddha nature but they all continuously bring their offerings to the Buddhist altars at home and ask each other when was the last time they went to visit their ancestors at the garden of the dead. You watch or hear the Buddhist temple ringing the bell for the end of the year or your friends might invite you to go to the shintō shrine for *hatsumōde* (which is, again, almost like asking you to go to a church for Christmas). Are these people not religious? Can we describe them as being a part of the western problem that we call ‘secularization’? Are they like the critical atheists who know well of the doctrine of Christianity or any other theologies of the monotheistic traditions and

sign of secularization in every civilization. In this regard, Japanese society seems quite secular to those who believe in Christianity and cultivate their hearts and minds through their readings of theology and classical philosophy. As you will see later, I am not entirely comfortable with this conclusion about Japanese sense of being religious either precisely because a different kind of logic (i.e., *aidagara*) seems to be at work in our way of understanding what it means to be religious.

deny their faiths (like the ways in which some of my Irish fellows de-baptize themselves)? I cannot help but to answer these questions with a somewhat equivocal statement: Japanese people are religious but not in the way we would think of being religious in the West. We must adopt a different way of thinking about being religious for describing the ways in which many Japanese people seem to maintain their ambivalent expression of their multi-religious belongings.

The best way to answer the question of religiosity in Japan without mistaking a specific religious doctrine as the representative of the whole nation or as being opposed to other distinct intra- and/or interreligious doctrines is to start from the general question of what it means for Japanese to be human and then to see what sense of religiosity can emerge from it. This process of adopting the Japanese way of thinking would enable us to deconstruct our tendency to frame the question of religiosity with the abovementioned attitude of *either/or* and further allows us to reframe the question with the plurivocal perspective of (*both* harmonious *and* disharmonious) multi-religious belongings. To do this, I find that Watsuji's short methodological text on (Sino-)Japanese ethics can provide a few fundamental notions and thereby help us rethink the most appropriate way to describe the general sense of being religious for the Japanese people. We will explore in the following how the specific sense of being human that Watsuji extracts from Chinese and Japanese intellectual traditions can lead us to the sense of religiosity that best describes the present situation of Japanese religiosity.

V

In the overture to the *Ethics as the Study of the Human*, Watsuji examines the self-reflective significance of the question 'What is ethics?' As a kind of philosophical response to the question, he further examines four fundamental concepts that pertain to the significance of human existence. These concepts are: ethics (*rinri* 倫理), the human (*ningen* 人間), the public or the world (*seken* 世間 or *yononaka* 世の中) and existence (*sonzai* 存在). Watsuji spends four chapters for laying out his remarkable reflections on these terms and then propose a new (and appropriate) type of ethics as the study of the human (*ningen*) through his critical analysis of western thoughts on ethics (i.e., Aristotle, Kant, Cohen, Hegel, Feuerbach, and Marx). In this section, I

would like to draw attention to the first two concepts and show how the general sense of being human in Watsuji's understanding of ethics could lead us to the peculiar sense of the religious in the eastern intellectual tradition.

In relation to the first concept, ethics (*rinri*), Watsuji takes the Sino-Japanese term *lúnli* (Jpn. *rinri* 倫理) as "the expression of historical and social life,"⁷ which has existed prior to our constructions of its meaning in the present age:

Chinese term *lún* (Jpn. *rin* 倫) originally means *nakama* (なかま), i.e., being in the same rank or of a similar kind [and this] clearly shows that the meaning of *rin* is a community (*kyōdōtai* 共同態).⁸ Thus, since *rin* signifies the common (*nakama*), the idiomatic phrase *jinrin* (人倫) is often used in the sense of the "belonging to the people" (*hito-no nakama* 人のなかま) or humanity (*jinrui* 人類).⁹

The Japanese philosopher further articulates,

On a side note, this *nakama* does not merely look at the plurality of human beings. But it signifies the relationship that pertains to the between (*aida* 間) of the people as well as the people that are determined by this relationship. As the Japanese application of *kanji* characters (i.e., 仲間) to the phrase *nakama* clearly points out, it means, on the one hand, "in the midst of the people" (*hitobito-no naka* 人々の中) or "between" (*aida*) them and, on the other, the people that are in "in the midst" (i.e., *naka* 仲) or the "between" (*ma* or *aida* 間).¹⁰

⁷ Watsuji, "Ethics as the Study of the Human" 人間の学としての倫理学, *Watsuzji Tetsurō Zenshū*, Abe Yoshishige, et al, eds. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten), 9: 8; hereafter cited as *WTZ*.

⁸ *WTZ*, 9: 8.

⁹ *WTZ*, 9: 8. "Rin" is often used to describe the ways of being that humans should follow and observe or friends that stand side by side or belong to the same rank. See also, Watsuji, *Watsuji Tetsurō's Rinrigaku: Ethics in Japan*, translated by Robert E. Carter, Yamamoto Seisaku (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 10-11; hereafter, *Rinrigaku*.

¹⁰ *WTZ*, 9: 8.

What Watsuji points out here is that the etymological origin of the term, ethics, namely, the *rin* of the *rinri*, already indicates that the interrelations or the between (i.e., *aidagara*) of humans is the communal ground for the possibility of our being human. This communal ground of human existence does not indicate a mere plurality of ethical subjects but the onto-ethical condition for the possibility of anyone to be human. In this context, to be ethical means to be true to the constancies or invariables (*tsune* 常) that signify “the order of a changing life wherein the life itself keeps changing” or the “path (*michi* 道)” that possibilizes the human community – the community in and through which each of us can exist as a human being in our relativity to the other.¹¹

To show what these constancies are, Watsuji refers two sets of the examples from the Chinese intellectual tradition: (1) five constancies, i.e., *jinrin-gojō* (人倫五常), found in Gōngyáng-gāo’s *Chūnqiū Gōngyángzhuàn* (Jpn. *Shunjū-kuyōden* 春秋公羊伝)¹² and (2) ten proper rules or relations that we must uphold for practicing a festival, i.e., *jūrin* (十倫), defined in the *Book of Rites* (Ch. *Lǐjì*, Jpn. *Raiki* 礼記).¹³ We cannot afford going into the details of these examples but what they show is that in questioning the significance of the term ‘ethics’ in Chinese or Japanese language, we must adopt the fundamental attitude of “grasping the ways of being human from the ontological and existential foundation of the human community.”¹⁴ That is to say, both examples show that there are constancies in human community that are enabling it to be a community. Since, according to Watsuji, the term *ri* 理, i.e., reason (*kotowari* ことわり) or the “ways of things in order” (*sujimichi* すじ道), merely “emphasizes the significance of the way (Ch. *dào*, Jp. *dō* 道) that *lún* (Jp. *rin*) already possesses,”¹⁵ the notion of ethics (*lúnli* or *rinri* 倫理) in Sino-Japanese tradition signifies the order or the path of these constancies that is foundational for the essentially communicative existence of human beings.

Given that the communal sense of being human is indispensable for understanding the sense of the ethical in Sino-Japanese context, Watsuji famously argues, “it is quite inappropriate to describe merely

¹¹ Cf. *Rinrigaku*, 11.

¹² WTZ, 9: 8-10.

¹³ WTZ, 9: 10.

¹⁴ WTZ, 9: 10-11.

¹⁵ WTZ, 9: 12.

the individual and subjective [moral] conscious through the word 'ethics'."¹⁶ In fact, *rinri* has to do with the foundation of the existence of human communities and communities of human individuals. Naturally, then, the Japanese philosopher comes to question the significance of the term "human" (*ningen*) in historico-linguistic context of Japan:

Ethics is realized in various kinds of communities as the foundation for their existence as human communities. Human communities are the ways or order of the interrelations (*aidagara*) between people, and because of them, the *aidagara* themselves become possible. The study of ethics strives to clarify the human relationships, namely the order or reason that constitutes the foundation of human communities. What is the human and what is their relationship (*aidagara*)?¹⁷

The term *aidagara* is generally used to mean the 'relationship between people' but also because it denotes their dynamic interrelations that serve as the ontological and ethical ground for any individual to exist as a human in Watsuji's ethics, it has been translated into English as *betweenness*. This is a remarkable effort of the first translators to emphasize the *dunamis* of the inter in the interrelations between humans. Watsuji's analysis of the term human, i.e., *ningen*, comes to shed light on the significance of the very insight: viz., what enables a human individual to be human is its *betweenness* or inter-relation (i.e., *aidagara*) with other individuals.

The term 'human being(s)' (*ningen*) in Japanese consists of two characters indicating a person (*hito* 人) and between (*aida* 間).¹⁸ Originally, the term is used to mean the public or the world (*yononaka* 世の中 or *seken* 世間) quite literally pointing toward the space between human individuals. But its meaning has also been confused with the meaning of the person (*hito*). Watsuji thinks that this so-called confusion of two meanings (i.e., *seken* and *hito*) is a "great historical event that took place according to the direct understanding of the

¹⁶ WTZ, 9: 12. Cf. *Rinrigaku*, 9.

¹⁷ WTZ, 9: 13.

¹⁸ Cf. Shields, 267.

historical life lived among Japanese people over centuries.”¹⁹ The justification for this praise is too important to overlook:

If it is correct to see that a human is human only when it is seen in relation to human relations and if, accordingly, a human is already expressing the totality of humans (that is to say, the human relations), then it is correct to understand the *nigen* as indicating the significance of a human individual. Thus, regarding the whole history in which the term *ningen* (which signifies the *seken*) is transformed to signify a person (*hito*), we can show the immediate understanding that *ningen* can mean both society and individual.²⁰

VI

Watsuji gives two theoretical arguments for grounding the possibility of the term *ningen* to mean both totality and particularity of human existence. First, he argues that “it has no other way but to rely on the dialectical relation of the whole and the parts”²¹ and hence, the *ningen* indicates the dialectical unity of the two opposing meanings – viz., the human existence is the dialectical community of human individuality and sociality.²² Second, Watsuji introduces the notion of emptiness as the me-ontic foundation of human existence where the self-less inter-actions of compassionate individuals (or the community of “empty beings” (*kūu* 空有) to borrow Tanabe’s expression) serves as the “ground of concepts as well as of natural being.”²³ Watsuji further articulates:

In such existence, *ningen* can realize the whole while appearing as a singular. This singular is the individual that

¹⁹ WTZ, 9: 14.

²⁰ WTZ, 9: 14.

²¹ WTZ, 9: 19.

²² WTZ, 9: 20; 27-28.

²³ WTZ, 9: 35. Cf. Tanabe Hajime, *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, translated by Takeuchi Yoshinori and Valdo Viglielmo (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 159; *Rinrigaku*, 118. For the excellent exposition on the parallel between Watsuji’s notion of human existence as based on *aidagara* and Tanabe’s notion of absolute/metanoetic inter-mediation of individuals as based on nothingness, see Shields, 270-72.

can become a body through its abstraction from the substantial existence and also can become the subjective ego in relation to the body; whereas its totality can become a society as the objective product of its abstraction from the substantial existence.²⁴ Accordingly, this totality is the whole that can become the interactions between the subjective egos. However, it is both practical and performative (*kōiteki* 行為的) insofar as it is the substantive existence and because of that, it is not yet either being or consciousness. Such existence is the existence only through the movement of becoming the whole through being an individual: accordingly, the ground from such activity can emerge is the absolute emptiness. To wit, this movement is the absolute negation. The substantive existence of human is precisely the movement of becoming an individual through denying the absolute negation and further returning to the totality through denying individuality. What enables any human community is precisely this movement of absolute negation.²⁵

Watsuji does not clearly distinguish whether the dialectical unity of the parts and the whole is identical with the logic of emptiness (as Nishida maintains throughout his logic of *basho*) or introduces a different kind of dialectic based on the notion of absolute nothingness (as Tanabe would maintain through the absolute dialectic).²⁶ What is

²⁴ What Watsuji means by the “substantial existence” (*shutaiteki sonzai* 主体的存在) is that which is prior to thethetic distinction between subject and object. (Notice how the term *shutaiteki* is often translated as “subjective” but since Watsuji clearly distinguishes it from *shukanteki* 主観的 which is also translated as subjective, to avoid the confusion, I opt for the substantial for conveying the meaning of the *shutaiteki*.) With this term, Watsuji attributes ontological (rather than ontic) sense of being to human existence, existence in which the differentiation or abstraction of subject and object can take place. The betweenness of being the human (i.e., the *aida* of *ningen*), in this sense, is the place in which everything is said to be prior to our determinate articulation of it and serves as a kind of place that Nishida talks about as the *basho* 場所.

²⁵ WTZ, 9: 35.

²⁶ I am almost certain that Watsuji would say ‘both’. According to Tanabe, the logic of *basho* and Hegel’s dialectic are the same: hence, he distinguishes his dialectic logic of metanoetic inter-mediations (based on agape of absolute

clear, however, is that from reflecting on the traditional usage of such terms as ethics (*rinri*) and human(s) (*ningen*) in Japanese, Watsuji comes to insinuate the religious notion of emptiness as the foundation of our communal existence as being human (*ningen*). Whether we take the path of Zen Buddhism with Nishida or that of Pure Land/Shin Buddhism with Tanabe, we can qualify here the sense of emptiness and show how that sense of being religious (in accord with the sense of emptiness and its absolute negation) constitutes the communicative relations of humans as the foundation for anyone to exist as a human being. This is the passage that Watsuji shows as a way from his reflections on ethics and the sense of being human to the sense of being religious in accord with the Kyoto School philosophy of nothingness.

But as I mentioned earlier, I am suggesting that neither the path of Zen/Nishida nor of Pure Land/Tanabe is representative of the sense of being religious shared among the majority of contemporary Japanese people. Through a self-reflection on my interrelatedness or betweenness (*aidagara*) with the other members of our society, I cannot help but think that the different interpretations of absolute

nothingness) from the dialectically self-determining totality of reason or self (which Tanabe claims to be present in Hegel's dialectic and Nishida's logic of *basho*). Tanabe calls Hegel's dialectic and Nishida's *basho* as the self-power philosophy where the religious movement from the finite individual to the infinite absolute can be made through the one-way movement from the former to the latter while he defines his renewed sense of philosophy as other-power philosophy which remains attentive to the two-way mediation between the self and the absolute (nothingness) as the other to the self (i.e., *ōsō-qua-gensō* and *gensō-qua-ōsō*). The problem with Tanabe's critique in this context of talking about Watsuji (and his reading of Nishida) is that the community of compassionate selves as the manifestation of absolute nothingness in Tanabe's absolute dialectic seems to correspond with the dialectical community of individuality and totality where each individual is actualizing the interrelatedness of persons as *ningen* or human community, the kind of betweenness that Watsuji talks about here in reference to the notion of emptiness and Nishida's notion of *basho*. This is to say that, Watsuji would agree with Tanabe's exposition of the agapeic intermediation of compassionate selves as the proper sense of *ningen* but would go so far as to say that it is the same as what Nishida is trying to get at through his reflection on nothingness in logic of *basho* as well as the notion of absolute negation. This point can be drawn from the fact that Watsuji clearly distinguishes Nishida's *basho* from Hegel's notion of the ethical. For Watsuji's reference to Nishida in the *Ethics as the Study of the Human*, see WTZ, 9: 2, 108.

nothingness must be left for another project on Nishida-Tanabe or Zen-Pure Land conflict on the very notion of the absolute.

VII

What interests us in the current project on the general sense of being human and its relation to religion(s) in contemporary Japan lies in the edge between what Watsuji has emphasized as the ‘significance of being *ningen*’ and our awakening to ‘emptiness’ or the ‘movement of absolute negation’ as the ultimate foundation of our communal existence. I think somewhere between these two poles – i.e., the sense of being human and that of being absolutely religious (in relativity to the notion of nothingness) – I see the general sense of being religious shared among the majority of Japanese people, people that I interrelate with as my family members, friends, and colleagues. I was not entirely sure where exactly I could find an example to describe this space between ‘Watsuji *Rinri-gaku*’ and the Kyoto School philosophy of religion. Fortunately, I found it in one of Watsuji’s examples of the ethical: the ten proper constancies of *aidagara* that we must keep for organizing a festival, i.e., *jūrin* 十倫. According to Watsuji, *The Book of Rites* indicates that

in the process of serving spiritual beings (*kishin* 鬼神), we have to observe the degrees of the noble and the mean, the distances that gradually increase between relatives, the bestowment of rank and reward, impartiality within government affairs; and the boundaries of high and low along with the four relations of the sovereign-minister, the father-son, the husband-wife, and the older-younger.²⁷ The path of serving spiritual beings is discussed in relation to the viewpoint of the village community, and the others are reflecting the structure of society, which already has the class divisions. The idea that to express “the degrees of the noble and mean” and “impartiality within government affairs” constitutes the *rin* for the festival in much the same way as to express “the righteousness between ruler and subject” and “the relation between father and son” – this idea clearly

²⁷ Cf. *Book of Rites (Liji)*, “Ji Tong,” 15 (Watsuji’s reference).

indicates that the festival is the *expressions of human relationships* (*jinrin-no hyōgen* 人倫の表現) or, accordingly, the expressed human relationship (*jinrin*) is nothing but the relationship (*rin*) of the festival.²⁸

The festival (*matsuri* 祭り), whether it is celebrated in accordance with the different schools of Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintōism or Christianity, means the rituals that revere the god(s), the Buddha, ancestors, or whatever we find necessary to be thankful for. It carries a strong connotation of religiosity. But this notion carries two important implications: (1) it does not reduce the plurivocal practice of paying homage given that the verb to practice the festival (*matsuru* まつる) can be disambiguated into different meanings depending on which character we use;²⁹ and (2) an appropriate *aidagara* or inter-relation of the individuals extends to the sense of being religious. This means that to serve the spiritual beings (or whatever we feel the need to revere and/or thank) presupposes the complex web of human inter-relatedness in reference to the constancies of our betweenness and thereby, the plurivocal sense of the festival well corresponds with Japanese people's belonging to different religious faiths, faiths expressed through their proper interrelations with each other.

Let me illustrate this point through some examples. Imagine yourself growing up as the oldest son in a Japanese family. It is very likely that your parents will call you with your given name (which comes second to your family name in Japan). But once younger siblings join your family, it is likely that you will be called and referred to with the diminutive title of being the older brother, i.e., *onīchan*. Then you will hear a series of strange reasoning. When the parents reject your access to the object of your absolute desire at a toy store, you cry. Then, your mother says, 'you must stop crying because you are *onīchan*'. When you make your little brother cry, what does she say? 'You have to stop being mean to your little brother because you are *onīchan*'. The same reason again when you cry after hurting yourself. These statements make little sense when the *aidagara* of family relations in a certain culture is not subject to the kind of constancies that Watsuji discusses in reference to the Confucian texts.

²⁸ WTZ, 9: 10.

²⁹ E.g., 祀る, 祭る, 奉る and 政る.

But this example shows that the *aidagara* of the older and the younger brother or the term *onīchan* that denotes one's betweenness with the other family members can be the ground for correcting one's actions because it points to the constancies that maintain one's relation to the others in community and these constancies enable one's existence as a human being.

Now let me explain another example: when I go home in Tokyo from Leuven, my mother will look toward the Buddhist altar in the living room at some point and ask me, 'Have you put your hands together before the altar?' or 'Have you greeted your ancestors?' My brother comes home to visit me and in the midst of our short conversation, he sometimes asks me, 'Have you visited our family grave?' or 'When is the last time you visited the temple?' (not without some contempt). This does not mean that my mother or brother know anything about the teachings of Rinzai Zen or that they have experienced the awareness of emptiness that, according to some Buddhists and the Kyoto School thinkers, is the ultimate foundation of our human awareness and existence. Yet why is it that I hesitate to call them not being religious? That is because our interactions with the other family members in the betweenness of mother-and-child (which enables us to be a mother and a child) and of older-and-younger sibling (which enables us to be an older and a younger brother) is woven into the complex web of interactions that extend to the *aidagara* between ourselves and our ancestors, ourselves to the teachings of the Buddha, ourselves to the Shintō shrines in the beginning of the year. In this sense, a mother is someone that asks you to revere the ancestors and a brother is someone that reminds to pay respect to the dead as a part of being a mother or a brother to me as a son or a brother. Your friend or significant other can ask you to go to *hatsumōde* or send you a greeting card for celebrating the New Year. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the interrelatedness of being human in Japanese context seems to bind us to something more than each of us as a single individual can exhaustively explain; and in the midst of our interactions with each other, we experience the opening to the communal celebration of the divine others. This point, I think, is compressed into the sense of being ethical or human in relation to the proper practice of the festival.

Many of those who periodically visit Rinzai Zen temple might not know anything written by Ikkyū or Hakuin. But that does not enable

us to brand them with the mark of secularity or irreligiosity. A person can be a father, son, husband, brother, friend, teacher, student, acquaintance, stranger, etc., in a variety of his *aidagara* with other members of (Japanese) society; and only when he lives up to the expectations of the constancies that enable these inter-relations of self and other as the human community, the person can said to be (a) human or what Japanese would like to call as *ningen*. Also since to keep the path that enable each of us to be human in our undeniable relativity to the other is to serve the spiritual beings (i.e., gods and demons), our proper participation in the multiple networks of *aidagara* as that which enables us to be *ningen* carries an unspoken porosity to the plurivocal festivity of the religious. To be human in context of contemporary Japan, therefore, is to be religious even though this religiosity might not penetrate into the depth of absolute nothingness or the height of the transcendent God.

VIII

The communal approach to the sense of the religious in relation to the exposition of human nature as *ningen* can show a tremendous strength of Japanese society where a majority of people can maintain some sense of religiosity simply through living up to the expectations of their proper interrelations with each other or their proper betweenness. Without knowing the specifics of the multiple religious teachings or experiencing rare awakening to the sense of absolute (as emptiness) or articulating the movement of the absolute negation as the foundation of one's communal existence with the other, one can still be participating in the festivity of being religious, for being human in the sense of *ningen* (consciously or unconsciously) binds one to such religious celebrations. In this sense, if we are to say that Japanese society is undergoing a secularization process, it would not be determined merely by the number of those who are knowledgeable of the religious dogmas or of those who oppose to all of these teachings. But it would have be the decline of the constancies that hold the interrelations of human beings as *ningen*. When the mother begins to speak ill of ancestors in front of her children, brothers cease to take care of the grave with each other, and the old and the young grow apart with mutual contempt, we will hear the sound of Fortinbras

approaching. What we will suffer in the fall of *ningen* is the death of all religions in Japan.

We must not forget that the magnificent structure of human interactions that enable Japanese people to maintain their unique sense of being religious in contemporary society is still built on the original foundation of religious awakening shared among various religious teachers from the past. Like some of the apartment complexes in this country that began to sink and fracture earlier this year, any structures that the builder has failed to drive the piles into the solid substrate will fail to support itself.³⁰ It will cease to be our safe haven or capable of housing our previous memories of the invariable truth. As if they were omens of the dark future, we begin to hear the horrible news in our islands: the prime minister failed to listen to the voice of constitution scholars, a sixty year-old woman killed her old mother and brother because she grew tired of taking care of her parents, and a ten year old child was found dead last week, hung from the tree naked with his hands and legs bound. Fukushima is still the third ground zero in the history of our nation but we just turned on two other nuclear plants to feed our desire.

There are so many fractures and flaws that make us doubt the safety and soundness of our interrelated existence. Sometimes the solution is to voice our concern and find the immediate remedy to these ailments. When the problems are rooted in something deeper than what we can quickly fix through the re-appropriation of human interactions, what we need is the metaphysical penetration to the ultimate ground of our existence as the human, the ground that Watsuji has called as emptiness or the movement of absolute negation. What is called for recovering the health of our communicative existence as *ningen* in contemporary Japan might be a kind of metaphysical thinking that uncovers the ground of our communal

³⁰ It is a data-fixing scandal by one of the biggest companies in Japan's housing industry, Asahi Kasei. An apartment complex in Yokohama had two parts of the buildings that were not properly aligned and then their gap was gradually widened like a "sinkhole" by October 2015. Asahi Kasei tampered their proof that the piles had properly reached the solid substrate but they reused the same proof from the previous constructions. Out of three thousand and forty buildings that they constructed over the last ten years, they have not been able to tell us how many of them are the victims of their fraudulent proofs. Cf. "Leaning apartment block raises broader safety concerns," *Nikkei Asian Review*, October 17, 2015, <http://asia.nikkei.com/print/article/125367> (accessed October 28, 2016).

existence or betweenness. To this deeper sense of religiosity, we must listen again with utmost vigilance to the religious thinkers of our past.

IX

Unlike the temples and the shrines in Japan, the number of churchgoers in Europe is definitely in inverse proportion to those who insist on having no faith in the Judeo-Christian tradition. As I have mentioned earlier, some of my acquaintances from Ireland informed me that they were finally de-baptized from their infamous 'church' while a few Belgian friends told me that they got rid of their beliefs in 'marriage', for the term immediately suggested a conservative outlook on their civil union. It seems that there are a lot of confusions about what really counts as being religious in the western context. However, no one would deny this: In entering any old church in western Europe, the chance of finding a cultural museum (with a group of tourists holding their Japanese cameras) is much higher than discovering a place of worship with prayer and thanksgiving. Perhaps this is a gross generalization in my part and yet the fact of secularization in the west is 'far more obvious than looking at fire' as the eastern sayings go.³¹

The communal foundation for the sense of being religious in the Japanese context, however, might help us rethink the fundamental difficulty in acknowledging the significance of living a religious life in many parts of the west civilization today. If we take on the intellectual lens of Japan, we will immediately realize the necessity of refraining from equating the significance of being religious with the undeniable fact of secularization. In other words, from the Japanese point of view, the fundamental question about religiosity is neither about the number of people who claim to have their faiths in specific religious doctrines nor about the quantity of those who can account for the accurate knowledge of them. Rather, the question is whether or not one's religious consciousness is imbedded in one's intermediation with other individuals in society. Put differently, it is not that a single individual in his solitude comes to win a religious self-awareness in his direct communication with the divine absolute and then comes to constitute a religious community with other individuals. Rather, the sense of being religious must originate from the community of

³¹ Book of Documents, 20: 58.

authentic human beings where each of them has been selflessly dedicating himself or herself for the sake of the other.

In the Japanese context, this is practically observed as the communal foundation for the possibility of our being human. Watsuji has described it as the networks of emptiness that manifests itself in various forms of human relations or betweenness. Fortunately, the Japanese have been able to relatively maintain their general awareness of this communal foundation for living an ethical life; and their religious activities have been more or less grounded in this context of great compassion. Hence, they seem to have no problem of going to different temples and shrines for the rituals, prayers, worship, social gatherings, and festivals regardless of their irreconcilable differences at the doctrinal level. These religious sites are simply not out of the place for their daily lives. In turn, the fact that there are more tourists than locals in many of the European churches seems to suggest that these buildings are somehow cut off from the western ethos or betweenness of being human.

This means that the communal foundation of our existence in the West seems to take place somewhere outside these religious sites. This also means (at least to the Japanese perspective) that the European people could still be religious without filling up these buildings just as much as that those who are self-consciously affiliated with different forms of Christianity will be able to recuperate their place of worship and prayer in these magnificent buildings. The Japanese outlook on the sense of being human only calls for our attention to the communal foundation of our existence as concrete and ethical beings; and only through this communal foundation, it can suggest our inherent openness to the significance of being religious and point us to the sense of religiosity that is always already at work in the very process of our being human.³²

³² This is certainly not something unique only to the Japanese intellectual tradition. Plato implies in *Republic* that the foundation of every society, which is originated out of the lack of our self-sufficiency as individuals (369d), must be the sense of justice (433a) and Aristotle, too, argues for the same point in *Politics* (1252a). We could easily show a number of our intellectual forefathers in the history of western philosophy have echoed this point. Perhaps, by failing to listen to the voice of the dead, were our religious language, rituals, stories, and activities in the Judeo-Christian tradition gradually cut off from the source of our communal existence – the source irreducible to any of the specific religious doctrines or any forms of human culture (but always manifested through them)?

I am still not entirely sure whether we should call this foundation 'God' in the sense of Christianity or 'emptiness' in the sense of Mahayana Buddhism without some hesitation for my readers in the disenchanted world. But what matters is that each of our existences, as single individuals is impossible without compassionate communities that selflessly grant us our existence and freedom; and also add something irreducible to these immanent networks of our ethical becoming. This is at work in the very process of constituting our communal life as human beings. If the Japanese can achieve this religious awareness without knowing the specifics of religious doctrines and also maintain their place of worship and prayer with equally old temples and shrines, I have no doubt that my fellow westerners (and myself in the West) can do the same with our religious tradition. For that to happen, those of us who claim to have faith and those who reject our religious traditions must talk with each other and reflect on what enables us to be who we are in the same society. In this communal effort for our mutual self-understanding, there might be an astonishing breakthrough in the renewed sense of religiosity, attuned to our lives in the contemporary west.

Constructing the Self in Dialogues with Cultural and Religious Others

LU CHAO

In an introductory course about modern philosophy at Peking University, I was taught that one's self-conception does not refer to an eternal substance the content of which is fixed once and for all. On the contrary, one's self-conception is in principle open to all kinds of changes and can be constructed through a complex social-historical process when being challenged by 'others'. For a beginner in philosophy like me, this teaching sounded very puzzling. In reality, it took me more than three years to decode its meaning, i.e. after I began my doctoral study on Kant's philosophy of religion at KU Leuven and was thrown into a totally foreign cultural and religious environment. Only when living in a community so different from China did I realize how unstable my self-conception is and how it can be shaken as well as re-constructed in encounters with cultural and religious others.

I would not regard the change of my self-conception simply as a self-protective response to challenges and threats from alien environments, as many psychological theories might suggest. No, it is much more complicated than that. The change of my self-conception cannot be reduced to a passive response to outer stimuli. Rather, my inner reflection played a large part in this change. Given my academic pursuit, my self-reflection takes the form of philosophical thinking, with 'myself' as both its subject and object. Simply put, I am able to apply what I have learnt from philosophical works to analyzing my own life. In this sense, philosophy is not one of my theoretical interests among many others; rather, philosophy becomes a higher-ordered praxis aimed at deeper self-knowledge. This is exactly the meaning of philosophy for Socrates and the pre-Socratic philosophers.

At the very beginning of its long history, philosophy was not a system of knowledge, but an activity, or, a certain way of life. In Plato's *Dialogues*, philosophy first and foremost means 'to philosophize', i.e. investigate the ultimate questions in our existence by means of reason, questions like 'what is virtue', 'what is justice', and

'what is the best form for a polis'. Whether the proper aim of 'philosophizing' should be regarded more ambitiously as 'systematic knowledge of being *qua* being' (according to Aristotle), or more humbly as 'knowing yourself' (according to Plato), is open to debate. However, given that the 'I' is not only the starting point whence to investigate the whole being *qua* being, it is also the most proximate part of the philosophizer himself, self-knowledge has always occupied one of the most important places in any philosophical endeavor.

All levels of self-knowledge can be subsumed under the most general question 'who am I?'. Nevertheless, this *prima facie* simple question is also, in fact, the most tricky one human beings can raise. As for all other creatures we have known, that is, creatures without rationality, the question 'what is it?' can be pursued without difficulty, since every species of non-rational creatures possesses a determinate essence either endowed by God (according to pre-modern theocentrism) or bestowed by human beings (according to modern or post-modern anthropocentrism). However, the question 'what are they?' can never be transformed into 'who am I?' in their case. After all, all these creatures possess no rationality, so they are unable to raise the question 'who am I?'.

On the one hand, human beings have the unique honor on earth to ask themselves 'who am I?', just thanks to their rationality; but on the other hand, this reflective act in thinking about oneself is doomed to make an original division within self-consciousness (an '*Ur-teil*', borrowing Heidegger's term): a division between 'I the knower' (subject) and 'I the known' (object). In this sense, theoretical reflection falls short of the true 'I am', just as Kant vividly described this necessary but futile pursuit of self-knowledge about one's noumenal self in the first *Critique*.

If as 'I the know-er', I can never approach the true 'I am', can I make a breakthrough as 'I the do-er'? According to the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the fact of reason reveals transcendental freedom and sheds light on the noumenal realm which is closed to theoretical reason. The previous division opened up by theoretical apperception 'I think' is covered by practical apperception 'I will'. In praxis and perhaps only in praxis, I acquire original consciousness of my existence and can answer the ultimate question 'who am I?'.

In the Biblical account of human origin, self-consciousness of Adam and Eve was awakened by God's commandment. Kant's doctrine of the fact of reason can be read as a moral translation of this religious account, which renders immanent God's transcendence: only when being aware of the divine other-ness inside me, i.e. the moral law legislated by my pure practical reason, can I for the first time in my life reach the essence of self-knowledge, that is, come to know myself as a respondent to this divine other-ness through saying 'Yes' or 'No' to it.

Here, we have three terms: 'self', 'other', and 'freedom'. In the Biblical account and its moral translation in Kant's 'fact of reason', my self-consciousness is awakened by confrontation of 'the self' with 'others', and the essence of my self-knowledge is to know myself as a free respondent who can say 'Yes' or 'No' to this other-ness. However, just as no one can put himself in Adam's shoes without reflection and abstraction by means of reason, no one can be enlightened by the fact of reason without being situated in concrete moral experiences. If we keep true to our pre-philosophical experience, we must admit our freedom is always embodied, our selves are always embodied, and others around us are always embodied. Here 'embodiment' does not mean a sharp dualism like 'soul trapped in flesh' (Plato), but can be understood as 'freedom as the essential form incarnated in extra-freedom matter' (Aristotle). Freedom as pure negativity in Hegelian sense is only a thought-entity. Real freedom is an incarnated form, and when it expresses itself in a concrete whole, the latter's matter comes from extra-freedom given-ness.

Therefore, the very moment self-consciousness is awakened, both 'the self' and 'others' will find extra-freedom matter in and around them as already given. This given-ness can be thorough and thorough un-free nature either inside or outside, like animal instincts rooted in our bodies, or natural environments around our living place. However, a more important part of extra-freedom given-ness is products of freedom itself, products which we inherit from either other free agents before us or from our old selves, namely, cultural traditions and old habits. History is the concrete stage on which embodied freedom is situated, comes to self-awareness, and transforms itself through confrontations with other selves. In their interactions, original given-ness of every self can be reflected upon, and its content can be changed continuously. In other words, every

free individual comes into the world always laden with original given-ness, and the matter of 'the new self' arises through constant syntheses of 'the old self' and 'its others'.

I

Given the embodiment of freedom throughout history, the question 'who am I?' does not point to a unanimous and abstract answer from every free agent, but implies countless answer-s due to specific situations in which they live. In our post-secular world, with thousands of new ideas rushing to us every single day, the question 'who am I?' can always linger in our mind, even making us at a loss what our identity truly is or what it should be. Now I will use my personal experience at KU Leuven as an occasion for a case-study in an attempt to answer this question more concretely.

As many Belgians often boast, KU Leuven is a highly international university, with students coming from all over the world: Europe, America, Africa, and Asia. The first and perhaps the most challenging experience for me here is the encounter with people from other cultures. Interestingly enough, I had never expected this encounter would be so striking, until the first month at KU Leuven made me to face the music. Perhaps the most traumatic experience for me in a western country is that I was judged not according to my character but, sometimes, according to my appearance: simply because I have a Chinese face, I was exhausted dealing with funny questions and strange comments from foreign friends. Some of these questions out of ignorance or curiosity, others rooted in ungrounded prejudice. Worse still, the last thing that I had naively thought could ever happen to me, namely, narrow-minded nationalism, was aroused in my heart and remained against my will for several months.

Keeping a distance from this dangerous ideology took painful efforts, with backs and forths more than once. I feel blessed that I succeeded in the end and confident to respond to similar situations more reasonably in the future. However, when reflecting on this traumatic experience, I must admit two things in all honesty: first, the prejudices from my foreign friends hold a seed of truth; second, avoidance of narrow-minded nationalism must be as equally attributed to my intellectual resources accumulated in the past, as to my decision to get rid of this ideology here and now.

As for the seed of truth in prejudices, let me talk a little bit about natural differences between China and Western countries. Particularly, climate in Eastern Asia has a great influence on our physical construction and diet, which means Chinese not only look different but also eat different than Westerners. These natural distinctions provide the so-called material conditions for a unique Chinese lifestyle (or, 'lifestyles'), which perfectly suits our environment but might seem strange to an outsider. Nature does not determine culture mechanically, but the former indeed contributes to the latter. In this sense, when I spent more time on cooking than my foreign friends, even at the cost of hanging out with them in bars, and when I wore more clothes in winter and refused to join some 'dangerous' activities such as skiing, I should not have felt wronged, if my friends called me 'a conservative lady', or saw me as 'too boring and timid for my age'.

Sometimes my lifestyle is fixed to such an extent that it becomes barely acceptable to my western friends, just as theirs is equally unacceptable to me, but is my lifestyle absolutely unchangeable? My answer is 'no', although after twenty years living in the same manner, it became extremely difficult for me to make a change. Does my lifestyle construct the essence of my identity? It depends on how I understand my identity under a specific circumstance. At least in my case, here and now at KU Leuven, my lifestyle is in principle open to all kinds of change without rewriting 'who am I?'. In other words, although my lifestyle caused inconveniences to my communication with western friends, it will never establish an impassable gap between us. However, since the question 'who am I?' must be answered by every individual in his or her concrete situation, I am only talking about my personal conviction, without any intention to 'represent' a general attitude of all Chinese.

As a philosophy major who is focused more on the ideal rather than the real, I believe similarities and differences in the former field are more crucial than in the latter. Growing up in a family liberal in spirit, I embraced universal values, like equality and justice, as a teenage girl, identified more with the Enlightenment ideas than the traditions of my motherland, and chose to study history of Christianity at BA and MA level. Plato's *Dialogues* provided me the first spiritual home beyond daily trivialities and Kant is 'The Philosopher' for me who literally teaches me how to philosophize. The

western classics I read constructed my self-image before my doctoral study at KU Leuven: For me, Greek classics, Christian theology, and the Enlightenment ideas construct a system of universal values I wholeheartedly identify with.

Perhaps being enchanted too deeply by Western classics, I never considered the following question seriously when I was in China, namely, to what extent is my cast of mind shaped decisively by my cultural background? Only after bitter debates with my foreign friends at KU Leuven on some crucial issues was I forced, perhaps for the first time in my life, to recognize several huge differences between us. For instance, I can easily imagine I will give deeper commitment to my parents than to my future husband, a situation totally wrong in the eyes of my foreign friends. Unlike lifestyles discussed above, I represent a majority view in China at this point. Valuing one's spouse more than one's parents is still unacceptable for many Chinese today, especially when Confucianism is influential in the local communities in which they live. I dare not judge acting against Confucianism as absolutely wrong, but doing this would offend an innermost sense of 'who am I?', even to the extent of offending my conscience.

Another big difference between my Western friends and I can be found in our attitudes towards teachers. Belgium is a relatively conservative country, but that does not stop me from feeling the relaxing atmosphere in classrooms and conferences. It is no big deal raising different opinions or serious criticism to professors, as long as this is done in a polite manner. I sincerely appreciate this equality between young beginners and established experts, seeing it as a main contributor to academic prosperity in the West. However, sometimes I could not help but suspect perhaps young beginners were so eager to emphasize the unique-ness of their own ideas that they ignored, perhaps unconsciously and innocently, the continuity of their study with their predecessors'.

In China, the situation is the exact opposite. Confucianism requires students to 'respect your teacher as if he were your father', and ancient thinkers were more accustomed to claiming their thoughts had been already implied by Confucius himself, rather than asserting they created brand new ideas by themselves. In modern China, this somewhat 'peculiar habit' is largely compromised by a desire for innovation, but it is far from totally lost. Perhaps my Western friends would say this habit thwarts academic progress, but

I would reply: from another perspective, it also gives scholars a sense of belonging and a stronger commitment than academic achievements, that is, all of them belong to the same Confucian tradition, a great tradition the main vocation of which is not limited to academic accomplishments, but moral cultivation through keeping Confucian teachings alive through generations. Therefore, the difference between Western and Chinese attitudes towards teachers are more or less due to distinct aims, and I cannot judge the former is absolutely better than the latter. My teachers introduce me into a broader spiritual world and form me as a new human being. In this sense, I find 'respect your teacher as if he were your father' not only morally permissible, but sublime as well, i.e. a teaching with which I fully identify myself.

To sum up, only in encounter with my Western friends did I fully realize I am formed by my cultural background not only in the changeable lifestyle but also in some essential ideas which construct my self-image. As discussed above, some ideas like 'deeper commitment to parents than to spouse' are morally questionable, but I cannot give them up without offending my conscience. Other ideas, like 'respect your teacher as if he were your father', are not only morally permissible but sublime as well, with which I cannot help but fully identify myself.

However, can I claim all self-knowledge triggered by confrontation with others truly construct 'who am I'? From the bitter experience of falling prey to narrow-minded nationalism, I find some self-images shaped in this way are imposed upon my mind even against my will, simply because under extreme circumstances, I could have no choice but to seek traditional culture as the last protection, otherwise my 'self' would be torn to pieces under unfriendly attacks, no matter these attacks are real or merely imagined, from 'others'. In my better moment when I can freely use my reason, I would not fall prey to this trap of 'imposed self-images'.

As embodied freedom, human beings cannot live without identity, no matter what content their 'selves' really contain. In modernity, narrow-minded nationalism is the most easy-to-find content for the self under great pressures, like identity crisis in a foreign country. I am lucky enough to be equipped with both the will and the intellectual resources to distance myself from that dangerous ideology, resources such as philosophical training and religious

commitment, about which I will talk later. However, many Chinese cannot get rid of this ideology as easily as I can, not because they lack a similar will, but because they lack proper resources: some had no access to Western thoughts when they were young, so they have no other standard besides traditional ones to differentiate what is right from what is wrong in their own culture; others, mainly humanity majors, received little, or none, training in logic and philosophy. This prevents them from sufficiently using their reason to rethink cultural limitations embedded within their mindset. Listing these obstacles is just to indicate: although reflection is an universal possibility open to all individuals in principle, its actualization in real life is severely restricted by social, historical, and cultural contexts. Therefore, we had better have more tolerance towards our neighbors and ourselves: not demanding too much, not expecting too much, and not criticizing too much in every concrete case.

II

Back to the case-study of my personal experience: although I will hold to ideas such as ‘stronger commitment to my parents than to my future spouse’ and ‘respect my teacher as if he were my father’, I do not regard Confucianism backing up these ideas as the ultimate ground for my identity. Confucian tradition is only the *conditio sine qua non* for constructing my identity, but whether this tradition has such a crucial status for me is totally contingent, depending on whether I was born in Eastern Asia, i.e. a totally contingent fact. If I can find a deeper ground for constructing my identity, and thank God I do have found one, then it is Christianity, or accurately speaking, Protestant Christianity.

My family members hold a friendly attitude towards all religions. In the opinion of my grandparents, believers are more likely to be good persons than non-believers. My mother, a talented writer full of imagination and inspiration, claims there must be some mysterious origin grounding the world, although she cannot accurately name it. My father is an expert in ancient myths and folktales, and often mourns ‘the destruction of faith’ in modern China. Grown up in such a family, I was open-minded to all religions and attracted to Christianity as a college student. My Christian classmates led me to Sunday service every week. After reading Bible from the beginning to

the end, I was so convinced by it that I felt unable to imagine anything else more sublime than Christ's teachings. Finally, I made the decision to be baptized, and joined a local church with Evangelical orientation.

From the moment I arrived in Leuven, I have received help from many Christians: my promoter, other professors, and Chinese as well as American classmates. A Catholic fellowship held every Saturday evening gave me the first warm welcome. Then ICEL (International Church of Evangelic Christians in Leuven) and its Chinese fellowship became my spiritual home. Unlike any specific culture, Christianity is a world religion and has been claiming for universality from the moment of its birth. I believed only in a church can I expect equality based on personality, no matter where I come from. I also believed only in a church can I escape exhausting conflicts between 'the self' and 'others', letting myself immersed into the big 'We', that is, the ideal of universal church, or, 'the City of God as a pilgrim on earth', a term St. Augustine coined in *De Civitate Dei*.

However, my earnest expectations broke up very quickly. I have many Catholic classmates at KU Leuven and one of them, a deacon at St. Kwinten, became one of my best friends. We held a small faculty meeting for our 'pseudo-philosophy faculty' every Friday evening. During these meetings, he was more than happy to give me free introductions to Catholic theology, liturgy, and canon law. The huge difference between Catholicism and Protestantism, especially rich historical resources in the former, kept giving me a shock. For the first time after my baptism, I could not help but suspect that my previous cognition of Christianity was highly problematic. Moreover, more and more identification with Catholicism, sometimes even against my will, brought pains alongside pleasures: not all Chinese Christians here are as liberal as I am towards Catholicism, and many of my brothers and sisters in ICEL hold deep prejudice against the Catholic church simply out of misunderstanding and ignorance. Under this circumstance, I felt like a stranger in my own church. The question of 'who am I?' came back haunting me again and again.

More serious challenges came outside Christianity. KU Leuven is such an international university that I can meet people of totally distinct religious backgrounds, not only various denominations within Christianity, but also other world religions. It might sound unbelievable that my best friend in Leuven is a Buddhist. She gave me spiritual support I needed most in the pursuit of truth. We often spent

whole nights talking about topics like unconditional love and ultimate wisdom which are beyond conceptual comprehension. She led me into KU Leuven's Oriental Library, and I still keep the habit of reading Buddhist scriptures now after her graduation.

Nevertheless, all these beautiful things we shared together do not reveal the whole story of our friendship. Sometimes I felt the attraction to Buddhism so strong that I suspected I would betray my Christian faith sooner or later. This fear of 'betrayal' made me a bit angry with my Buddhist friend: 'Stop seducing me with *your* wisdom! I do not want to feel guilty before *my* God!' However, she was entirely unable to understand my anxiety about identity crisis. For her, Christ is one of Buddha-s who has unlimited power and Buddhism finds no difficulty absorbing other religions into its own all-inclusive system. Moreover, she sharply criticized that my over-emphasis on my Christian identity and over-literal understanding of '*Solo Christo*' indicate a shallowness in my understanding of Christ's love.

Even today, I still do not know whether her criticism is correct or not, but my anxiety about 'betrayal' indeed reveals a deeper self-knowledge, or, my psychology behind this anxiety: although I cannot fully justify my commitment to Christ, I cannot reject it without offending my innermost conscience. If merely judged by pure reason, Buddhism is without doubt more convincing than Christianity. Nevertheless, it is just the 'irrationality' within Christianity that attracts me most. I dare not claim 'I believe, just because it is absurd' like Tertullian, but I feel certain the *prima facie* irrationality in Christianity in fact points to something infinitely noble, sublime, and thus 'beyond' reason, rather than 'below' reason as the term 'irrationality' usually implies.

In challenging communications with my Buddhist friend, I gradually came to realize I need a proper solution which can keep me both faithful to Christianity and open to Buddhism. A fruitful confrontation with others means neither 'devouring others' nor 'being devoured by them'. A middle way between these two extremes is called for. Buddhist understanding of Christ as a Buddha gave me the initial hint, but with little training in the history of theology, I lacked proper resources to substantiate this hint.

My situation turned for the better sharply when the leader of my Chinese fellowship, who came from Hong Kong and was studying Catholic mysticism here, heard of my problem. He fully sympathized

with me because he had suffered similar anxiety many years ago. He invited me to a lunch, giving me warm consolation and theological instruction I needed most: the idea of God's universal revelation through history and Karl Rahner's teaching about 'anonymous Christians'. As a matter of fact, I had been acquainted with this view before I was baptized, but comfortably dwelling in a local church made me oblivious of it. After this dialogue, my burdens were relieved a lot, for which I cannot thank him enough.

Taking a liberal attitude towards other religious approaches is only a partial solution to my oft-felt crisis of identity. For me, religion means first and foremost communion with my fellow men rather than reflection in solitude. On the one hand, in any Evangelically orientated local church, I would probably always feel 'not-fully-at-home', with the fear of being tagged as 'over-liberal' by my brothers and sisters. On the other hand, I cannot give up reflecting upon other great wisdoms, because self-isolation would be against what I value as 'truthfulness before God'. This tension between my liberal cast of mind and the conservative community I belong to might remain forever, and the best decision I can make might be to carry this tension patiently and be more tolerant towards both myself and my fellowmen. My Buddhist friend summed up this solution as follows: abandon your proud desire for the ultimate truth and embrace your own finitude. At this point, I cannot help but fully agree with her: Only when I humbly recognize my finitude, can I take a further step to approach the infinite I ambitiously seek, just because the true way to the infinite does not lie in rejecting the finite, but in accepting it.

III

The encounter of the self with others is both a threat and a promise to constructing one's identity: a threat to pull down the old self and promise to give birth to a new one. Between these two extremes of 'losing the self into others' and 'devouring others into the self', there might exist a middle way 'in between': a sincere dialogue between the self and others. During my first three years at KU Leuven, I have experienced important dialogues in cultural and religious differences. Though fruits of these dialogues are rich, I know how difficult it would be to pursue this middle way, how much pain it might cost, and also the bitter fact that the possibility of dialogue is far

from its realization: To realize a dialogue between the self and others, one need willingness, courage, confidence, hope, patience, friendly circumstances, and intellectual resources for reflecting upon his old identity and constructing a new one. If the first five elements are up to one's free choice, so might be reasonably required from him as well, then friendly environments and intellectual resources are highly contingent factors, i.e. something more like 'moral luck' that one cannot fully control.

Moreover, I must admit a fruitful reconstruction of one's identity in continuous encounter with others also requires the ability of philosophical reflection, at least at some preliminary level. Due to the Kantian universalism that I endorse, I often feel hesitant to list philosophical reflection as a condition *sine qua non* for bettering oneself in a moral sense, but here I have no other choice, given that I must keep true to my personal experience: self-improvement requires leaving one's previous position, thinking from others' stance, and taking a more comprehensive perspective. This transition from 'particularity' to 'universality' implies not only 'freedom from being trapped within a narrow self-image' but also 'freedom to re-shape oneself into a broad self-image', i.e. both sides of self-construction. Also, the contingent content of the self in historical contexts (which is its material part) is both the *ground* and the *limitation* for freedom (which is the formal part of the self) to operate in an embodied situation. Continuous encounter of the self with others triggers and pushes this process. Borrowing technical terms from German idealism, I will summarize this dialectic structure of self-construction into three points:

First, brute given-ness in our human world is relatively tiny, which means the main part of this world is constructed by our 'ideas'. Ideas are products of human freedom which are made either by our past selves or by our ancestors and fellow men. Ideas are embodied in habits, rules, customs, traditions, and countless social institutions, which are historical traces left by freedom beyond history. A world laden with, or more accurately, constructed by ideas, as the marker of freedom, is only possible for humans, not for animals. This first distinction of humanity leads to a deeper truth about it, as will be clarified below.

Second, being immersed in ideas and unreflectively driven by them in cognition and in praxis indicates both freedom and un-

freedom. On the one hand, we are free in this situation because we are not determined by brute given-ness, but act and think according to ideas, i.e. products of human freedom. Ideas establish a layer of protection distancing us from direct determination by nature. But on the other hand, we are un-free because we blindly follow the guidance of ideas without reflecting upon them. In this sense, ideas become obstacles to fuller realization of freedom. For instance, we can be bounded by cultural traditions and old habits, which gradually become our second nature and hard to get rid of. In this way, we are enslaved either by our ancestors and fellow men, or by our past selves. It is not 'the present we' who lead lives here and now, but the ghosts of our ancestors, our fellow men, or 'our past selves' who live through us by means of ideas. Since these traditions and habits are products of *their* freedom, not *mine*, here appears a paradoxical truth about human freedom: it can form a chain of slavery for itself in history. Previous freedom can bound present and future freedom. Still, it is only freedom, not nature, that can truly limit freedom, as Fichte conveys the same meaning by confirming all limitations are self-limitations in his *Wissenschaftslehre*. However, this paradoxical situation of being free and un-free at the same time implies a even deeper truth of embodied freedom, that is, the eternal possibility of getting rid of this situation and more fully realizing freedom through reflection.

Third, the eternal possibility of reflecting upon ideas is the eternal possibility of saying 'yes' or 'no' to these ideas. Which of the two answers is actually given in a concrete situation does not matter. What matters is the fact that when an individual takes the very act of saying 'yes' or 'no' to given ideas, he distances himself from his old self, his fellow men, his ancestors, and the community he lives in. He elevates himself above products of *their freedom*, and asserts *his freedom* by appointing himself as the final judge with regard to whether and to what extent *their freedom* should lead *his*. In this very moment of reflection, he 'individualizes' himself by awakening the embodied freedom within him. He is no more the expression of others' freedom, but becomes identical with his own freedom through constructing his self. In this sense, reflection is not only a theoretical act, but also a practical one, i.e. a decision on how to construct one's identity by affirming or rejecting given ideas. Thinking and acting converge at this point: to think by oneself is also to construct one's self.

Nevertheless, self-construction, which can be an everlasting process in principle, has huge limitations in reality. Embodied freedom must depend on one piece of given-ness to negate another: that is to say, in order to negate one idea as entitled for my self-construction, I need to endorse another idea as more properly 'mine'. There must always be a limited self-image, although its content is open to all sorts of change. So, on the one hand, we can avoid totally identifying ourselves with our old selves, cultural traditions, and the community we live in; but on the other hand, every individual has a specific limitation for his self-construction, due to original resources he acquired at his birth, resources he has here and now, and resources he might have in the future. Also, interactions between him and his fellow men will contribute to the actual limitation of his self-construction. Back to the beginning of this paper: 'who am I?' is the most tricky question human beings can raise and must be put forward to every individual to answer in his concrete situation, since 'I', the *prima facie* most simple term in our language, is a paradoxical combination of pure particularity and pure universality. As pure particularity, every concrete self is opposed to all other concrete selves, and the gap between them can only be partly bridged by recasting their self-images in dialogue; but as pure universality, the self and others are not only the same, but also numerically identical in their form. In this sense, cultural and religious differences are more like various products of the same universality under particular material limitations. In the end, this thought of 'the ultimate sameness between the self and others' might give us some consolation and peace in our eternal tension with our fellow men.

Constitutional Secularism and the Symmetry of Religious Pluralism: Belgian Involvement and the Nigerian View – A Case for the Religious Being

MICHAEL UZOCHUKWU NWOKOCHA

One upshot of the human drive for fulfilment is the transformation of the existing order of things, stimulated by either deliberate or inadvertent re-conceptions of the status quo by the rhythms and modalities of a way of life. This human predilection for alteration manifests itself in our times in deep modifications of modern society. In Western European culture and society, this revision is associated, among other things, with the current social trend tagged secularization. Secularization is generally granted a Western peculiarity; however, some claim that there is cause, somewhat oddly, to view this phenomenon as a modern global trend. One basic reference is its involvement in modern Nigeria. While up-holding a separation of Church and State, Nigeria's Constitution prohibits the adoption of, and promotion of State religion. Yet, the intensive structuring dynamics of Christianity and Islam paradoxically continued to dominate the Nigerian public life and government policies.

Following from the Nigerian experience and from Western secularism and epitomized by Belgian involvement, this paper intends to address the question whether religion, after all, still has a place in a post-secular society and in a modern liberal democratic setting. With the Nigerian situation in view, I will outline the possible challenges arising from the ambiguous relationship between Constitutional secularism and the formatting dynamism of religion. In this regard, we will address the issue of disruptive pluralism and the fallout from Shari'ah legalism. Drawing from these, our aim will be to validate the *religious being*.

I

For much of the 20th century, philosophers and sociologists believed that modernity leads invariably to secularization. In one sense, the phenomenon of secularization indicates the decline of religious belief and practices, the dwindling numbers of church membership, and the dearth of converts. It is evident also in the essential alteration of religious belief in relation to rationalizing and objectification. In another sense, it points to the withdrawal of religion from the public sphere, a seeming resolve to hinder the norms of a religion from dictating the terms of a modern liberal democratic state, and a consistent drawing away of public institutions from religious orientation in transformation toward religious and ideological neutrality.

Different reasons could be adduced for the secularization phenomenon. One could suggest a raging disenchantment of modernity—an age drawn to the cult of science and glorification of technology, which condenses reality to the tangible. In mind is the attitude inaugurated by the development of the positive sciences by Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton, which saw the reign of purely physical laws to the dethronement of the acts of God. From this emerged the opinion around the 16th and 17th centuries that views belief in God as an impediment to progress and a source of human alienation. Deemed in this respect also is the rise and allurement of atheistic culture in modern Europe facilitated by factors preceding the 20th century. Such factors consist of certain intellectual inclination derivative of left-wing Hegelianism and represented, for example, by David Friedrich Strauss (1835-1892) during the late 18th and early 19th century. The left-wing Hegelians transited from a pantheistic interpretation of Hegel's Absolute Idealism to naturalism and atheism. Strauss's dissolution of historic Christianity and his relegation of the Gospel stories to myths shored up Feuerbach and other left-wing radicals' views. At the hands of Feuerbach, anthropology substitutes theology. Like other left-wingers, Feuerbach's ideas took off, but with a revolutionary turn, from Hegelian Romanticism, which tries to assert the freedom and creativity of the human mind or finite spirit as lying within the Absolute consciousness. In line with the romantic tradition, Hegelianism stood in opposition to the scientific rationalization and split of Nature into objectively disconnected lifeless entities as propagated in the preceding Age of Reason. In essence, it is a traverse

from the objective to the subjective which, later in the left-wing Hegelian Feuerbach, translates to a quest for a shift from the transcendent to immanence in humanity.

In Feuerbach's view, the idea of God is to be interpreted as a mere projection of man's idealized essence hoisted to infinity and, then, venerated as Sovereign Being. Religion in this vein is viewed as an ephemeral phase in the progression of human consciousness. In fact, any contemplation of the objective existence of a personal, self-conscious God outside human thought is viewed as a construal that alienates man from himself, which subjects man to dynamics outside of himself and over against himself, which overwhelms him. God is assumed to be the infinitely perfect Being, while man becomes the contemptible, despondent sinful creature. But man, in the incommensurable opinion of the radical Hegelians, has to overcome his self-alienation by overcoming religion, and by aptly recognizing himself for what he is, namely, the God created via the idealization of man's own essence. Man has to do this by reasserting faith in his own self and own clouts and, as such in reverse, list Deity as a trait belonging to no transcendent Other but to man himself.

What emerges is an enthronement of man as his own utmost entity, an end to himself. In forecast of Nietzsche's and Sartre's "philosophies of self-creation," this seems to mark "a nostalgia" in modernity "for ourselves as our own glowing god" i.e., a resplendent of "God [who] in modern philosophy is *causa sui*."¹ In accordance with Feuerbachian philosophy—the 'new philosophy', a living unity of these deified men, that is, 'ourselves', progresses to constitute an infinite being with one infinite power; born through a dialectic of division, development and reunion of the developed powers of man. The consciousness of this absolute Man finds objective expression in a unity represented as the State. In place of God, the true State in Feuerbachian narrative is divine—it is the unlimited, actualized, divine Man.

Thus it is, that, as the concept of God increasingly fades from the orthodox notion in modernity, supposedly propelled by Feuerbachian anthropology and other similar views, so also was an increase in the assumed rejection of formalized religion and doctrines. This is

¹ William Desmond, *Ethics and the Between* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 351.

followed by a kind of movement for self-determination and individual freedom; a freedom defined as liberation from transcendent heteronomous bonds. In this framework, the substitution of State for God, whereby the State is understood as a political democratic entity is speciously thought to be the definitive path to individual emancipation and to social development. It is thus that modernity finds itself locked in a Feuerbachian dialectic: God and man, the holy and the profane, religion and secular, Church and State are engaged in a contest for the same arena—the human person and the public sphere—the one threatening the exclusion and abolition of the others.² Evidently, this tussle does, not in rare cases, generate dogmatic godlessness evidenced in the likes of the strident atheism of Richard Dawkins.

II

For sure, the concern of philosophy about the relationship between religion and politics from early modern period until today is driven by perturbing circumstances. Conflicts that were religiously motivated were so rampant that the stability of the whole mainland of Europe in early modern times was almost jeopardized. One could recall the religiously inspired nationalism that shattered the unity of Christendom and split nations, resulting in the Thirty Years War of the 17th century. The bane of contention pivoted on the issue of preservation of officially sanctioned State religion usually claimed as the true faith; tolerance of religious beliefs and religious practices that differ from the established State standard were hard to sustain. This frequently gave way to forceful suppressions and coercive compliance that flared (both civil and international) debilitating conflicts.

This situation directly compelled philosophers and political theorists to seek justifiable philosophical basis to reinstate the peace and guarantee stability. The points of deliberation bordered on the following counts: One is the question of whether the State is to be tolerant of religion or not. Another is the question of whether the norms of a religion should be allowed to dictate the terms of governance decisions in liberal democracies and the question of the role, if at all, religious views should be permitted to play in the public sphere.

² See Denys Turner, "Feuerbach, Marx and Reductivism," in *Language, Meaning and God*, Brian Davies, ed. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), 99-100.

Most theorists in early modern Europe vied for principles that are accommodative of religion and of religious plurality in a State.³ Those philosophers reasoned that religious toleration undergirds positive social, moral and political output. In states where this is implemented, it was roughly interpreted to entail the integration of the Church into the political system by offering the latter opportunities for cooperative engagement in education and social services. Still with same objective for peace in the polity, some liberal theorists in recent years opted, rather, for complete shunning of, or at best, for strict limitation of the part of religion in civil affairs. In this consideration, some suggest that the most central aspects of State policy in liberal democracies—“questions of constitutional essentials and questions of basic justice”—must rather be guided by concern for freedom and equality among citizens rather than by the dynamics of a religion.⁴ In such statist and liberal polity, the individual is placed as the principal holder of rights, while “religion” is classified as a private affair organized in voluntary associations, and hence, supplementary. On this state-centrally, liberalist principle, it is considered that social (even moral) changes can occur, not from religious tenets, but specifically from structural and ideological changes induced by the State.

Thus, it is the case that the Western world finds itself steeped in the secularization saga that seems to substantially burden the religious exercises of subjects. A high point of this saga is the separation of Church and State, which integrally underpins the secularization process that defines modernity—a development that for many underscored the Church’s emasculation.

III

While confident secularism is said to be a common phenomenon across Western European states, it appears to crystallize in numerous variations in accord with each country’s different historical context. Of particular interest is the meta-narrative of the Belgian experience. Immediately following the cessation of the religiously inspired hostilities of the 17th century, and in 18th century, Catholicism was

³ For instance, John Locke, “A Letter Concerning Toleration,” in *The Works of John Locke, Volume 5*, G. and J. Rivington, eds. (Oxford, 1824), 10-13.

⁴ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 218.

maintained in what is now Belgium as the State religion. The Belgium monarchy is known to be profoundly Catholic. As socialization in the Catholic culture was initially legally obligated, the Church in Belgium dominated both the cultural and political sphere. The Belgian Church was financed by the State.⁵

Nevertheless, the influence of the Church in Belgium in the public sphere inevitably began to wane as Belgium's society gradually yields to secularization. This was facilitated by a number of factors: liberal and radical ideas that hallmarked the French revolution at the end of the 18th century resonated in Belgium in the severance of the alliance between Church and State. More so, Church practices were negatively impacted to diminution by social and economic revolutions witnessed in Brussels metropolis and cities such as Ghent, Liège and in the industrial basin of Wallonia.⁶ Though, there was initial close collaboration or "Unionism" between liberals and Catholics to organize and control the State following Belgium's independence in 1830, this eventually crumbled. The collapse of the alliance is attributed to pressure from anticlerical Masonic Lodges who controlled the radical liberal wing and who nursed deep umbrage at the Catholic hierarchy and its custodianship over morals and culture, education and charitable services. With parliamentary majority and the attendant co-option of the socialist party, the radical liberals finally actualized and implemented the secularist policy in Belgium starting from the later part of the 19th century.⁷

What emerges is an essentially laicized Constitution which, though accommodative of the freedom of worship (cfs. Articles 19 and 21 of the Constitution), heavily curtailed the influence and outreach of the Church in the Belgian polity. One instance is the enforcement of the principle of "functional differentiation," which seems to emasculate religion further. Determined by the law, certain functions such as running of schools, study grants, the mass media, culture, and the professional fields, ceased to be prerogatives of religious control. In the educational sector for instance, a secular version of schooling emerged, established and controlled by Communities and municipi-

⁵ See Karel Dobbelaere, "Religion and Politics in Belgium: From an Institutionalized Manifest Catholic to a Latent Christian Pillar," *Politics and Religion*, 4, no. 2 (2010), 284.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

palties under the auspices of liberals. In this arrangement, religious and moral instructions were conveniently shed from the obligatory school curriculum.⁸ With this principle henceforth, Catholic ideology no longer constitutes the ultimate reference in the organization of the Belgian State and that of its differentiated subsystems. The upshot is that the Church was condensed to a society alongside others as legal obligation to socialize in its culture was laid off. Hence, though Belgian culture is still vestigial Catholic, the Belgian Constitution states that, “No one can be obliged to contribute in any way whatsoever to the acts and ceremonies of a religion or to observe its days of rest” (Article 20).

IV

It is of note also, that demographic changes due to sizeable number of immigrants with Muslim background added to make the Belgian social-political landscape drift towards secularization. The Muslim religion, which has become more visible in the Belgian public sphere, inherited the mesh of church-state relations based on constitutional secularist principles and foundational conceptions of the expedient interface between Church and State. The Belgian State took the initiative at the institutionalization of Islam or, what Olivier Roy describes as “*Churchification of Islam*.”⁹ In principle, this initiative seems to indicate a form of recognition, identity formation and integration mechanism, as well as an opportunity to be politically relevant. Yet, in reality, it is a step meant to observe and possibly restrain the religious body viewed as intrinsically centrifugal with regard to the secularist posture of the State.

V

Obviously, the Church has been a force in the Belgian political landscape. However, regardless of the fact that the Christian Parties have been in government for the last fifty years (except for eight years), and that Muslims have become politically visible and active in both domestic and national levels, Belgium remained unthawed in

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

secularism. Such commitment to State secularism, in fact, came to a point where the Church was formerly cautioned to refrain from encroaching into politics “using its moral power.”¹⁰ It also persisted in a fashion, as it is among modern European states, whereby the Belgian government politicized gender relations, sacral values and sexual preference—aspects that, hitherto, were supposed in pre-modern milieu to be private and apolitical. Thus, over recent years, the Belgian government being pressured by the Free Masons reversed the religiously inspired traditional ethical values via the legalization of litigious elements such as: soft drugs and gay-marriages, and the liberalization of euthanasia;¹¹ the latter’s legislation now being extended even to children. Thus, here moral principles were vanquished to the dynamics of secularization, thereby alienating the Church again from her averred authority to determine such.

Religious education in Belgium has also reeled under the impact of secularization. In Belgium, since the 1958 endorsement of the school pact, the selection of school is granted a legitimate personal choice of the candidate. Given this framework, Catholic and other Christian (denominational) schools witnessed consistent pluralization with a growing number of students and staff from different faith and religious backgrounds, including Islam. The emergence of non-homogeneity among students of religious education classes ushered the challenge to find a way to consider and accommodate the plurality of students. To this end, two prominent models of religious education came into consideration, viz., the multi-religious model (in the 1970s) and the interreligious model (in the 1990s). The former hinges on the notion of equality of religions, and offers a disengaged comparative and objective description of the different religions. It failed however to afford the pedagogical objectives of religious education classes aimed at forming students into proficient and responsible human persons in society and as religious faithful for the prospective Church.¹² The latter addresses plurality among the students and

¹⁰ Dobbelaere, *Religion and Politics in Belgium*, 292.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 294.

¹² See: Didier Pollefeyt, “Religious Education and Opportunities and Challenges of Interreligious Learning,” in *Interreligious Learning*, Didier Pollefeyt, ed. (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), xi.

encourages students to maintain their proper religious identity while being open to encounter other religions in dialogue.¹³

Within the context of interreligious learning, the Hermeneutical-Communicative Model (HCM) of religious education was developed in the Faculty of Theology at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven Belgium at the end of the last decade of the 20th century. It is meant as a medium between absolutism and relativism in religious education.¹⁴ While trying to be open to the diversity and plurality of religious traditions and various philosophies of life, the HCM seem to succumb to the pressure of secularization. Not only did it fail to consider doctrinal-catechetical didactics, it argues for variableness in ideological and religious conviction. By so doing, it seems to undermine the irreducibility of an Orthodox understanding of what the Church owes her evangelizing mission.

It is also of note that the emergence of societal and organizational secularization in Belgium went in concert with individual secularization. From the late sixties till date, the Belgium Church witnessed a dearth in regular Sunday mass attendance. Religious ignorance or even indifference became prevalent. In truth, some Christian Feasts are still recognized as national holidays (but not as national holy days of obligation). However, it is observed that many people feel less connected with these religious traditions, especially, the younger generation who no longer appreciate their spiritual and liturgical significance. Besides the disestablishment of the Church by State secularism extensive abdication of the priesthood by the clergy in Belgium and loss of vocation by seminarians¹⁵ resonated negatively among the lay faithful in massive depression of faith. Over time, the vibrant Christian life that used to be the case among the Belgian Catholic faithful of earlier days began to give way to despondency towards religiosity, especially among the young generations. In the light of the above narrative, one will say that the Belgian State (as is common across Western European States) lost its once remarkable Christian

¹³ H.G. Ziebertz, "Religious Pluralism and Religious Education," *Journal of Empirical Theology*, 6 (1993), 82–99.

¹⁴ See Didier Pollefeyt, "Difference of Alterity: A Religious Pedagogy for an Interreligious and Interideological World," in *Responsibility, God and Society*, John de Tavernier, Joseph Selling, Johan Verstraeten and Paul Schotsmans, eds. (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 305–330.

¹⁵ Dobbelaere, *Religion and Politics in Belgium*, 288.

character. This loss reflects the repercussion of its extensive integration into the State's secularism schema.

VI

The Belgian involvement may constrain us to assume that the adoption of secularism as a State scheme invariably generates the process of secularization. Paradoxically, it is difficult to sustain this supposition in view of the Nigerian experience. Having adopted a secular Constitution, Nigeria officially assumes a secular status and, as such, identifies herself as a secular State. This tenuously implies that while upholding a separation of Church and State, the Nigeria Constitution (Chap. 1, sec. 10) prohibits the adoption of, and promotion of any type of State religion in Nigeria.

It is of note, that the constitutional secularity in Nigeria does not partition the State from religion.¹⁶ Nigeria understands itself as a secular nation not necessarily necessarily in the mode of Belgian secularism or that of French *Laïcité*. Instead, it allows the State to relate equitably with different faiths, such as Islam, African traditional religion, and Christianity.¹⁷ While refraining from, and ruling out the approval of State religion, the Nigerian government supports religious causes as a State policy: in addition to Nigerian public life, government policies increasingly are dominated by the certainties of religion; particularly by the intensive structuring dynamics of Christianity and Islam. One recent instance is the legislation that prohibits and criminalizes same-sex marriage, homosexual activities, by Nigeria's National Assembly in 2014. This was legislated on grounds that such behavior is averse to Nigerian culture, morals and various religious faiths.

Another important example is Nigeria's National Policy on Education. In line with its constitutional secularity, the Nigerian government opted to maintain a secular educational profile. Yet, though not intending to domesticate religion, it pursues a vigorous promotion of Religious Education in schools responsive to religious sentiments. Within the cadence of Universal Basic Education (UBE), launched in 1999 and signed into law in 2004 by the Federal Govern-

¹⁶ Sam Amadi, "Religion and Secular Constitution: Human Rights and the Challenge of Sharia," 14, fn. 28, <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

ment of Nigeria, Religious Education was made compulsory in the six years of primary education and three years of Junior Secondary School (JSS). However, it remains an elective course at the Senior Secondary and University levels. Interestingly, the current Nigerian National Policy on Religious Education is confessional oriented¹⁸. It is committed to fostering the students' concern within their respective faith traditions. Accordingly, it is structured along religious affiliations intended to encourage students to imbibe the principles concerning the practice of their religion. Besides, in the Nigerian context, Religious Education is closely aligned to moral education. It is also informative to note that, having their own parental religion as background, students are encouraged to choose to learn comparatively about other different religions. Its aim is to enable an openness to gain insights and to share with those of other religious traditions and culture.

Institutions owned by religious bodies took some steps further to complement the specifications by Nigeria's National Policy on Education with denominational principles. In its policy on education, the Catholic Church in Nigeria, for example, adopted objectives that were confessional, Christocentric and evangelical in character.¹⁹ In this regard, it focused on doctrinal-catechetical didactics, together with sound moral training and good discipline.

VII

Drawing from the above narrative, it might seem a puzzle to reconcile the structuring dynamics of religion in the Nigerian polity with the nation's constitutional secularism. What is apparent however, is that Nigerian authorities do recognize that the best response to religious plurality and, cultural diversity within Nigeria's secularism context is not to seek to stifle religion and its values, as is seen in the Belgian and other Western experiences. Rather, it considers that the best approach is to create an accommodative framework for a satisfying expression of differing religious and cultural attitudes without favoring the one over and against another. Significantly, also,

¹⁸ See Mary-Chizurum Ugbor, "Living the Future in Dialogue: Towards a New and Transformative Model of Religious Education for Nigeria in the 21st Century," PhD diss., K.U. Leuven, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, 2013.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

unlike the Western approach, the Nigerian policy is informed by the understanding that “the foundations of a just and peaceful nation are predicated on its belief in God and religious values.”²⁰ Hence, the issue of disestablishment of the Church (religion) by the State does not occur in the case of Nigeria’s Constitutional secularism.

This leads us to another important consideration, namely that the question of disenchantment with a transcendent “Other,” or the issue of despondency towards religiosity is not a factor in the Nigerian case. Nigeria’s Constitutional secularism is necessitated, in part, by the need to respond to ethno-religious tensions in the Nigerian polity and, in another part, by colonial inheritance. Hence, despite the nation’s official secular status, Nigerians are still deeply religious. Nigeria, by population is the largest African nation (over 182 million in the 2015 count) and is roughly equally divided between Christians and Muslims. The exact ratio is yet to be determined. In fact, Nigeria boasts of one of the most robust vibrant growing Christian communities in the world. The same is applicable to Nigerian Muslim community. Specifically, over the last 100 years the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria has grown from composing fewer than three dioceses to nine ecclesiastical provinces and 43 suffragan dioceses and two apostolic vicariates, and still counting. The numbers of Catholic faithful, seminarians and priests are huge and keep on growing astronomically. In this consideration, it is reasonable to say that the intention of the framers of Nigeria’s secular Constitution is not to incarcerate religion. The objective rather, as I already said, is to ensure that the Nigerian nation or any of its federating states does not force a religion on its citizens or, give preference to one religion over and against the other— Islam against Christianity or vice versa; or any other religion.

One tag in some way seems to complicate the otherwise downy Nigerian situation. It is the constitutional power granted to the federating States’ Houses of Assembly to enact laws for their respective States. The states utilize that constitutional authority to enact laws contingent on the constitutional bill of rights’ ascendancy. Given that, eleven states in northern Nigeria ratified and extended

²⁰ Rosalind Hackett, “Conflict in the Classroom: Educational Institutions as Signs of Religious Tolerance/Intolerance in Nigeria,” *Brigham Young University Law Review*, 2 (1999): 559.

the *Shari'ah* Muslim law to "a penal code."²¹ This means that the *Shari'ah* courts were accorded full jurisdiction over crimes and trivial offences, with competency to issue the death penalty in cases like adultery, etc., as the *Shari'ah* prescribes.

The question however must be addressed as to the legitimacy and the justifiability of the elevation of the law of a particular religion to a law of a federating state in a religiously pluralist nation and, in a country that operates a secular constitution. This now undeniably raises the issue in this discuss of the place of religion in Nigeria's constitutional secularism. The discussion here focuses on Islam as our reference.

VIII

The extension of *Shari'ah* to twelve northern states in Nigeria is not without fallout. Thousands have been killed in religious violence, many unfairly condemned to death by stoning, and others had their limbs amputated for filching, in the past decade.

It is against the backdrop of implementation of *Shari'ah* that Boko Haram evolved, as a Sunni Islamic fundamentalist terrorist sect, which advocates a strict form of *Shari'ah* law throughout Nigeria. Since the inception of its insurgency in 2009, the group has killed over 20,000 and displaced 2.3 million from their homes and still counting, thereby making them the deadliest terrorist group in the world (Global Terrorism Index, 2015). Observers see these developments as some of the consequences of *Shari'ah* Extension in Northern Nigeria.

Following the extension of *Shari'ah* criminal law, the Nigeria State faces the problem of deep legal pluralism. "Deep legal pluralism" would describe a situation where two or more essentially disparate legal systems coexist in a body polity: in the Nigerian context, where secular law functions along with *Shari'ah* law. Such arrangement subjects the citizens to the strain of incongruent legal standards.²² Deep legal pluralism, courtesy of the emergence of *Shari'ah* public law, tends to undermine the legitimacy of the Nigerian constitution. It manifestly aggravated the tension between Christians and

²¹ Sam Amadi, "Religion and Secular Constitution: Human Rights and the Challenge of Sharia," 31, <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/>.

²² *Ibid.*, 15.

Muslims. In this regard, a “normative co-existence of the legalisms of [Shari’ah] and secularism”²³ is difficult to sustain in the Nigerian context given the incommensurability of Nigeria’s cultural/religious pluralist environment. Moreover, it indicates the erosion of the authority of the Nigerian state, and the underlying factor of this erosion is the contradiction of the penal code of the secular Federal system by the Shari’ah public law.

This typically portrays the problem of deep legal pluralism. As the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) points out, it “obliges individuals to obey, not rules laid down by the State (...) but static rules of law imposed by the religion concerned.”²⁴

The question of the “constitutionality of Shari’ah” revolves on its 1999 amendment to integrate the criminal law and other “public law matters.” There seem not to be much controversy over its pre-1999 (i.e., from the colonial era to 1999) operation constrained within “personal law matters such as marriage, adoption, inheritance, and bequest.”²⁵ The contentious aspect, however, concerns the Shari’ah law infringement on human rights (including rights of individual Muslims); its encroachment on the right and freedom of non-Muslims, and the fact that it impinges on the secular law on crime. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria maintains that: “The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion” (Chap. 1, Sec. 10, 1999). The extension of Shari’ah to public criminal code amounts to adoption of Islamic religion as state religion in the component states involved given that it is essentially a religious law.

It is incontestable that most Nigerian Muslims seem intensely committed to their religion and to the Shari’ah. Hence, to try to persuade them by any secularist rhetoric will turn out a knotty endeavor. In other words, any attempt to reverse completely the

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Julie Ringelheim, “Rights, Religion and the Public Sphere: The European Court of Human Rights in Search of a Theory?,” *Lovanium Seminar Ethics & Public Policy—The Neutrality of the State* (K.U. Leuven & U.C. Louvain, November 25, 2010, 15).

²⁵ Ali Ahmad, “Extension of Shari’ah in Northern Nigeria: Human Rights Implications for Non-Muslim Minorities,” *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 2 (2005): 9.

already established trend may no longer be possible. This leads to the question as to how to respond to the Shari'ah saga.

In response, two concerns become prominent: first, is how to accommodate Shari'ah publicly within the ambit of State secularism. Second is how to envisage a public compliant Shari'ah law in northern Nigeria that will give Muslims a sense of the good (i.e., the Muslim ideal religious life) and, at the same time, modify the Shari'ah legal system to international human rights requirements. Human rights become significant in the northern Nigerian religious pluralistic setting that requires the different religions—Christianity, Islam, and African traditional religion—to reside peacefully.²⁶

Irrespective of the secular orientation of modern Europe, most European societies have rapidly become religiously plural²⁷. The religious plurality is the consequence of post-colonial immigration into Europe by immigrants with Muslim background as it is the case, for instance, in Belgium and France. This "resulted in the development of significant non-Christian—notably, Muslim—communities."²⁸ Like the Nigerian situation, the emergence of this phenomenon in Europe is not without tension. In some European countries, like Belgium, France, Britain, etc., Islam has undeniably become a reference issue in debates on the place of religion in State secularism. Common in Europe, also, as in Nigeria, are religion-related disputes and violence of which the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) is tasked to resolve based on principles drawn from the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Our basic concern here is with Article 9 of the European Convention, which guarantees the right to freedom of religion. Based on its rulings under Article 9 of the Convention, the Court strives to define common standards on religious freedom and the place of religion in the public sphere in a religiously pluralistic Europe. By so doing, the Court provides adoptable principles of religious freedom reflected in its case law.

Though Nigeria is not a European country and, thus, not bound by the Convention, I consider it useful to draw from certain principles

²⁶ Ali Ahmad, "Extension of Shari'ah in Northern Nigeria: Human Rights Implications for Non-Muslim Minorities," *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 2 (2005): 1, 5–6.

²⁷ See G. Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe—A Memory Mutates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²⁸ Ringelheim, "Rights, Religion and the Public Sphere," 3.

of the European Court as identified by Ringelheim (2010). Based on common grounds, these provisions may be relevant in resolving the Shari'ah tension in the religiously diverse Nigerian polity, with regard to human rights, the rights of other religions and State secularism. Moreover, this will be quite suitable since, the Nigerian Federal Constitution adopted a bill of rights from the European Convention on Human Rights.

First, the European Court proclaims the autonomy of religious communities in its relation to the State. The autonomy is founded on the collective dimension of religious freedom; and is derived from the fact that "religious communities traditionally and universally exist in the form of organized structures."²⁹ The Court's provision is here understood to mean that religious communities are privileged to enjoy their autonomy and freedom without unjustified interference by the State. Here, the emphasis on 'unjustified interference' is to be noted. This implies that in certain justified circumstances and with legitimate reasons, the State is obliged to interfere with the internal life of a religious community. The Court identified such legitimate reasons to include lawlessness, danger to a democratic society, acts that are inimical to public safety and order, health and morals or the rights and freedom of others.³⁰

The Court, from the right to religious freedom, derives a second fundamental principle, according to Ringelheim. It insists on the obligation for States to remain neutral and impartial towards religions and creeds.³¹ This is in accordance with the conditions of religious plurality, which the state is expected to foster; whereby, the state is not to act in such a way as to privilege one religious interpretation over another. The Court, however, maintains that while guaranteeing religious freedom, the state should place legitimate restrictions on certain manifestations of one's religion in order to safeguard and reconcile the interests of the various groups and ensure that everyone's beliefs are respected.³²

The third (and probably most arguable) principle derived by the Court is the necessity of neutrality of the state's foundations, viz. the legal-political order. The Court declares that the legal-political

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³² *Ibid.*, 6.

systems of a democratic state cannot be built on the norms of a religion. The reason for the Court's declaration is that such arrangement paves ground for the establishment of a theocratic regime³³ while, at the same time, it deprives the State of the role of guarantor of rights and freedoms. Moreover, it places the subjects in crises of double allegiance occasioned by bifurcation of identity by subjecting them to obedience to dogmatic rules of law of particular religion in place of the rules of law of the state. Hence, in the thinking of the Court, a political-legal system based on inimical religious rules (such as those adversative to human rights in sections of the Shari'ah) is considered incompatible to a secular democratic system.

IX

Abolishing Shari'ah entirely from the system may not be the best option to the Shari'ah question. Despite its flaws, Shari'ah, if reformed, may offer valuable resources that could be harnessed for the good of the polity. Shari'ah, indeed, is not only about amputation of limbs and gory executions; it is, as Muslims believe, a complete "way of life." Any Shari'ah reform, however, should be non-reactive but, methodical and positive; via an Islamic law hermeneutics that is reflective of progressive human experiences and modern challenges.³⁴ It is hardly contestable that a Shari'ah based on social justice and aimed at fostering public good rather than on totalitarian criminal justice, is publicly compliant.

Though Islamic religion and secular democracy may claim to hold specific parallel standards, such as human rights, dignity, and respect, they tend to diverge in their detailed interpretations and concrete applications of these values. That could mean that we can reconcile their different "moral and metaphysical orientations" with an acceptable reinterpretation of Islam.³⁵ Since the basic problem of Shari'ah significantly centres on the tread of individual human rights, which derives from the rigorous interpretation and application of the

³³ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁴ Ali Ahmad, "Extension of Shari'ah in Northern Nigeria: Human Rights Implications for Non-Muslim Minorities," *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 2 (2005): 32.

³⁵ Sam Amadi, "Religion and Secular Constitution: Human Rights and the Challenge of Sharia," 17-18, 23, <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/>.

Shari'ah criminal justice, any agenda of reform should take note of this as a starting point. The question now is how to safeguard the rights and freedom of individuals within and outside Islam, in the framework of reform, without breaching Islamic authenticity or the sense of collective self-determination and of the Muslim sense of ideal life. This could be done by drawing from two sources:

First, is from the Principles guiding State-Religion Relationships drawn from the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. The principle as stated above maintains that, with legitimate reasons such as lawlessness, danger to a democratic society, acts that are inimical to public safety and order, health and morals or the rights and freedoms of others,³⁶ the state can justifiably intervene in the internal life of a religious community. In this provision are implied acts that entail terrorism, torture and brutality, inhuman or degrading treatment carried out by a religious community on individuals or on society. A similar provision can be found in the Nigerian legal system in Section 10(2) of the Native Court Ordinance, 1933, which provides that "...a native court may inflict any punishment authorized by native law or custom provided it does not involve mutilation or torture, and is not repugnant to natural justice and humanity." It is here that one could find the breaching line of the Shari'ah criminal law.

It is clear that any provision of the Shari'ah criminal law that condones the inimical acts listed above cannot be reasonably accommodated within the ambit of state neutrality. Rather, in accordance with John Stuart Mill's harm principle, the state is considered to have an obligation to intervene in defense of the fundamental rights of individuals, persons or society being infringed by such injurious provisions in the Shari'ah.³⁷ The intervention by the state could be incorporated within the framework of a systematic reform of the Shari'ah. "Islam, by deriving human entitlement from submission to the will of Allah and obligating obedience to the will of Allah, takes a starting point different from liberal theory of right."³⁸ Thus, while having the respect of individual human rights as priority (which does not make ready sense even to some pious Muslims), such reform should appeal to numerous interpretations of Islamic texts and the

³⁶ Ringelheim, "Rights, Religion and the Public Sphere," 10.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Amadi, "Religion and Secular Constitution: Human Rights and the Challenge of Sharia," 27-28.

Shari'ah that oppose the exercise of violence. Additionally, the reform should seek out and highlight those areas where the Islamic and national law converge. It is pertinent to mention that some Islamic scholars believe that the Shari'ah provides for the protection of rights of all persons, irrespective of race, religion or status, etc.³⁹

The second is to be sourced from the provisions of the Federal Constitution of Nigeria from 1960-1999 which provides for the Islamic *personal* law. Section 277 (2) (e) requires that for that provision to apply, the parties must be Muslims and they must have opted or requested the court at first instance to determine their case in accordance with Islamic personal law. This particular Constitutional requirement for the personal law could be extended to a *reformed* Shari'ah criminal law; whereby, it applies only to Muslims and particularly, only those Muslims who must have requested the Court at first instance to determine their case in accordance with Shari'ah public law. In other words, this will make Shari'ah optional.

X

Given that extremism in religion has so often portrayed religion as source of conflict and oppression and, particularly, in the case of radical Islam, as threat to Western civilization and global peace, some in modernity are increasingly becoming disgusted with religion. Moreover, some have unduly tagged the tenet of some religious bodies (like the Catholic Church) on moral issues as *rigid con-servatism*. Such unfair narrative in the West has compelled its entertainers to despondency towards religiosity. These misgivings are not unconnected with the modern rejection of religion on the part of a few who would rather see religion abstain from public space, and thus be imprisoned in its own private conscience. For such disenchanting modernists, the existence of God is an irrational invention; and the Feuerbachian assertion of religion as momentary phase in the progression of human consciousness is a dictum. Therefore, they claim that religion is out of pace with modernity and, indeed, with humanity. More so, they mused that religion has little or nothing to

³⁹ See Abiola Akiyode-Afolabi, *Democracy, Women's Rights and Sharia Law in Nigeria*, <http://www.pambazuka.net/en/category.php/features/12816/print> (accessed 02.12.2015).

do with *being* human; rather, it is an unfortunate occurrence in human odyssey on earth.

The current raucous denunciation of religion by a disgruntled few has uncovered for us once again the absolute centrality of religion in human life: religion can no longer be ignored, neither can it be dismissed, as the continuing social and political role of religion in public life indicates. The Nigerian experience is a case in point. That religion remains unabated irrespective of calculated and organized efforts at its disestablishment indicates an important fact, namely: the fact that religion derives essentially from human frame. It is part of what it takes to be human. This goes to show that atheism in its complex form, as well as secularism and secularization, are all modern artefacts. Thus, mankind's concern with God and with religion endures. This is so as long as the search for the ultimate and the transcendent, the thirst for immortality and the instinct for self-perpetuation, as well as religious experience essentially characterizes the human being. This is what underlies metaphysics in philosophy and the practice of religion in every human society.

To be definite, the principles that underlie religion embed naturally in every culture on earth. For instance, the believe that some aspect of the human person, mind, spirit or soul lives on after death is wide spread among various cultures. A typical example is the Igbo culture of Eastern Nigeria. For the Igbos, as for other traditional cultures in Africa, there is life hereafter. In other words, death does not entail the end of one's life; it is not obliteration, but a transition to another sphere of life. Firmly linked to this is the concern with a world transcending ordinary sensory experience. This world in Igbo culture and other various cultures is usually believed to include entities superior to man. Traditional Igbo culture maintains a dualistic world-view, namely: perceptible and unseen worlds. The perceptible world is the phenomenal, for-granted, physical world of humans. Unseen supernatural entities such as Chukwu (the supreme Deity), lesser deities, malicious and benevolent spirit-forces, and the ancestors, populate the invisible world. Merit to a life of immortality and of bliss in the abode of the ancestors beyond this world requires that one lived a good, moral, and just life in the phenomenal world. It also requires that one died a natural death followed by a befitting burial. Through their merits, the ancestors are worthy of veneration in form of sacrifices offered to them. They supplicate for the living, mediating

between them and the deities. Their descendants also rely on them for protection to ward off malicious spirit-forces. It is believed that wicked men lose all the rewards of immortal bliss as they are rejected in the ancestral abode after death.

This eschatological view of the Igbos is evidential of the natural thirst in humans for immortality. It is interesting to note that the Igbo worldview antedated the Igbo encounter with Christianity and, as such, never conditioned by Judeo-Christian eschatological concepts, hence, original and typical. It is indicative of the fact that distinctive *religious experience* does occur and is universal. Experience of the holy, the numinous, or the sacred is underlined by human nature and it instates the sense of a superior *Other*. There is tendency however to explain such experience in purely psychological terms, but the fact remains (as Cobb says) that we cannot deny the vividness of such occurrences and their mystical effect on those who encounter them. The sense of the sacred is obviously the same with our sense of absoluteness, or in our recognition of the aspect of ultimacy in our considerations within a secularized context. However, for the pious (Judaist or Christian), the sense of the sacred parallels the understanding of Yahweh in the Old Testament as the Holy One of Israel.⁴⁰

A brief survey of ancient philosophy also shows that human-kind's instinctual intellectual tinkering with the dimension of ultimacy has involved many absolutes. Initially, it was designated as the *Nous*. Later Plato termed it the *Theos*. For Aristotle it was the *Unmoved mover*. Indeed, Plato spoke plainly, when he once categorized the totality of the world as imperfect reflection of 'God'. In Christianity, there are also series of absolutes such as *Being itself*, as the *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1.1.1., henceforth, C.C.C) puts it, which culminated in the affirmation of God himself in what I describe as the *Omnipotent Perfection and Love who is worthy of adoration/worship and unalloyed devotion*. At any rate, God's real essence is not manifest to humans, neither to philosophy, in ordinary reflection nor to Christian religion even in its present highly evolved state, or to any other religion. For God is a mystery. Nonetheless, as Vatican Council I teaches (and affirmed by Vatican II), "God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from the

⁴⁰ John B. Cobb, *God and the World* (Philadelphia: The West Minster Press, 1974), 22–29.

created world by the natural light of human reason." (Vat. I, *Dei Filius* 2: DS 3004; cf. 3026; Vat. II, *Dei Verbum* 6). What matters therefore is that, "Man's faculties make him capable of coming to a knowledge of the existence of a personal God" (C.C.C., 1.1.1, n.35); and that man's nature disposes him to worship God, Yahweh or Allâh or whatever names this Perfect Being is attributed.

Thus, in many ways and in different forms, humans all through history till modernity have been engaged in the quest for the Divine. In this light therefore, I will say that atheism and secularism are shown to be mendacious and incongruous. They are more so in the form Jacques Maritain once described as 'anti-theism', i.e., the complete exclusion of God in the reconstruction of the narrative of man and his environment.⁴¹ It involves ferocious militancy against whatever that invokes a reminder of God; or what might indicate his existence, such as religion. Remarkably, it manifests in frantic endeavour to reconstruct and mutilate the entire human trove of thought and to upturn the entire human scale of sacrosanct values consistent with that state of war against God. Such is the case in Nietzsche, in his efforts to proclaim the death of God as happy development of human emancipation. It is mostly prominent in the current secularization efforts in what Cobb calls the "relativization of God."⁴² That is, the denunciation of God's absolute power or the rejection of his control over human affairs.

In ethics, it manifests itself in form of Weininger's moral solipsism, reformulated from Kantianism, with its rejection of all heteronomy. In the Kantian system, the autonomous will must have "...the property...of being a law unto itself."⁴³ In Weininger's perspective, "the only conceivable ethics" is one drawn from, and towards oneself. Hence, the individual, in this account, is not morally accountable to God or anyone else, as responsibility and "duty exists only towards oneself."⁴⁴ Evidently, therefore, if the modernists were

⁴¹ Jacques Maritain, "The Meaning of Contemporary Atheism," in *A Maritain Reader*, Donald and Idella Gallagher, eds. (USA: Image Books, 1966).

⁴² Cobb, *God and the World*, 109.

⁴³ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, translated by H.J. Paton (New York, Hackett, 1964), 97.

⁴⁴ Otto Weininger, "Geschlecht und Charakter (1903)," in *Wittgenstein: The Way Out of the Fly-bottle*, Severin Schroeder, ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 206–208.

allowed to make a case for atheism and secularism, this would entail the dissolution of man's concord with the Divine—the source of man's being—in his deeper reality understood to be a soul or spirit. It would also mean the demolition of the true ground of universal moral obligation identified as God, the Divine obligator.

It stands to reason that, "human mind," as St. Augustine says in his *Confession*, cannot rest until they rest in God who made man for Himself. Whether in their efforts at prayers in Churches, worship in Synagogues or Mosques, meditations in Hindu/Buddhist shrines or sacrifices to the supreme Deity and to ancestors in African Traditional Religion, etc., humans at different epochs, have given and continue to give, expression to their quest for God. All "these forms of religious expression, despite the ambiguities they often bring with them, are so universal that one may well call man" both in his deeper reality and overt expression as characteristically "a religious being" (C.C.C., 1.1.1, n.28). On these grounds, it makes sense to assume that modernity's assertion of secularism and secularization (represented in the Belgian, i.e., Western involvement) does not embody a global reality. As the Nigerian experience has shown, the religion-modernity incompatibility thesis is not the whole story and, therefore, hardly sustainable in our post-secular milieu without inconsistencies.

Univocalizing Political Hindutva: A Threat to Indian Secularism

MANOJ FRANCIS

Jawahar Lal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India, said during his convocation address in Aligarh Muslim University in 1948: “You are Muslim and I am Hindu. We may adhere to different religious faiths or even none, but that does not take away from the cultural inheritance that is yours as much as it is mine.”¹ These words shed light on the longstanding secular nature of the Indian Republic. Hinduism, the major religion of India,² is very much open to plurality and has done much to support and promote the harmonious and peaceful co-existence of people who fundamentally differ from one another.

In recent decades, we have witnessed a shift in Hinduism, from a plurivocal, polyphonic and tolerant ethos to a univocal, monolithic and absolutist one. The all-embracing, porous and hospitable nature of Hinduism is being subverted by a neo-Hindutva agenda, which is widely regarded as an illegitimate politicization of religion. Moreover, the nationalist rhetoric of the saffron brigade propagates the claim that only Hindu ideology is compatible with Indian-ness. As a consequence, members of the brigade demands that minorities pledge allegiance to Hindu religious symbols, presented as national symbols. In this article, I offer a historical and analytical account of political Hindutva and its ambition to transform secular India into a theocratic Hindu nation by use of illegitimate means. Such an approach will reveal the great damage this exclusive, totalitarian and separatist movement has done to the secular ethos of the Indian Republic. In addition, at the end, I will point out certain similarities between

¹ Subhash C. Kashyap, “Who are we, the People of India: A Quest for National Identity,” in: *Understanding India. Relevance of Hinduism*, Subhash C. Kashyap and Abhaya Kashyap, eds. (New Delhi: Vistara Publishing Pvt. Ltd.), 7.

² According to the census of 2011, 80.5% of Indian Population are Hindus. Cited from the official website of Indian census. See http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_And_You/religion.aspx

Political Hindutva in India and the militant secularism in Europe. I argue that both of these tendencies by their univocalizing tendencies negate the porous and polyphonic nature of cultures in both contexts.

Secularism is a 'multivocal' word in the Indian context.³ The Indian understanding of secularism is by its very nature different from the concept of secularism in the West, where separation of state and religion is a reality and religion is for the most part purely a private affair. In contrast to the Western understanding, secularism in India does not mean anti-religion or an attitude of indifference towards religion. In India, the term *Sarva Dharma Samabhava*, which reflects the spirit of Indian secularism, means the creative co-existence of many religions, all making positive contribution to the rich and varied mosaic of India; and it acknowledges the essential unity of all religions. Indian secularism has traditionally envisaged an organic relationship between secular, democratic and social movements on the one hand and reformed religious thought on the other, an interaction that has shaped the socio-political and cultural life of the state and society.⁴ In short, India is a secular society largely unmarked by the so-called phenomenon of secularization familiar to the West. The secular virtues of the Indian constitution provide an Indian citizen the fundamental right "freely to profess, practice and propagate religion."⁵ It requires that the state treat all religions equally. Along with state's non-involvement with religions, we also witness a constitutionally approved affirmative action on the part of the state to provide for security and the basic rights of religious minorities.⁶

I

The ancient values of tolerance inherent in Hindu culture are the best guarantee of the secular nature of the Indian constitution. Because

³ T.N. Madan, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds: Secularism and Fundamentalism in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 235.

⁴ Jesudas M. Athyal, "An Indian Christian Perspective on Religion and Politics," in: *Nationalism and Hindutva: A Christian Response: Papers from the 10th CMS Consultation*, Mark T.B. Laing, ed. (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 158.

⁵ Constitution of India, Article 25 (1), cited in Robert J. Stephens, "Hinduism in Independent India. Fundamentalism and Secularism," in: *Contemporary Hinduism: Ritual, Culture and Practice*, Robin Rinehart, ed. (California: ABC-CLIO, Inc, 2004), 311.

⁶ Robert J. Stephens, "Hinduism in Independent India," 311-312.

Hinduism acknowledges that the aspects of the universal divinity are discernible in all forms of worship. So in India secularism comes to be defined as a form of pluralism with metaphysical foundations and not in any sense as the replacement of religious values by irreligious ones as in the West.⁷ The porous nature of Hinduism has positively contributed for the secular ethos of India. The words of Fr. Jerome D'Souza, who is a Jesuit and a member of Indian constitution formation committee representing the Catholics, during the meeting of Constitution committee are a testimony to the inherent tolerance of Hinduism. Refusing Nehru's offer of reservation for the Christians in Indian parliament, he said that the security of minority communities in India is safe in the hands of generous and tolerant Hindu community.

The Hindu ethos in general is porous to new and divergent perspectives and accepts plurality as intrinsic to the human condition. Since Hinduism is not an organized religion, there is no institutionalized supreme head who dictates and monitors the religious behavior of Hindus. Thus there is room in Hinduism for orthodox-minded believers, open-minded religious believers and even for atheists. This freedom functions as a checkpoint to ensure the scope for plurality.⁸

The strength of Hinduism is that it is based on a direct spiritual realization, without the strict mediations of scripture and dogma. Thus, in general, it is open to the reinterpretation. The adaptability of Hinduism opened the doors of hospitality to other religious traditions. Hindu metaphysics that never envisage any division between sacred and mundane have tended to prevent secularizing trends and kept the Indian soil fertile for religiosity.⁹ Moreover, unlike liberal Protestantism in the West, a naturalist-rationalist erosion of the supernatural is not happening in Hinduism, in large part because of the collective network of priests, ritualists and theologians.¹⁰

⁷ Fenella Cannell, "The Anthropology of Secularism," *The Annual Review of Anthropology*, No. 39 (2010), 93.

⁸ Varadaraja V. Raman, "Hinduism and Science: Some Reflections," *Zygon*, vol. 47, No. 3 (2012), 570-571.

⁹ Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward: Postmodern Critiques of Science and Hindu Nationalism in India* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 49.

¹⁰ Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward*, 50.

The sacred texts of Hinduism in general promote 'unity in diversity,' and this has become the motto of the pluralistic edifice of Indian secularism. Hindus in general believe that the entire cosmos is pervaded by divine power. The divine that permeates the entire universe is found in the heart of every human being irrespective of caste, creed, culture, race, religion and color. This divine spark in human beings points to the essential unity of the human race. This is why Hinduism in general promotes the basic unity of human race. The Rg Vedic concept *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the universe as a family), which emerged from the deep spiritual experience of mystics and seers, testifies to Hinduism's basic desire for unity.¹¹

Hinduism in general promotes the underlying unity of all religious faiths. The Vedic dictum *ekamsad viprah bahudha vadanti* (the truth is one, the wise may call it by many names)¹² points to the unequivocal acceptance of all religions as different paths leading to the same ultimate reality. The Upanishadic dictum *bahujana sukhaya bahujana hitaya ca* (for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many) also manifests the Hindu ethos of hospitality. It is a religion that advocates universal harmony. The last hymn of the Rg Veda expresses the idea of the harmony of minds: "O ye men, assemble, speak together, let your minds be of one accord, partaking like gods of old in harmony, share in the bestowed treasures, etc."¹³ In all these ways, the Hindu world view is porous and hospitable to other traditions and cultures.

II

Hindutva (the equivalent of Hindu communalism) is the materialization of the revival of a reactionary and fundamentalist stream of thought in Hinduism that has eroded the secular ethos of the Indian republic. Wearing the mantle of authentic nationalism,

¹¹ Karan Singh, *Essays on Hinduism*, second revised edition (New Delhi: Ratna Sagar Pvt. Ltd, 1990), 81-82.

¹² Rg Veda 1.164.46, Rg Veda 10.114.5 as cited in Rajendra P. Pandeya, "The Vision of the Vedic Seer," in: *Hindu Spirituality: Vedas Through Vedanta*, Krishna Shivaraman, ed. (London: SCM Press, 1989), 9.

¹³ Rg Veda, 10.191 as cited in Rajendra P. Pandeya, "The Vision of the Vedic Seer," 23.

Hindu majoritarian communalism sets its agenda.¹⁴ Since a majority of the population in India are Hindus, they argue that Hinduism should be the anchor of societal values and standard of culture in India. Rejecting the secular paradigm of Indian constitution, that finds certain aspects of life outside religious realms, they argue that religion (Hinduism) plays a ubiquitous role in public life.¹⁵ So they demand the reinterpretation of the secular constitutional norms according to the traditional religious values of Hinduism. Together with the rewriting of Hindu religious code to fit their political strategies, they have demanded that minorities uncritically accept the ideological basis of Hindu nationalism, which homogenizes a variety of differences such as region, language, and culture.

The Hindu nationalist movement presents religion as an ideology in contrast to the basic idea of Hinduism which views itself as faith or a way of life. To achieve their goals, they have become more exclusive, extremist, revivalist, reactionary and separatist.¹⁶ Those who resist this communal move are branded traitors and even physically eliminated. Hindutva gave communalism a cultural validity that made Hindu violence against minorities appear as a natural upsurge or manifestation of Hindu rage.¹⁷ The conflicts and bloodshed in *Ayodhya* (which originally means 'free of conflicts') exposes the paradoxical condition of Hinduism today, a religion that advocates universal harmony.¹⁸ The member organizations of Sangh Parivar¹⁹ with their ambition to transform India into an exclusively Hindu nation, have generated what has been called a 'Syndicated

¹⁴ David Ludden, ed., *Making India Hindu*, second edition (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 271.

¹⁵ Robert J. Stephens, "Hinduism in Independent India. Fundamentalism and Secularism," 326.

¹⁶ Robert E. Frykenberg, "Hindutva and the Aftermath of Ayodhya: Dangers of Political Religion and Religious Nationalism," in: *Nationalism and Hindutva: A Christian Response: Papers from the 10th CMS Consultation*, Mark T. B. Laing, ed. (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 14.

¹⁷ David Ludden, ed., *Making India Hindu*, viii.

¹⁸ Ayodhya, a small town in North India which Hindus regard as the birthplace of Rama, is a controversial symbol. The growth of Hindu fundamentalism resulted in the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992.

¹⁹ Sangh Parivar is the family organization of Hindutva, composed of various subgroups, that pledged to make secular India into a Hindu Nation.

Hinduism'.²⁰ This hegemonic constellation of forces ranges "from the outright sectarian hatred of the Bajrang Dal to the 'respectable' parliamentarianism of the BJP."²¹ Frykenberg's analysis of the general characteristics of neo-Hindutva is worth quoting at length:

Proselytizing and political in character, chauvinistic and imperialistic in demands, and defensively aggressive and militant in attitude, it claims to 'represent' *all* the 'noble' and 'pure' peoples of India; and it calls for the subordination and subjugation of *all* defiling or non-pure peoples of India to Ram Rajya. In short, its protagonists have given new name and new meaning to the term 'Hindu'. In the name of '*Hindutva*', or 'Hindu-ness', advocates for this kind of 'Hinduism' insist that they not only speak, in statistical terms, for a mythic '*Hindu majority*' but also that this majority, *which only they alone can represent*, by virtue of cosmic fiat (*vishwadharma*), must have sole control and total dominion over all that lies within the territorial bounds of the subcontinent of 'India' or 'Aryavarta'.²²

III

British and German orientalist in the eighteenth century had a positive impact on the self-esteem and self-understanding of Hindus through their translations of the major Hindu sacred texts from Sanskrit into English and German. Authors such as William Jones claimed that a 'forgetfulness of Vedantic monism', the specific Hindu gift to world spirituality, was the reason for India's present-day weakness. This claim in a way persuaded Hindus themselves to revitalize the Hindu tradition to regain India's imagined ancient

²⁰ A term coined by famous Indian historian Romila Thapar. See "Syndicated Moksha?" and other articles in Seminar: "The Hindus and Their Isms: a Symposium on Some of the Complexities of a Dominant Religion" (September, 1985), 14-22.

²¹ Neil Gray, "Hindutva, Modi, and the Tehelka Tapes. The Communal Threat to Indian Secularism," *Variant*, No. 32 (2008), 24. BJP is the main Hindutva Political Party and Bajrang Dal is a youth wing of Sangh Family that is violent in nature.

²² Frykenberg, "Hindutva and the Aftermath of Ayodhya: Dangers of Political Religion and Religious Nationalism," 14.

glory. Furthermore, Jones's analysis of the resemblance between Sanskrit, Latin and Greek initiated much new research on the Aryan race. Hindu nationalists, pointing to Jones's discoveries, claimed that India is the original homeland of the Aryans and had a glorious past that had been systematically destroyed by external invaders.²³ Consequently, they equated India with Hindu India and Indian culture with Aryan culture, forgetting the composite nature of Indian culture to which pre-Aryan and non-Aryan cultures and communities had contributed so much.²⁴

These research findings in Oriental studies gave a green light to revivalism in Hinduism. But at the same time, the Western Enlightenment posed a dilemma for Hindu nationalists. How could they reconcile reason-based Western science with their own religious traditions, which were criticized in the West as superstitions? According to Meera Nanda, mainstream Indian intellectuals "resolved this dilemma by subsuming science into the Vedantic tradition. They declared that the latter as containing all the essential ingredients of modern science."²⁵ This resulted in the emergence of Neo-Hindutva, a view that the Vedic tradition in Hinduism contained "all the elements of the 'Greek Miracle' that had presumably given birth to science and technology."²⁶ The words of Swami Vivekananda give expression to this illegitimate Hindu claim: "Conclusions of modern science are the very conclusions the Vedanta reached years ago...only in modern science they are written in the language of matter."²⁷ Swami Dayanand's dual claim that science was vibrant in ancient India and Vedic civilization was technologically advanced also exposes this nostalgic error of recasting ancient scriptures in the language of modern science.²⁸

As Meera Nanda argues, "the Indian Renaissance turned out to be a veritable Hindu revival; not a rebirth of something new, but an aggressive restatement of the old in a 'scientific' idiom."²⁹ In this

²³ Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward*, 89.

²⁴ K. Damodaran, *Indian Thought. A Critical Survey* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1967), 411.

²⁵ Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward*, 90.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁸ Varadaraja V. Raman, "Hinduism and Science: Some Reflections," 565-566.

²⁹ Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward*, 90.

revivalist phase, Heimsath observes, there was an evident tendency to look to native Indian intellectual sources to find justification for their agendas. The attitude of Hindu revivalists in this phase is revealed in the words of Heimsath:

India's essential spirit had been smothered by the centuries' accumulation of the refuse of degraded customs and untruths, and Indians must restore it, not build afresh on alien foundations. Not an evolutionary progress toward a new society based upon 'social efficiency', but regeneration of purified Hindu society based on a spiritual revival should occur.³⁰

The revivalist trend in Hinduism, by focusing on the ancient sources of the Vedic golden age, tried to rub out the Western colonial and Persian Islamic influence. This facilitated the growth of an obscurantist and reason-defying philosophy in the neo-Hindutva fold. As David Kopf observes, many Hindu national reformers "used the ideas of the west as means for modernizing their own traditions... for pouring the new wine of modern functions into the old bottles of Indian culture."³¹

Authors such as Frykenberg have presented Hindutva as a reaction to Western modernism. Frykenberg identifies three basic traits of this reactionary movement: it is conservative, separatist and radical.³² It becomes militant in reaction to whatever is antithetical to the "Truth" as they conceive it (in Hindutva, the Vedic Truth). Revivalism is a basic trait of this reactionary movement, for through revival they try to restore the 'mythical ancient vitality' of Hinduism, which is said to be declining as a result of the invasion of foreign ideologies and intruders.³³

³⁰ Charles Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 24-25, as cited in Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward*, 91.

³¹ David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 205, as cited in Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward*, 92.

³² Frykenberg, "Hindutva and the Aftermath of Ayodhya," 12.

³³ Robert J. Stephens, "Hinduism in Independent India. Fundamentalism and Secularism," 314.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of Arya Samaj (in 1875), is a good example of this revivalist trend in Hinduism. His famous catchphrase, 'go back to Vedas', reveals his basic assumption that all truth is Vedic truth; at the same time, it indicates his desire to go back to an ostensible 'golden past' of Hinduism.³⁴ Dayanand's attempt to defend Vedic truth against the truth claims of modernism and external religions resulted in *Shudhi* (purification) movements that exhorted reconversion to Hinduism. The result is a new kind of Hinduism with militant aggressive forms that regards both foreign religions (Islam and Christianity) and radical forms of secularism and modernism as enemies.³⁵ The modern forms of the *Shudhi* movement repeat through the aggressive Hindutva call for *Ghar Vapasi* (literally meaning 'return to the home'), a movement of reconversion into Hindu community.

From ancient times, India has been a target of foreign colonizers, both of Muslims from Persia and Christians from the West. These colonizers, especially the British, have struggled for further dominance while the natives have attempted to reclaim their land. This led to the emergence of Indian nationalism. On the Indian scene, colonialism readied the way for the nationalist movement.³⁶

The Indian national movement included a wide variety of sub-movements, ranging from militant communalists to secular nationalists. In some of its strategies against the British, it often looked like a Hindu Nationalism.³⁷ The official historian of India's National Congress Party, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, observes that the preliminary aim of the national movement was the renewal of Hinduism and in this way it intertwines and accords with the Indian National Congress.³⁸ The initial stage of the national movement emphasized Hindu values and the Hindu way of life as an alternative to British

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 316.

³⁵ Robert E. Frykenberg, "Accounting for Fundamentalism in South Asia: Ideologies and Institutions in Historical Perspectives," in: *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, M.E. Marty and R.S. Appleby, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 601, as cited in Robert J. Stephens, "Hinduism in Independent India. Fundamentalism and Secularism," 317.

³⁶ Satish Deshpande, *Contemporary India: A Sociological View* (Penguin Books, 2003), 75.

³⁷ Frykenberg, "Hindutva and the Aftermath of Ayodhya," 17

³⁸ K. Damodaran, *Indian Thought. A Critical Survey* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1967), 408.

colonialism. Leaders such as Bala Gangadhara Tilak made use of religious faith and cultural pride to stir up the patriotic feelings of Indians. To this end, they organized religious and cultural festivals like Ganapati Puja, the Shivaji anniversary. For the same purpose they invoked and interpreted the Hindu gods and goddesses as the symbols of India's national evolution. At this initial stage we would just note the strange mixture of political radicalism and religious revivalism in the Indian national movement³⁹

The religious emphasis of the national movement had some counter effects. As Frykenberg observes, "loyalty to the Indian empire gradually turned into antipathy towards anything that was not part of something exclusively and narrowly conceived as the 'Hindu Nation'." ⁴⁰ Activists such as Aurobindo Ghosh equated Indian nationalism with Sanatana Dharma, i.e., Hinduism itself. ⁴¹ Bipin Chandra Pal identified the goddess Durga as a representation of the eternal spirit of the Indian race. ⁴² The adoption of the song *Vande Mataram*, which identified Bharat Mata (Mother India) with the Goddess Durga, by the Congress party as the national song, is another example of the strange blend of religious nationalism. ⁴³ Commenting on this, Omvedt writes:

The national movement was turned into a form of historical mythological movement and ancestor worship...Those who...did not want society to be democratic started eulogizing history, mythology and ages gone by, because in those mythological and historical ages, they were the supreme victors and leaders. ⁴⁴

The strange mixture of political radicalism and religious revivalism was an obstacle for the development of a united national movement incorporating various parts of the cultural and religious

³⁹ Damodaran, *Indian Thought*, 409.

⁴⁰ Frykenberg, "Hindutva and the Aftermath of Ayodhya," 12.

⁴¹ Aurobindo Ghosh, Uttarapara Speech, as cited in K. Damodaran, *Indian Thought*, 409.

⁴² B. C. Pal, *The New Spirit*, as cited in K. Damodaran, *Indian Thought*, 409.

⁴³ K. Damodaran, *Indian Thought*, 410.

⁴⁴ Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit movement in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1994), 15.

mosaic of India. The catchphrase 'return to the Vedas' functioned as a catalyst for Muslim revivalism and its parallel slogan: 'return to the Quran.'⁴⁵ The Muslim League's accusation that the Congress did not represent Muslims, but only caste Hindus, led finally to a bifurcation of Bengal on a religious basis in 1905, and the consequent widening of the gap between Hindus and Muslims.⁴⁶

In a way it was Gandhi who liberated the Indian national movement from the clutches of religious nationalism. He recognized the deep influence of religious orthodoxy on the Indian population. To free people from this dungeon of blind religiosity, he introduced a unique interpretation of religion that emphasized its humanistic aspects, transcending the borders of a particular religion.⁴⁷ He thus displaced reactionary modes of narrow patriotism with a moral and spiritual language that reached beyond all religions. This new mode of leadership had an astonishingly warm reception among the Indian population.

Gandhi valued the ethical-moral aspect of religion over its institutional and ritualistic aspects. His religion was inclusive, upholding a universal brotherhood of all humanity that annihilated walls of separation.⁴⁸ Gandhi's entrance into the mainstream of the Indian national movement in the 1920s and the wide support for his inclusive secular policies provoked the Hindu nationalists. It is in this context Savarkar and Hedgewar began to envision a militant organization devoted solely to the promotion of Hindu community. The establishment of RSS (The Association of Nationalist Volunteers) in 1925 can also be seen as a reaction against the secular nature of the Indian national movement. Hindu nationalists regarded the secular policies of Gandhi as a constant threat to their dream of a Hindu nation. It was Nathuram Godse, an active member of Hindu Mahasabha, who assassinated Gandhi in 1948, an act which was the end result of a conspiracy of Hindu extremists.

The politicization of Hindutva began in 1915 with the designation of Hindu Mahasabha (The Great Hindu Association) as an

⁴⁵ K. Damodaran, *Indian Thought*, 410.

⁴⁶ B.P.R. Withal, "Roots of Hindu Fundamentalism," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28 (1993), 337.

⁴⁷ Ram Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), 73.

⁴⁸ Ram Puniyani, *Communal Politics*, 74.

organization within the Indian National Congress. This lobby group in the non-sectarian Indian National Congress pressured for more administrative and electoral positions for the Hindu wing.⁴⁹ The ideology of this movement was stated in a systematic way in V. D. Savarkar's controversial work of 1923, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* Savarkar identified as a Hindu one who considers India a Holy Land, and thereby portrayed Muslims and Christians as foreigners.⁵⁰

K.B. Hedgewar, an outspoken Hindu nationalist in Congress, was unhappy with the secular policies of Gandhi and in 1925 left the Indian National Congress Party to found a Hindu nationalist organization, namely RSS. His organizational models were the militant and ascetic sects of ancient India as well as the European nationalists' promotion of drills and a corporate spirit.⁵¹ His follower M. S. Golwalkar, laid the theoretical foundations of RSS through his work *We or Our Nationhood Defined* of 1939, which is known as the 'Bible of RSS.'⁵²

Golwalkar's admiration for Nazi Germany is evident from his frequent use of quotes from Nazi figures in his work. Writing in the late-1930s, he identified the Nazi concept of German national pride as a model and 'good lesson' for the revitalization of the Hindus in India. The only difference was the religious colour he added to the concepts of racial purity and national pride. He adopted fascist styles of disciplined drill, route marches, and a homogeneous dress code for RSS. In his view, the so-called violation of Indian racial purity and national pride started with the arrival of Muslims on the Indian sub-continent.⁵³

In its constitution of 1949,⁵⁴ RSS outlines their plan to recreate the imagined Hindu mythical past. "To eradicate differences among

⁴⁹ C. Ram-Prasad, "Contemporary Political Hinduism," in: *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, Gavin Flood, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 527.

⁵⁰ C. Ram-Prasad, "Contemporary Political Hinduism," 528.

⁵¹ C. Ram-Prasad, "Contemporary Political Hinduism," 529.

⁵² In 1951, the academic Jean Curran introduced this qualification. See Neil Gray, "indutva, Modi, and the Tehelka Tapes: The Communal Threat to Indian Secularism," *Variant*, No. 32 (2008), 25.

⁵³ Neil Gray, "Hindutva, Modi, and the Tehelka Tapes," 25.

⁵⁴ RSS was banned in 1948 because of its link to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation. Later, to lift the ban, the central government of India asked them to submit a written constitution with a declaration of loyalty to

Hindus; to make them realize the greatness of their past; to inculcate in them a spirit of self-sacrifice and selfless devotion to Hindu society as a whole; to build up an organized and well-disciplined corporate life; and to bring about the regeneration of Hindu society.”⁵⁵ They spread the idea that Hindu culture is superior to other cultures, especially Western culture. As an alternative, they emphasized Hinduism’s potential to give answers for all ages, emphasizing its perennial nature that rejected both reforms and modifications in the same gesture.⁵⁶

After independence, Hindu nationalism lay dormant for some time. The potential for its further development was damaged because of its link to the assassination of Gandhi in 1948. Another reason was the determination of Jawahar Lal Nehru to build up India as a sovereign, socialist and secular Republic.⁵⁷ The secular framework of the Indian Constitution inhibited the growth of Hindu Nationalism. Jana Sangh, a political party of Hindu nationalists formed in 1951, could not flourish because of the towering presence of Nehruvian Secularism. Only after the death of Nehru we witness a growing soft Hindutva policy of Congress party for political gains.

The declaration of a state of emergency in 1975 by then prime minister Indira Gandhi and the consequent brief suspension of civil rights catalyzed the growth of the Hindu nationalists. RSS, under the leadership of Balasaheb Deores, became a focal point of resistance and joined with socialist parties and Congress dissidents. Its participation in government alongside the socialists after the defeat of Congress in the election of 1977 made RSS more familiar to the Indian populace and alleviated the mental resistance and dislike that secular-minded people tend to have towards Hindu nationalism.

The role of VHP (the Universal Hindu Assembly), founded in 1964 with the support of Swami Chinmayananda and later developed as the activist arm of Hindu nationalism, was crucial in the political expression of Hindu nationalists. VHP’s sought to *semiticize* Hindutva i.e., to homogenize Hinduism into a single entity. This movement

the Indian constitution. See B.D. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: The Origins and Development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 14.

⁵⁵ Cited in T.N. Madan, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds*, 221.

⁵⁶ K. Damodaran, *Indian Thought*, 406.

⁵⁷ C Ram-Prasad, “Contemporary Political Hinduism,” 532.

never undertook a critical rereading of the texts of Hinduism in their renewal effort, as the reformists had done. The strategy of VHP was synthetic and accumulative rather than reformist and purifying.⁵⁸ Commenting on this, Ram-Prasad writes: "Its strategy was exemplified in demonstrations and marches meant to articulate the idea of a united Hindu India, covering places sacred in Hinduism and systematically conflating Hindu sacred geography with Indian political unity."⁵⁹ At a later stage, in 1981, the BJP (Indian Peoples Party) formed with the slogan of "Ram Rajya" (Rule of the god Ram) and succeeded in using religion for political gains. By cleverly blending religious revivalism and economic liberalism, they won favor with voters and were instated as the rulers of India.

IV

The historical construction of a pristine mythical past, which had declined since the arrival of external invaders, is a common starting point for most fundamentalist groups.⁶⁰ In the same way, Hindu nationalists have tried to project the myth of a perfect Hindustan in ancient times, which was destroyed by foreign intruders such as Muslim Mughal dynasty and the Western colonizers. They succeeded in creating an impression that a great and ancient Hindu tradition had been rendered aberrant by the entry of colonizers.⁶¹ In this, Hindu nationalists employ an over-romanticization of pre-modern India as a multicultural paradise ruined by colonialism and modernity.⁶² This is evident in a statement by Golwalkar, the supreme leader of RSS from 1940 to 1973. He writes:

⁵⁸ Richard H Davis, "The Iconography of Rama's Chariot," in: *Making India Hindu*, David Ludden, ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 53.

⁵⁹ C Ram-Prasad, "Contemporary Political Hinduism," 537.

⁶⁰ Robert J. Stephens, 'Hinduism in Independent India', 315.

⁶¹ There are authors who compare this with Nazi and Fascist appeals to a mythic past, anti-communist and, cadres, violent and repeated mobilizations, etc., to achieve their agenda. See Tapan Basu, et al., *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993).

⁶² Peter Manuel, "Music, the Media, and Communal Relations in North India," in: *Making India Hindu*, David Ludden, ed. (New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 2007), 137.

The origins of our people, the date from which we have been living here as a civilized entity, is unknown to the scholars of history... We existed when there was no necessity for any name. We were the good, the enlightened people. We were the people who knew about the laws of nature and the laws of the spirit. We built a great civilization, a great culture, and a unique social order. We had brought into life almost everything that was beneficial to man. Then the rest of mankind were just bipeds and so no distinctive name was given to us.⁶³

To relocate this imagined ancient community of Hindus, the RSS redefined Indian nationality to mean Hindu religious nationality. For this purpose, Hindu fundamentalists projected a de-historicized vision of a Hindu Utopia. In order to regain the vitality of this mythical paradise and Hindu hegemony, they argue, we need a 'redemptive violence' against the alien forces.⁶⁴

As in the case of other fundamentalists, Hindu fundamentalists categorize people in terms of insiders and outsiders. For them, Muslims and Christians are outsiders who have destroyed the pristine glory of India. According to Savarkar, on the day Mohammed of Ghazni (a Persian invader) invaded Sindhusthan (synonym for Hindustan), the conflict of life and death began in Indian subcontinent.⁶⁵ It is interesting to note how V.D. Savarkar also categorizes the Indian population into insiders and outsiders. In his book *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* Savarkar writes:

A Hindu... is he who looks upon the land that extends from Sindhu to Sindhu – from the Indus to the Seas – as the land of his forefathers – his fatherland (pithrubhu), who inherits the blood of that race whose first discernible source could be traced to the Vedic Saptasindhus, and which on its march, assimilating much that was incorporated and ennobling much that was assimilated, has come to be known as the Hindu people, who has inherited and claims as his own the

⁶³ Cited in Robert J. Stephens, "Hinduism in Independent India," 320.

⁶⁴ Richard H. Davis, "The Iconography of Rama's Chariot," 48-50.

⁶⁵ Christophe Jaffrelot, ed., *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 91.

culture of that race as expressed chiefly in their common classical language Sanskrit, and represented by a common history, a common literature, art and architecture, law and jurisprudence, rites and rituals, ceremonies and sacraments, fairs and festivals; and who, above all, addresses this land, this Sindhusthan, as his Holy land (punyabhū), and the land of his prophets and seers, of his godmen and gurus, the land of piety and pilgrimage. These are the essentials of Hindutva – a common nation (Rasthra), a common race (jati), and a common civilization (Sanskriti).⁶⁶

Savarkar initiated a spatial way of thinking about Indian nationality. In the absence of a non-religious nationality, he started to construct an 'imagined community.'⁶⁷ According to him, to be a Hindu one should have been born in Hindustan and inherit Hindu blood through natural parents. For him, what matters is one's authentic indigenous origin in Bharatvarsha (Classical India). Yet his emphasis on India as a 'Holyland' complicates matters. His intention is to exclude Muslims and Christians from the Indian mainstream as outsiders, whose holy lands are elsewhere (Mecca or Palestine) outside of India. The implication is that non-Hindus must assimilate to the Hindu way of life. Commenting on this, Deshpande writes:

The basic spatial strategy behind Savarkar's notion of Hindutva is the redefinition of the nation as a sacred space the claim that the nation is and ought to be, formed in the shape of a *punyabhoo*, a holy land. This serves to invest the Indian nation with a religious essence – an un-questionable sacred value – that 'outsiders' can never experience or comprehend, and which forever and completely defines 'insiders'.⁶⁸

Hindu fundamentalism always creates a wall of separation against what they claim to be alien or other. They create an external 'other' against whom they launch campaigns of opposition. They

⁶⁶ V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Sahitya Sadan, 1923), [reprinted in 1989], 116.

⁶⁷ Satish Deshpande, *Contemporary India*, 78.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

pretend to be the guardians of purity and vitality of their religion and land, for which they promote a pseudo-Hindu consciousness. To make this mobilization easy, they make use of the metaphors of 'just war' in the Indian epics *Mahabharatha* and *Ramayana*, thus giving a religious coloring to their campaign against the contaminating presence of the 'other'.⁶⁹ M. S. Golwalkar⁷⁰ further alienates non-Hindus by defining the obligatory lifestyle of non-Hindus in India. He writes:

The non-Hindu people in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu Culture and language, must learn to respect and revere Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but the glorification of the Hindu nation, i.e., they must not only give up their attitude of intolerance and ingratitude towards this land and its age-long traditions, but must also cultivate the positive attitude of love and devotion instead; in one word they must cease to be foreigners or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizens rights.⁷¹

Here Golwalkar clearly equates nationality with Hindutva, thus identifying believers of other religions as foreigners. In his nationalist ethnic reasoning, Muslims, Christians, Communists and Western secularists are all internal threats to Hindustan.⁷²

Hindu nationalists were very keen in appropriating all available religious and cultural capital to further their nationalist cause. With their Machiavellian tactics, "the original teachings of [Hindu] religious and spiritual reformers were often adapted inappropriately and allegedly distorted to serve their fundamental cause."⁷³ Their appropriation of Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta and Yoga, and of the spiritual universalism and cultural nationalism of Sri

⁶⁹ Frykenberg, "Hindutva and the Aftermath of Ayodhya," 14-15

⁷⁰ Sarsanghchalak (The supreme leader) of RSS from 1940 to 1973.

⁷¹ Cited in T.N. Madan, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds*, 223.

⁷² Christophe Jaffrelot, ed., *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 98.

⁷³ Narinder Mohkamsing, "Machiavellian Hindutva Untamed," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* vol. 11 (2010), 104.

Aurobindo, as well as their accommodation of pious Hindu movements and popular spiritual leaders into the Hindu fold, catalyzed the growth of Hindutva.⁷⁴

At the same time, Hindu nationalists have selectively repudiated Indian secular figures. Their admiration for Sardar Patel, known for his soft-Hindutva stand and the indirect rejection of secular-minded national figures such as Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar, is revelatory. At the time of this writing, they are constructing a statue of Patel (which they claim to be the largest statue in the world) with the name 'Statue of Unity'. Nicanor Parra, a Latin American poet, wrote the following powerful line after visiting the statue of liberty in the United States, in his poem *Artefactos*: 'United States: The country where liberty is a statue'. Looking at the divisive strategy of Hindu nationalists, secular-minded people are forced to say that in 'Hindu India', unity is a statue.

In the Indian context, it is said that a 'lucky lie' (successful lie) often becomes the truth. This is evident when we analyze the growth of Hindu nationalism. The British Policy of 'divide and rule' during the colonial period sowed the seeds of hatred between Hindus and Muslims. Moreover, British colonial historians portrayed medieval Muslim rulers in a distorted way as having been intolerant to Hindus and systematically destroyed Hindu pilgrim centers, and this only widened the gap.⁷⁵ These historians consciously produced an enemy image of Islam as a faith that has always sought to destroy the Hindu heritage and win adherents for itself. But actually in India, Islam was spread by Sufis rather than invaders. There are even historical examples of Muslims showing great tolerance for Hindus, as when the Mughal emperor Babar instructed his son Humayun to ban cow slaughter out of respect for the Hindus.⁷⁶

At a later stage, Hindu nationalists adopted the same method that the British had used in their hate campaign. Romila Thapar's work *The Past as Present: Forging Contemporary Identities Through History* explains how Hindu nationalists distorted history to serve their hidden agendas. Hindu fundamentalism created a feeling of insecurity

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁷⁵ B.P.R. Withal, "Roots of Hindu Fundamentalism," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28 (1993), 336.

⁷⁶ Peter Manuel, "Music, the Media, and Communal Relations in North India," 134.

among ordinary Hindus by fabricating stories and citing false statistics about the glorious past and the pathetic present. According to Thapar, Hindu nationalists often constructed a mythical culturally-pure past in order to legitimize their strategies in the present.⁷⁷ In this way, they injected new assumptions into the common sense of middle-class Hindus – that Hinduism was dying and that minority populations were responsible for this – and so created a reactionary syndrome that met with surprisingly widespread sympathy.⁷⁸

The feeling of insecurity and this new reaction syndrome among Hindus in general is also connected with a feeling of insecurity among upper caste Hindus. In the 1920s, an aggressive Hindutva led by Brahmins postulated the enemy image of Islam as an ever-present existential threat to Hinduism. They propagated the story of a golden Hindu past which had been spoiled by Muslim invaders. The creation of an external enemy and consequent feeling of insecurity among Hindus, some authors argue, arose from a fear of upper caste Hindus that they might lose their hierarchically privileged status, dominance and leadership position due to the social reform movements and changes brought about by the spread of Western forms of education.⁷⁹ In addition, they accused the Congress Party of having shown favoritism toward minorities in India.⁸⁰

Pramod Mahajan's so-called 'dual genealogy' is a clear example of the hate campaigns that have alienated Muslims from the national mainstream. These campaigns present Muslims as children of the Mughal rulers who conquered India, such as Babar, Akbar, and Aurangzeb. Framing Muslim identity around the history of the medieval conquests of these rulers, they recast Muslims as 'other' to Hindus.⁸¹ Yet these stories of aggressive Muslim invasion also have served to draw attention away from the miserable social condition of many Muslims in present-day India, where they are just 14 percent of the population. These communities are often deprived of basic access to mainstream education.

⁷⁷ Romila Thapar, *The Past as Present: Forging Contemporary Identities Through History* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2014).

⁷⁸ B.P.R. Withal, "Roots of Hindu Fundamentalism," 337.

⁷⁹ Withal, "Roots of Hindu Fundamentalism," 337.

⁸⁰ Stephens, "Hinduism in Independent India," 320.

⁸¹ Davis, "Iconography of Rama's Chariot," 49.

V

Jawahar Lal Nehru held that the responsibility of secular government is to treat all citizens equally regardless of their religious affiliation. During the framing of the Indian constitution, Nehru declared categorically that “India will be a land of many faiths, equally honored and respected but of one national outlook.”⁸² He was a staunch critic of Hindu nationalism, which is communal and theocratic, and he called it the greatest threat to a secular India. His attempts to minimize the role of religion in political life without negating the truths of religion created a secular ethos in independent India. In short Nehruvian secularism became the strongest barrier to the Hindu nationalists’ dream, i.e., the transformation of India into a Hindu Nation. Their protest against Nehru must be understood in this context.

Hindu nationalists regard Nehruvian secularism as pseudo-secularism. For them it is a European transplant that destroyed the traditional religious heritage of India.⁸³ The election manifesto of the BJP against Nehruvian secularism is worth citing here: “The theory and practice of secularism (an intra-religious evolution in the west which had no application to a multi-religious situation which always existed and existed peacefully till the invaders arrived in this great nation) resulted in a greater erosion of our national consciousness than ever under the rule of invaders.”⁸⁴ The nationalists propose Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation) as an anti-thesis to the pseudo-secularism of the Congress Party. Their intention is to redefine secularism in order to eliminate the safeguards of minority rights or identify the interests of the Hindu majority. To this end, they invoke pseudo-nationalist claims in order to legitimate their communal orientations.

The portrayal of the figure of Mother India in the image of a Hindu Goddess is a clear example of how the Hindu nationalists

⁸² B.R. Nanda, *Jawahar Lal Nehru: Rebel and Statesman* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) 108, as cited in Robert J. Stephens, “Hinduism in Independent India,” 332.

⁸³ Ankur Barua, *Debating ‘Conversion’ in Hinduism and Christianity* (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 174.

⁸⁴ BJP’s Election Manifesto, 1993, 12-13

equate Indian nationalism with Hindu identity.⁸⁵ The selection of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's 'Vandhe Matharam' (originally a song in praise of Hindu goddess Durga, later interpreted as a hymn to the divine mother land) as the national song in 1950 is another example.⁸⁶ Tagore's letter to Subhash Chandhra Bose, a prominent leader in the Indian nationalist movement, reveals the controversy behind Vande Mathram. Tagore writes:

The core of *Vande Mataram* is a hymn to goddess Durga: this is so plain that there can be no debate about it. Of course Bankimchandra does show Durga to be inseparably united with Bengal in the end, but no Mussulman [Muslim] can be expected patriotically to worship the ten-handed deity as "Swadesh" [the nation]. This year many of the special [Durga] Puja numbers of our magazines have quoted verses from *VandeMataram* – proof that the editors take the song to be a hymn to Durga. The novel *Anandamath* is a work of literature, and so the song is appropriate in it. But Parliament is a place of union for all religious groups, and there the song cannot be appropriate. When Bengali Mussulmans show signs of stubborn fanaticism, we regard these as intolerable. When we too copy them and make unreasonable demands, it will be self-defeating.⁸⁷

Hindu nationalists have deconstructed traditional images of the Hindu gods and reconstructed them in the masculine image of a warrior to fit their communal agenda. The makeover of Lord Rama, who is known in Hindu epics as Maryadha Purushothama (an exemplary model with human qualities), into a warrior god was driven by a hidden agenda. It is worth noting here Anuradha Kapur's analysis of the changing face and body of Lord Ram and the consequent demolition of the Mosque in Ayodhya and rapid growth

⁸⁵Satish Deshpande, *Contemporary India*, 76.

⁸⁶Vandhe Mathram is a song in praise of the Hindu Goddess Durga in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novel *Ananth Math* in 1882. In the novel, this song is sung by a Hindu mob against Muslims during a riot.

⁸⁷K. Datta and A. Robinson, eds., Letter 314, *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

of Hindu nationalism in India from 1981 to 1998.⁸⁸ Hindu nationalists portrayed the destruction of Rama's temple in Ayodhya by the Muslim invaders and construction of a mosque on its site as a symbol of the humiliation of the Hindu community. Based on this study, Anand observes that the Hindu gods were subject to a "militant and homoerotic makeover with a stress on building muscles, warlike expression and an erect demeanor."⁸⁹ Hindutva groups consciously popularized hyper-masculinized and warrior-like images of the gods through posters and calendars to instigate a fighting spirit among the public, opposed to the internal and external enemies of the imagined Hindu nation.⁹⁰ This religious Hindu mindset was used by L.K. Advani during his chariot procession in the 1990s, in which he converted religious rituals into political statements and the Ramabhakti (devotion to Rama) into electorally legitimated ruling power.⁹¹ Commenting on this, Kapur writes:

The transformation of Ram image from that of a serene, omnipresent, eternally forgiving God to that of an angry, punishing one, armed with numerous weapons, wearing armour and even shoes, is truly remarkable. Where does this New Ram, laden with all manner of martial gear come from?

He appears to come from television epics-Ramanand Sagar's "Ramayana" and B.R. Chopra's "Mahabharata" especially, feeds upon the escalating notions of a militaristic and virile Hinduism.⁹²

During a counter-demonstration against Hindutva in Bombay, a large cutout of Rama with the request 'leave me alone', served to give expression of an alternative mindset, opposed to shifting Rama's identity in a violent direction.⁹³

⁸⁸ Anuradha Kapur, "Deity to Crusaders," 46-73.

⁸⁹ Dibyesh Anand, "Anxious Sexualities: Masculinity, Nationalism and Violence," *The British Journal of Politics and Governance*, 2 (2013), 261.

⁹⁰ Sriram Mohan, "Locating the "Internet Hindu: Political Speech and performance in Indian Cyberspace," *Television and Media*, 16 (2015), 343.

⁹¹ Davis, "Iconography of Rama's Chariot," 46.

⁹² Anuradha Kapur, *Times of India* (October 1, 1991).

⁹³ Richard H. Davis, "The Iconography of Rama's Chariot," 54.

VI

Hindu nationalists' effectively used religious symbols and popular images to attract ordinary people during their *Rath Yathra* in the 1990s. Jaffrelot observes that "it was reverence for Rama rather than anti-Muslim feelings which was most in evidence...the RSS-VHP-BJP used the instrumentalization of religious symbols for political purposes but many of its followers mobilized for religious ends."⁹⁴

In India, there is a great deal of popular respect for monastic orders. Hindu nationalists made use of believers' respect for these orders. In addition, in some periods of history we witness the militant monks' or soldier sadhus' roles in defending India from foreign invaders. Hindu nationalists made use of this imagery by appealing to the ancient lineages of Hindu sages⁹⁵ in order to popularize the movement and present under the guise of religion. The participation of Hindu monks in VHP meetings is to be understood in this context. Religious images used in BJP meetings were a mask used to exploit the religious sentiments of Hindus for political gain, as if they were speaking for all Hindus.

Romila Thapar describes the many attempts of Hindu nationalists to erect a centerpiece for nationalist culture. In their one-sided approach, they identify some forms of culture as ideal and sideline other forms. The serialization and broadcast of the Hindu epics of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* by in Indian national television and the fact that they were presented as expressing the universal values of Indian culture are clear examples of this. In this period, the BJP mobilized grassroots Hindu sentiment by casting Rama as a symbol of Hindu revitalization. The broadcast of *Ramayana* in 1987-1988 and consequent unprecedented growth of Hindutva as well as of communal polarization is noteworthy here.⁹⁶

The TV serial *Chanakya*, aired by Doordharshan and based on the history of the Mauryan empire, is another example. The empire

⁹⁴ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 476-477.

⁹⁵ William R. Pinch, "Soldier Monks and Militant Sadhus," in: *Making India Hindu*, David Ludden, ed. (New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 2007), 140-141.

⁹⁶ Victoria L. Farmer, "Mass Media and Communalism," in: *Making India Hindu*, David Ludden, ed. (New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 2007), 102-105.

reached its greatest extent when Ashoka, grandson of Chandra Gupta Mauryan, was in power. But the TV serial neglected Ashoka, because of his conversion to Buddhism, instead portraying Chanakya, a Brahmin, as the great hero of the Mauryan empire.⁹⁷ This television series *Ramayana*, based on the epic, was broadcast by Indian national television without any legal objections. Yet at the same time, the series on Tipu Sultan, based on the life of the eighteenth century Muslim ruler, was allowed to air only after a long series of legal battles due to the protest of certain Hindu organizations. The court did finally allow the serial to air, with a disclaimer that the story is not historical but fiction, thus neglecting his fight against British colonialism and thereby the failing to acknowledge the fact of a significant Muslim contribution to the national movement.⁹⁸

The role of the Hindi press in translating Hindu symbolism into a register of communal violence reveals the partial and biased approach of some Indian journalists. An investigation of the press trust of India reveals the role of the Hindi press in the communal crisis of 1990.

There is little doubt that some influential sections of the Hindi Press in UP. and Bihar were guilty of gross irresponsibility and impropriety, offending the canons of journalistic ethics in promoting mass hysteria on the basis of rumors and speculation, through exaggeration and distortion, all of this proclaimed under screaming, banner headlines. They were guilty, in a few instances, of doctoring pictures (such as drawing prison bars on the photograph of an arrested Mahant), fabricating casualty figures (for example, adding "1" before "15" to make "115 deaths), and incitement of violence and spreading disaffection among members of armed forces and police, engendering communal hatred.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Romila Thapar, "Communalism and the Interpretation of early Indian History," Presented in the South Asia Seminar, University of Pennsylvania, September 22, 1993.

⁹⁸ Farmer, "Mass Media and Communalism," 106.

⁹⁹ N. Ram, "Communalism in the Press," *Sunday Observer* (December 15, 1992).

N. Ram also observes that in the media coverage of the Hindu-Muslim riots in October and November of 1990 in Ayodhya, a considerable part of the Hindi press turned *kar-sevak*, a term used to signify one who is a Hindu volunteer, working for Hindu ideals.¹⁰⁰

The term 'Internet Hindus' was used in a pejorative sense by Sagarika Ghose on Twitter to describe Hindu nationalists who use social media to constantly insult secular-minded people and spread propaganda for a Hindu India.¹⁰¹ They are an anti-minority who characterize true secular nationalists as pseudo-secularists and minority appeasers. For example, the statement 'secular pigs are strictly prohibited' appeared on the Facebook page of a group of internet Hindus on April 15, 2014, revealing their hatred for secularists. They refer to themselves as patriots and proud Indians and have a preference for writing under pseudonyms. By creating a false impression that Hindus are a persecuted majority, they spread a reactionary mood among Hindus against other believers.¹⁰² They are eager to present historical figures such as Shivaji¹⁰³ as ideal leaders who will bring back a Hindu Utopia. Their one-sided interpretation of history goes along with the BJP's constructed quasi-historical narratives of a glorious ancient India ruined by external invaders.¹⁰⁴

There is a paradox in this position: for while in India they use majoritarian terminology, in the pluralistic milieu of the United States and other Western countries they seek accommodations as a minority. They stand for a tolerant pluralism in the West and a narrow sectarianism in the East.¹⁰⁵ This is reminiscent of the double-speak of the BJP, that makes use of different tactics for different groups. In cities such as Delhi they propagate a soft communalism for the middle class in the guise of development; they call for a stronger and even authoritarian state that would bring stability, and this is appealing to the middle class. Yet in slums and villages, they take a more populist approach, making use of religious symbols and thereby exploiting the religious sentiments of the illiterate.

¹⁰⁰ N. Ram, "Communalism in the Press," *Sunday Observer* (December 15, 1992).

¹⁰¹ Sriram Mohan, "Locating the 'Internet Hindu'," 340.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 341.

¹⁰³ Chatrapati Shivaji was an Indian warrior-king who fought against Muslim dynasty.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 342.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 342.

Based on the illegitimate bridge constructed between the Vedic tradition and modern science, the Hindu nationalists argued that many modern scientific inventions were prefigured in Hindu mythology and epics. The recent Indian Science Congress¹⁰⁶ held in Mumbai witnessed the strange claims of Hindu nationalists. The paper presented by Anand J. Bodas, for example, was entitled 'Aviation in Vedic Age'. He claimed that sages in India in the Vedic period invented the technology for rockets and airplanes and had conducted inter-planetary journeys.¹⁰⁷ Even though many scientists protested in advance against this illegitimate affair between pseudo-science and constructed religious claims by the conflating mythology with science, the Indian government, led by Hindu nationalists, condoned the presentation.¹⁰⁸ Astrology creeping into the public educational curriculum, under the pretext of ancient science, and of mythical Hindu *puranas* in the guise of historical facts, are other examples of the obscurantist strategy of Hindutva.

A selective denial of what is foreign is another characteristic of Hindutva. Why do they brand secularism as Western and protest against it? Only because Western secularism opposes the manipulation of religion for political ends, i.e., exactly what theorists of political Hindutva are doing. They protest against all observable facts when they do not fit with their interests, even when these facts are supported by rational proofs. Unbiased historians who question the historical accuracy of Hindu claims concerning the Hindu Utopia and land of Ayodhya are accused of using foreign methodologies that do not respect Hindu traditions. They accept democracy only as an interim solution because it is of Western origin; ultimately, they seek a theocracy, Ram Rajya. BJP leader Advani reveals the general tactic of political Hindutva to combat reasonable social institutions with religious verdicts in his statement that "no Judge can give a verdict on the birth place of Lord Rama, which is a matter of faith for Hindus"¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁶ Indian Science Congress conducted at Mumbai University, starting on 3 January 2015.

¹⁰⁷ "Outlandish claims diminish respect for ancient science: Narlikar," *The Times of India* (14 January, 2014).

¹⁰⁸ "Pseudo-Science must not figure in Indian Science Congress," *Mumbai Mirror* (31 December, 2014).

¹⁰⁹ *Indian Express* (10 October, 1990).

It is misleading and distortive to speak of the resurgence of Hindu fundamentalism as a 'return of the sacred', for this resurgence amounts to an annihilation of the porous nature of the Indian mind and of the possibility for alternatives and differences. The danger of such a move is that the Transcendent (*Ekam*), which is the common spiritual source of all humanity, is substituted or identified with particular religious rituals, which are mere means to reach the Transcendent. Such reification and petrification of religious rituals, without any openness to renewal, is often devoid of any rational process and may end up in merely superstitious representations, leading to an exhaustion of the mysterious dimension of reality. Rituals, exhausted of their dimension of mystery, may perhaps function as a divisive rather than a cohesive force and a cause for the absolutization of differences, as has happened in the Indian context. To sum up, the univocal approach of political Hindutva, with its singular approach to reality, resulted in a reduction of the infinite richness of different ways to the divine, to a set of homogenous, uniform, and pre-determined categories.

VII

The rising intolerance of Hindu nationalism has made Christians a vulnerable community in India. RSS leader Golwalkar in his book *Vicharadhara* portrays Christians and Muslims as foreigners and internal threats to the nation. Following this lead, fundamentalists question the patriotism of Christians and accuse them as foreigners and compel them to go back to Europe, the so-called 'home land' of Christians. Consequently at least in some states, Christians are forced to pledge their loyalty to the nation through public admiration towards Hindu symbols and adoption of Hindu culture becomes a prerequisite for a peaceful survival for minorities.

Hindu nationalism's dream for a theocratic Hindustan persuade them to radicalize the masses through hate campaigns against minorities especially against Christians, projecting them as the cause of contemporary India's lost glory. Moreover, comparing to Muslims, Christians are easy target for Hindu nationalists. Christians do not riot like the Muslims after Hindu fundamentalists destroyed Babri Masjid (Mosque) in 1992. Another reason is that the so-called Western Christian countries do not raise voices to protect their fellow believers

as Muslim countries do. In spite of the cultural adaptations of Indian Church, Hindu nationalists argue, Christian traditions are alien and foreign to Indian Culture and Christians must adopt the cultural symbols of the majority in their life style and worship.¹¹⁰

Violence against Christians became rampant since Hindu nationalists took power in center and BJP ruling states such as Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and some other north Indian state like Odisha. The Hindu nationalists have their own hidden agendas and evil strategies to make Christians a vulnerable group incapable of self-defense. They make use of hate campaigns and propagandas similar to that of Joseph Goebbels (Nazi Germany), and attack the churches with the accusation that that churches are factories of conversion to Christianity, and even employ physical elimination of those Christians who seems to be a hindrance for the growth of Hindu nationalism. They propagated the myth that all non-Hindu religions are anti-national and the conversion to other religion is tantamount to change of nationality.¹¹¹ The derogatory and insulting words of RSS chief Mohan Bhagavat against Mother Teresa, the renowned mother of destitute, that her original intention was not charity, but the conversion of Hindus into Christianity, is a clear example for the hate campaigns.

The fundamentalist Hindu groups make use of the anti-conversion law as a tool to prohibit church services in some states. Moreover, Christian gatherings are maliciously portrayed as disturbing the social ethos and hurting the religious feelings of Hindus. Consequently churches are attacked, Bibles, sacred statues and other holy things are burned, branding them as 'conversion materials.' The intensity of violence was so cruel that Indian President K.R. Narayanan characterized the assassination of Christian missionaries belonging to the "world's inventory of black deeds" and as "a monumental aberration."¹¹² The Indian president's remark at the cold blooded murder of Graham Steins, a missionary who worked for the poor lepers, is shedding light unto the atrocities of Hindu

¹¹⁰ Herbert Hofer, "Why are Christians Persecuted in India? Roots, Reasons, Responses," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 18 (2001), 12.

¹¹¹ Ram Puniyani, *Communalism and Anti-Christian Violence* (Thiruvananthapuram: Mythri Books, 2010), 57.

¹¹² Ram Puniyani, *Communalism and Anti-Christian Violence* (Thiruvananthapuram: Mythri Books, 2010), 47.

fundamentalists. He states: "that someone who has spent years caring for patients of leprosy, instead of being thanked and appreciated as a role model, should be done to death in this manner is a monumental aberration from the traditions of tolerance and humanity for which India has been known."¹¹³

Christian converts from Hindu background are always under pressure and undergo economic sacrifice and face social discrimination. Government benefits and privileges of reservations which are allowed to the Hindu *dalits* (the low caste people), are denied to them when they convert into Christianity. They are incessantly compelled to return to Hinduism through reconversion, sometimes even the government machinery is used for the promotion of reconversion. In addition, Hindu fundamentalism determines the national policies and governmental actions. Now no foreign missionaries are allowed to enter into the country for missionary activities. Even the native Christian missionaries who work for the uplifting of the poor irrespective of caste and creed, are under strict surveillance and sometimes imprisoned due to the fabricated accusations of conversion. Nirmala Sisubhavan (child care centers instituted by Mother Teresa for orphans) are now forced to stop their charity because of governmental policies. Declaration of Christmas day as 'Good Governance Day' and making it an obligatory working day for the government employees is another example to cast out the Christian symbols from the national mosaic.

VIII

How to get out of this vicious circle of fanaticism? In the Indian context, it is necessary to strengthen the basis for building a nationalism of harmony; this requires a reformed religion which transcends religious, communal and secular ideological divisions and a recognition of our porosity to the Transcendent and of the unity of humanity. A positive traffic across the porous boundaries between religion and politics can lead to the mutual enrichment of both in India, where political life is tempered by the transcendental dimension of faith. This opens the doors of dialogue that presuppose a critical commitment to one's own religion coupled with an openness

¹¹³ K. R. Narayanan, *The Asian Age* (January 25, 1999).

to the religions of others. What is needed is a healthy blend of the inherent porosity of the Indian mind to the divine and the reformation of religious traditions, on the one hand, with its openness to alternative significations, and an openness to otherness and to the emergence of something altogether new, the not-yet represented. Achieving this blend can allow us to live with the other who is different, with what we do not fully know or understand, and thereby enable us to recognize the mysterious dimension of reality.

Note on the Contributors

William Desmond is David Cook Chair in Philosophy at Villanova University, and Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at the Institute of Philosophy, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. His work is primarily in metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics and the philosophy of religion. He is the author of many books, including the groundbreaking trilogy *Being and the Between* (1995), *Ethics and the Between* (2001), and *God and the Between* (2008). *Being and the Between* was winner of both the prestigious Prix Cardinal Mercier and the J.N. Findlay Award for best book in metaphysics. Other books include *Art and the Absolute* (1986); *Desire Dialectic and Otherness: An Essay on Origins* (1987); *Philosophy and Its Others: Ways of Being and Mind* (1990); *Beyond Hegel and Dialectic* (1992); *Perplexity and Ultimacy* (1995); *Hegel's God* (2003); *Art, Origins, Otherness: Between Art and Philosophy* also in (2003); as well as *Is There a Sabbath for Thought?: Between Religion and Philosophy* (2005). He has also edited five books and published more than 100 articles and book chapters. His book *The Intimate Strangeness of Being: Metaphysics after Dialectic* appeared in 2012, the same year in which the *William Desmond Reader* also appeared. His new book, *The Intimate Universal: The Hidden Porosity among Religion, Art, Philosophy and Politics* appeared with Columbia University Press 2016. He is Past President of the Hegel Society of America, the Metaphysical Society of America, and the American Catholic Philosophical Association.

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Philip Gonzales is an Affiliate Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Dallas. He defended his doctoral dissertation at KU Leuven in 2015 on the postmodern significance of Erich

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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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