

NETWORK

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture



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Conference Proceedings
The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
Berlin, March 2005

Edited by
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Contents

John Milbank, Nottingham	3
Liberality versus Liberalism	
Graham Ward, Manchester	18
Religion and Politics in the Films of Volker Schlöndorff	
Yves de Maeseneer, Leuven	28
The Art of Disappearing: Religion and Aestheticisation	
Gerhard Larcher, Graz	49
Response to "The Art of Disappearing: Religion and Aestheticisation" by Yves de Maeseneer	
Lieven Boeve, Leuven	55
Die Unterbrechung der Christlichen Tradition als Herausforderung für die Identität des Glaubens	
Patrick Riordan SJ, London	60
Religion and Politics: Conceptual Tools for Understanding Their Relationship	
Alexander Darius Ornella, Graz	86
Response to "Religion and Politics: Conceptual Tools for Understanding Their Relationship" by Patrick Riordan SJ	

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Liberality versus Liberalism

John Milbank, Nottingham

Today we live in very peculiar circumstances indeed. The welfare of this world is being wrecked by the ideology of neo-liberalism and yet its historic challengers –conservatism and socialism -- are in total disarray. Socialism, in particular, appears to be wrong-footed by the discovery that liberalism and not socialism is the bearer of 'modernity' and 'progress'. If the suspicion then arises that perhaps modernity and progress are themselves by no means on the side of justice, then socialists today characteristically begin to half-realise that their own traditions in their Marxist, Social Democratic and Fabian forms have been themselves too grounded in modes of thought that celebrate only utility and the supposedly 'natural' desires, goods and needs of isolated individuals.

For these reasons, there is no merit whatsoever in the contention of the ageing left (Habermas, Hobsbaum etc) that we are faced with an abandonment of progress and the enlightenment by a postmodern era. To the contrary, it is clear that what we are now faced with is rampant enlightenment, after the failure of secular ideologies derived from the 19th C – socialism, positivism, communism - that sought to some degree to *qualify* enlightenment individualism and formalism with organicism, distributive justice and socio-historical substance.

Instead, in the face of a very peculiar situation, we need to take the risk of thinking in an altogether new way that will take up the traditions of socialism less wedded to progress, historical inevitability, materialism and the State, and put them into debate with conservative anti-capitalist thematics and classical and Biblical political thought which may allow us to see the inherent restrictions of the parameters of modern social, political and economic reflection. Our perspective may remain basically a 'Left' one, but we need to consider the possibility that only a re-alignment of the Left with more primordial, 'classical' modes of thinking will now allow it to criticise currently emerging tyranny.

This must include at its centre an openness to religion and to the question of whether a just politics must refer beyond itself to transcendent norms. For this reason, in what follows I have undertaken the experiment of thinking through a Catholic Christian approach to the social sphere in the light of current reality, in the hope that this will have something to offer not just to Christians, but to a degree also to Jews, Muslims and people of no religious persuasion whatsoever. I do not choose to insult the latter by

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

concealing in any way the religious grounds of what I wish to say, nor my view that a predominantly secular culture will only sustain the neo-liberal catastrophe.

The documents of Vatican II, especially *Gaudium et Spes*, appear in retrospect to have been in some ways over-accepting of modern liberal democracy and market economics. This is historically understandable – since the Church needed to move beyond a previous endorsement of reactionary and sometimes absolutist monarchy, and static and hierarchical economic systems linked to unequal landholding.

Today though, we need to recognise that we are in a very different situation. First of all, recent events demonstrate that liberal democracy can itself devolve into a mode of tyranny. One can suggest that this is for a concatenation of reasons: an intrinsic indifference to truth as opposed to majority opinion, means in practice that the manipulation of opinion will usually carry the day. Then governments tend to discover that the manipulation of fear is more effective than the manipulation of promise, and this is in keeping with the central premises of liberalism which, as Pierre Manent says, are based in Manichean fashion upon the ontological primacy of evil and violence: at the beginning is a threatened individual, piece of property or racial terrain. This is *not* the same as an Augustinian acknowledgment of original sin, perversity and frailty – a hopeful doctrine since it affirms that all-pervasive evil for which we cannot really account (by saying for example with Rousseau that it is the fault of private property or social association as such) is yet all the same a contingent intrusion upon reality, which can one day be fully overcome through the lure of the truly desirable which is transcendent goodness (and that itself, in the mode of grace, now aids us), Liberalism instead begins with a disguised naturalisation of original sin as original egotism: our own egotism which we seek to nurture, and still more the egotism of the other against which we need protection.



Thus increasingly, a specifically liberal politics (and not, as so many journalists fondly think, its perversion) revolves round a supposed guarding against alien elements: the terrorist, the refugee, the person of another race, the foreigner, the criminal. Populism seems more and more to be an inevitable drift of unqualified liberal

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

democracy. A purported defence of the latter is itself deployed in order to justify the suspending of democratic decision-making and civil liberties. For the reasons just seen, this is not just an extrinsic and reactionary threat to liberal values: to the contrary it is liberalism itself that tends to cancel those values of liberality (fair trial, right to a defence, assumed innocence, *habeas corpus*, a measure of free speech and free enquiry, good treatment of the convicted) which it has *taken over*, but which as a matter of historical record it did not invent, since they derive rather from Roman and Germanic law transformed by the infusion of the Christian notion of charity, which in certain dimensions means a generous giving of the benefit of the doubt, as well as succour even to the accused or wicked. For if the ultimate thing to be respected is simply individual security and freedom of choice (which is not to say that these should not be accorded penultimate respect) then almost any suspensions of normal legality can tend to be legitimated in the name of these values. In the end, liberalism takes this sinister turn when all that it endorses is the free market along with the nation-state as a competitive unit. Government will then tend to become entirely a policing and military function as JG Fichte (favourably!) anticipated. For with the decay of all tacit constraints embedded in family, locality and mediating institutions between the individual and the State, it is inevitable that the operation of economic and civil rules that no individual has any longer any interest in enforcing (since she is socially defined only as a lone chooser and self-seeker) will be ruthlessly and ever-more exhaustively imposed by a State that will become totalitarian in a new mode. Moreover, the obsessive pursuit of security against terror and crime will only ensure that terror and crime become more sophisticated and subtly effective: we have entered a vicious global spiral.

In the face of this neo-liberal slide into despotism, Catholic Christianity needs once more to proclaim with the classical tradition it carries – and which tended to predict just such a slide of a ‘democratic’ ethos -- that government is properly mixed. Democracy can only function without manipulation of opinion if it is balanced by an ‘aristocratic’ element of the pursuit of truth and virtue for their own sake and by a ‘monarchic’ sense of an architectonic imposition of intrinsic justice that is unmoved by either the prejudices of the few or those of the many. In addition, the Church needs boldly to teach that the only justification for democracy is theological: since the people is potentially the *ecclesia*, and since nature always anticipates grace, truth lies finally dispersed amongst the people (although they need the initial guidance of the virtuous) because the Holy Spirit speaks through the voice of all.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
Conference Proceedings
The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
Berlin, March 2005

But to say this is to ask that we subordinate contract to gift. A government may be contractually legitimate as elected and its laws may be legitimate as proceeding from sovereign power, but such arrangements can be formally correct and yet lead to tyranny – as the Nazi example and now the Bush example so clearly show. So beyond this it needs to be supposed that the truth lies with the people somewhat in the way that truth lies in the Church for St Paul: namely that the body of Christ receives from the Holy Spirit who is life and gift a life of circulation which is the exchange of gifts. Different people and groups have different talents and insights – these they share for the good of the whole body. The people give their goods to the head of the Church who is Christ: in like manner the people should give their gifts of insight and talent to the sovereign representative who acts in their name.

Inversely the sovereign power must think of itself as distributing gifts – gifts of good governance and ordering, not simply as imposing a fiat in order to expand the utility and productiveness of a nation-state. This is an outrageous notion – for example Blair's racist view that Britain should only accept 'skilled' immigrants and refugees who can increase the gross national product. A government that gives must pursue the intrinsic fulfilment of its citizens. To rule in this way means that the subjects of rule can participate in this ruling, can appropriate its task to themselves. To be ruled renders them indeed 'subjects' even in the ontological sense, since thereby something is proposed to them that can form their own good if they respond to it. And no-one is self-originated.

This means that to be a subject of a 'crown' (in an extended sense) is actually a more radical idea than to be a citizen of a republic in the contractualist sense of Rousseau (not necessarily in the ancient Roman sense). For the citizen is a natural individual before the State comes into being and only a citizen as co-composing the state. This means that he is always implicitly threatened by what Giorgio Agamben calls 'the state of the exception': if he lapses back into being a natural individual like the denizens of Guantanamo Bay, he now lacks all human dignity. This will only be granted to him as long as the contractual co-composition of the State holds good. By contrast, if one has what one may metaphorically describe as 'constitutional monarchy' (I am not necessarily advocating it in the literal sense) then according to natural law and not just natural right, the sovereign authority is only 'subjecting' men because it is obliged to offer them the gift of good co-ordination of diverse talents and needs. St Paul desacralised and redefined human rule as only concerned with justice and not with the protection of religious power or a domain – hence no human animal can fall outside this beneficent subjecting (in principle) which is in excess of contract. For this reason, the Christian principles of polity stand totally opposed to any idea of the 'nation state' as the ultimate unit

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

and rather favour at once the natural pre-given 'region' on the one hand, and the universal human cosmopolis on the other.

This positive feature of 'monarchy' does not of course mean that the 'monarchic' power should not be elected. To the contrary, it should be regarded as able to give rule because it has first been constituted by the mass donation of varied talents and points of view.

This perspective however, should encourage us to revisit notions of 'corporate' authority that are characteristic of Catholic thought and linked with the principle of subsidiarity. Not all bonding and grouping happens at the central level and there is not first of all an aggregate of isolated individuals. To the contrary, people forever form micro-social bodies, and governments should treat people not according to formal abstraction but as they are – in regions, metiers, local cultures, religious bodies etc. We will not be able peaceably to accommodate Islam within Europe if we do not treat Islam as a 'political' body and not just as a mass of individual believers – a notion which is foreign to Islam itself.

To re-insist on monarchic, aristocratic and corporate dimensions is in one sense conservative. Yet I am in fact a socialist of sortsmy case is rather that democracy will collapse into sophistic manipulation as Plato taught, if it is not balanced by the element of 'education in time' which requires a certain constantly self-cancelling hierarchy. The hierarchies of liberalism are in fact absolute spatial hierarchies of fixed power: one can climb up the ladder of power but only to displace someone else. The purpose of control here is simply utility and not the sharing of excellence. By contrast, the genuine spiritual hierarchy (after Dionysius the Areopagite) is a hierarchy that for human spiritual beings is endemic to time: in which pupil may overtake master and yet there should be no jealousy of the hierarch for the temporarily subordinate because excellence is intrinsically shareable. Today, especially in Britain, all education is being subordinated to politics and economics. But a Catholic view should teach just the reverse: all politics and economics should be only for the sake of *paideia*.

This means: make time equal to space or even primary. Unqualified democracy has a kind of spatial bias -- it supposes that we are all contracting individuals within a sort of eternalised agora. But this is to deny *life* – indeed it is part of the culture of death of which the Pope speaks – for life flows as a perpetual *glissando* through time. Life is not democratic, because it is both spontaneously creative and giving: with the arrived child, something new emerges. We must give to this child nurture, but from the outset the child reverses this hierarchy by revealing his unique creative power of response. No democratic contract can be involved here: pure

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

democracy tends to deny the sanctity of life, the importance of the child, the procedure beyond mere political participation to old age and death - its 'normal' person is rather the freely choosing and contracting autonomous 31 year old. But *no* human person is forever like this; it is rather only a moment in a coming to be and passing away.

Politics subordinate to education - and so to the various traditions of wisdom, including religious traditions which can alone undertake a real *paideia* - can be truer to life as such, and also will be bound to ask questions about the final end of life. For only if life is deemed to have such a final end can every moment of life in fact be granted value. At this point it is not, after all, that one is advocating the temporal dimension over the spatial one. Nor an aristocracy of *paideia* over a democracy of the *agora*. Instead, the point is that pure spatialisation will *also* tend to subordinate every given spatial form to the process of time leading towards the future. But not the time of gift: rather the empty time of pointless accumulation of a new spatial hoard of 'wealth'. By contrast, time can only be the time of gift where time is providing gradually the way to eternity beyond time. From this perspective every formed spatial stage of the way has an aesthetic value in itself and is not subordinate to future production.

Hence pure contractual democracy is spatial and yet in fact it nihilistically evacuates material space in favour of an abstract time always to come. On the other hand, a mixed government grounded in eternal law actually sanctifies space in its actual temporality and does not subordinate it to the pure *glissando* of mere process.

So in the face of the crisis of liberal democracy, Catholic Christian thought (including Roman Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox and even some Reformed strands) needs to return to certain older themes of its critique of liberalism, but for radical and not conservative reasons. The 'modernity' of liberalism has only delivered mass poverty, inequality, erosion of freely associating bodies beneath the level of the State and ecological dereliction of the earth - and now, without the compensating threat of communism, it has abolished the rights and dignity of the worker, ensured that women are workplace as well as domestic and erotic slaves, and finally started to remove the ancient rights of the individual which long precede the creed of liberalism itself (such as *habeas corpus* in Anglo-Saxon law) and are grounded in the dignity of the person rather than the 'self-ownership' of autonomous liberal man (sic).

The only creed which tried, often valiantly, to challenge this multiple impoverishment - communism - did so only in the name of the subordination of all to the future productivity of the nation, and ignored people's need's for an aesthetic and religious relationship to

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

each other and to nature. What must rather challenge liberalism is a truer 'liberality' in the literal sense of a creed of generosity which would suppose, indeed, that societies are more fundamentally bound together by mutual generosity than by contract - this being a thesis anciently investigated by Seneca in his *De Beneficiis* and in modernity again reinstated by Marcel Mauss.

But considerations about gift are relevant also to a second context for contemporary social reflection. This concerns the economic realm. Today we live under the tyranny of an unrestricted capitalist market. We have abandoned the Marxist view that this market must inevitably collapse and evolve into socialism. So we have thereby abandoned immanent, secular, historicist hope. But we have also largely abandoned the social democratic idea that the capitalist market can be mitigated: here a Marxist analysis still largely holds good: social democracy was in the capitalistic interest for a phase which required a Keynesian promotion of demand; but it was abandoned when labour demanded too much and when the generation of profits became problematic. It is true that neo-liberalism has scarcely solved the problems of slow productive growth since the 1950's, but nevertheless the inherent logic of capital accumulation seems to prevent any return to social democratic solutions.

Here again, Catholic social thought needs to remain true to its own genius which has always insisted that solutions do not lie either in the purely capitalist market nor with the centralised state. There is in fact no 'pure' capitalism, only degrees of this. Small-scale local capitalist economies are only in truth semi-capitalist, because they often exhibit a competition for excellence but not a mutually-abolishing drive of companies towards monopoly (as was rightly argued by Fernand Braudel). This is because in such cases - e.g. parts of North Italy and of Germany - a certain local culture of design excellence ensures that there is *no* pursuit of production *only* to make money nor any exchange of commodities *only* determined by supply and demand and not also by a shared recognition of quality such that supply and demand plus the accumulation of capital for future and offering of loans at interest for reasonable social benefit themselves are involved in an exchange in what is taken to be inherent value and not just formal, market-determined value. (This is not at all to deny that there will always be a never foreclosed *debate* as to what constitutes intrinsic value.)

Given such a consideration, one can see that an element of 'gift-exchange' can remain even within the modern market economy. Producers of well-designed things do not just contract with consumers. The latter give them effectively counter-gifts of

sustenance in return for the gifts of intrinsically good things, even though this is mediated by money.

From this example one can suggest that more of the economy could be like this. This requires indeed that local production is favoured of locally suitable things linked to local skills. We should import and export only what we have to or what truly can only come from elsewhere – for I am not advocating asceticism! Rather the true hedonism of the genuine and its interchange. But if we receive only the exotic from elsewhere, then here too there can be a form of gift-exchange in operation. In actual fact global communications and transport favour this: within a global village those in Europe wishing to receive the good gift of organically-farmed coffee can in exchange pay a fair price for this which is a counter-gift ensuring that producers should not be exploited.

It is also likely that Islam and Judaism will be sympathetic to this way of looking at things and in fact the best hope for Europe is the re-emergence, beyond the dominance of a worn-out *Aufklärung*, of a certain religiously informed but shared philosophic culture built around a wisdom tradition that re-awakens the old Western fusion of Biblical with neoplatonic (Platonic plus Aristotelian and Stoic elements) tradition. This alone will be able to ground the possibility of a future achievement of social participation that is a real consensus (rather than the liberal semi-suspended warfare of plural co-existence) in a belief in ontological participation of the temporal in eternal peace and the hope for a final eschatological disclosure of this peace here on earth.

Things like the economy of fair-trade coffee may not sound dramatic or decisive and indeed they remain pathetically marginal, but nevertheless the extension of such gift-exchange bit by bit is the sure way forward rather than revolution, government action or capitalistic solutions. Groups linking across the globe can ensure that something is given back to the earth and that genuine goods go into planetary circulation. We need once again to form systematic links between producer and consumer co-operatives and we need to see an emergence of cooperative banking (perhaps supervised by Church, Islamic and Jewish bodies) to regulate and adjudicate the interactions between many different modes of cooperative endeavour. Only this will correct the mistake of all our current politics: namely to suppose that the 'free market' is a given which should be either extended or inhibited and balanced. For if the upshots of the free-market are intrinsically unjust, then 'correcting' this through another welfare economy is only a mode of resignation; moreover its task is sisyphian and periodically doomed to go under with every economic downturn (British Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown as Sisyphus, always expostulating, puffing and blowing).

Instead we need a different sort of market: a re-subordination of money transaction to a new mode of universal gift-exchange. This requires that in every economic exchange of labour or commodity there is always a negotiation of ethical value at issue. Indeed, economic value should only be ethical value, while inversely ethical value should be seen as emerging from the supply and demand of intrinsic gifts.

For ethical value is not for Christianity just 'virtue': rather it is charity and therefore it is the forging of bonds through giving and receiving. Virtue is here ecstasised and therefore its context ceases to be simply as for Aristotle, political, but rather becomes, as for St Paul also economic – the virtue of a new 'social' in the middle realm between *polis* and *oikos* that is equally concerned with political just distribution and with domestic care and nurture (the equality of women which stems from Paul, even though he could not see how far this must go, has profoundly to do with this) St Paul does not mention *arete* though he does talk of the person who is *phronimos*. The latter though, is now more a giver and receiver of gifts as *Phillipians* especially shows. For St Paul, in speaking of *ecclesia*, proposes a new sort of *polis* which can counteract and even eventually subsume the Roman empire – as the heirs of Abraham, Moses and Plato must today subsume the American one. This new *polis*, as Bruno Blumenfeld shows, as with Philo, is at once monarchic, headed by Christ, and drastically democratic in a participatory sense – the people are the body of the King; the King can only act through the people. Since virtue is now newly to do with the wisdom of love, virtue with Christianity gets democratised and is indeed dispersed amongst the diverse gifts of the body of Christ which as talents also need to be constantly exchanged to realise the solidarity of the whole. As much later in Christian history (the 17thC) Pierre Bérulle suggested (though too much in the sense of Royal absolutism) human kingly rule is entirely Christological, since it echoes the kenotic and deificatory exchange of worshipping and worshipped (the King manifesting in a faint degree the glory of divine rule as such) that is fused in one corpus by the Incarnation.

The latter event creates a new paracosmic reality – a new order somehow embracing both God and the Creation and a new order which abolishes the previous dominance and semi-universality of the law, of *torah*, *lex* and *nomos* and so of all political process as such. The participation of the creation in God through the newly realised cosmic body of Christ ruled by the new order of love is utterly self-abandoning toward the good of the community of *esse* (as for Aquinas, there is only one divine *esse* in Christ for Bérulle). And it meets all the time with an equivalent divine kenosis: such that God now is – or is also and so is even in himself – simply a sharing of himself with the Creation, and yet this by free gift of love

and not by inexorable fate of imminent pantheistic process which would tend always to appropriate the beings of the Creation. No. As created, things exceed both temporal process and fixed form, out of these they constantly weave the exchange of *relation*, and relation persists all the way down, because the created thing is at bottom outside itself as relation to another, namely God who gives it to be. But the God who creates affirms this within himself as generation of the *Logos*, and affirms also the worshipping response of the Creation within himself as the procession of the Holy Spirit.

Yet to this infinite good within the Trinity is added the ecstatic mysterious 'extra' of finite dependence and finite worship. God, as both Philo and Bérulle in different eras said, lacks worship of himself, since he does not, as ontological rather than ontic, depend even on himself anymore than he causes himself. Yet in the Incarnation, suggests Bérulle, God ceases to lack even this and in coming to share God's life we are returned by God in Christ always back to specifically finite excellence. The invisible points back to the visible as well as the other way round, as Maximus the Confessor says in his *Mystagogy*.



So with the Incarnation, for all that God, it seems, can receive nothing, it happens that God comes to receive our worship of himself by joining to the personhood of the *Logos* our human worship. Thus in some mysterious way, it is not just that the finite receives in a unilateral way the infinite, nor that the finite returns to the infinite a unilateral praise. It is now rather true that there is an infinite-finite exchange of gifts – as St John of the Cross affirmed was the case in his experience of deification. And in this way Christ in now King upon the earth and so it follows that there should be always a fusion of democratic dispersal with monarchic liberality and objectivity. Indeed this should run almost in the direction of monarchic anarchy, as clearly recommended by Tolkien in the *Lord of the Rings* (no law in the Shire but the orderly echo of remote kingship). Property, as Hilaire Belloc taught, needs to be as widely and equally dispersed as possible in order to ensure that people have real creative liberty, little interest in greed and a tendency to spontaneously form self-regulating mechanisms of exchange of benefits. Today very few people, even middle class 'well-off' people, possess any real property as opposed to a mass of temporary commodities that they have been more or less constrained into

buying. For all the neo-liberal talk of freedom, it is not an accident that so few are allowed the kind of property that permits one to leave a creative mark in the world. This is above all true of land – but we are made to pay most dearly of all and on almost life-time lease for the very space in which it is possible to sleep, make love, be born, die, prepare food, engage in play and in the arts. We should instead provide people as widely as possible with real property, commencing with landed property itself. As I have just indicated, property that is to do with self-fulfilment rather than accumulation is the foundation for a free giving and receiving that begins to compose a wider social household. But here gift-exchange is not just a mode of economy, but also a mode of politics. Its spontaneous formation of an ethos and of tacit conventions restricts, without entirely removing, the need for the operation of codified and enforceable law – though this is still somewhat required, especially to prevent any breaking of the norms of wide dispersal. Monarchy in some sense, as Belloc like Tolkien taught, enters into the picture here, because mass popular movements along with the centralising ambitions of the few can – as in fact occurred in the early modern period - tend to subvert the more genuine operation of local participatory democracy that is linked to the dispersal of property whether in town or countryside (in the Mediaeval case, especially in the towns).

What is the *ecclesia*? For St Paul it seems to be a kind of universal tribalism of gift-exchange over against both local polis and universal empire. But how can this be? Gift-exchange is normally of sacred things amongst friends. With strangers one needs formal rules of contract to ensure mutual benefit. Things exchanged here get secularised. How can one return to tribalism and exchange gifts with strangers? Well, I have already indicated that there may be a virtuous dialectic at work here: the more we become strangers also the more potentially at least we become universal neighbours. We cannot achieve this as isolated individuals, but we can achieve this if across the globe localities and kinship groups still retain identity – as they tend to do, to assert themselves against anonymity – and yet ceaselessly exchange this with other groups: the way for example different folk musics remain themselves and yet constantly borrow from other folk musics - like English Elizabethan folk music from Celtic and Iberian sources. And today this goes on of course far more.

But there is another and specifically theological point. Christianity renders all objects sacred: everything is a sign of God and of his love. Moreover in Christ this is *shown again*, and he provides the *idiom* for rendering all sacred. Hence there need be no more neutral commodities just as there are no more strangers – not because we are citizens, even of *cosmopolis*, but because we are sons, daughters, and brothers in Adam and now in the new Adam who is

Christ. We are literally one kin, as the Middle Ages saw it – one kin both physical and spiritual; one kin under Christ. Thus we live by an exchange of blood and charity as just this exchanging.

But is it? Is not charity the free one-way gift? But this makes love always sacrifice. But what is sacrifice, the ultimate free one-way gesture of love for? Surely to re-establish exchange. In this way sacrifice by no means escapes an economy, nor should it. And yet in gift-exchange, though there is equivalent return, the same thing does not come back. Something passes never to return at all. And for this reason no counter-gift ever cancels a debt but always inaugurates a new one. In the New Testament one finds both repeated unease (in both the gospels and the epistles) about gift-exchange as something pursued for the power of the benefactor, unlike the grace of God, and yet at the same time a continued insistence that God's grace must be actively received and responded to and that the mediators of this grace, like St Paul himself, deserve acknowledgment and support. The tension between these two stresses underlies many tortured passages in his writings.

For this reason the gift is not a straight line, but nor is it a closed circle. Rather it is a spiral or a strange loop. Beyond the law of non-contradiction it is both unilateral and reciprocal. It spirals on and on, and there is no first free gift because to give to another one must have received at least her presence. Likewise one cannot be grateful without a gesture which is already a counter-gift.

And when one gives, for that unilateral instance, one is a monarch. One stands, as it were, hierarchically above the one who cannot choose what you are going to give to him, say to him etc. No contractual liberalism can ever bind the oscillating aristocracy of mere conversation. Likewise when one receives, for that instance one is a monarch receiving tribute, even if the roles will be reversed in the next instance. Thus to give, or to receive, is hierarchically and unilaterally to help continue a process that is nonetheless fundamentally democratic and reciprocal. Indeed charity as welfare and equity have always been the prerogative of kings and empires rather than city-states all the way from Babylon to Elizabethan England. But charity is not just welfare, it is also, as the Middle Ages taught, the festive 'between' that binds people, like the state of grace between the beggar who blesses you and you who give your coin to the beggar.

We today, have totally divided reciprocal market contract from private free giving. And yet the latter remains secretly a contract and the former is also like the crossing of two unilateral gifts whose objects in no way mingle. Our situation therefore has crazy undercurrents that go unrecognised. Giving is, by contrast, only

really free and liberal where it respects and helps further to create reciprocal norms. Contract is only really fair where there is a judged equivalence of objects and also a free mutual promotion by donation of the welfare of the exchanging parties.

Judged equivalence of objects. If all objects are sacred then, as for primitives, they possess a kind of animated force. Objects or their equivalents must return because they have in some sense personality. And this is the ecological dimension of gift-exchange. Humans identify themselves through the production and exchange of things. Marx was right. So inversely things are imbued with the story of human comings and goings. Objects naturally carry memories and tell stories. Only commodified ones don't – or they tell shameful tales which they also conceal. In a modest way even the packet of fair-trade coffee can start again to be a mythical object with personality.

For Catholic Christians, this is as it should be. Everything is sacramental; everything tells of the glory of Christ and therefore every economy is part of the economy of salvation and every process of production and exchange prepares the elements of the cosmic eucharist. This was true for St Paul. His thought about grace is indissociable from his thought about the human exchange of talents and of material benefits. But the latter can only be a just exchange where there are constantly re-negotiated and agreed upon standards concerning the human common good: of what should be produced and with what standards; of what should be rewarded and to what degree for the sake of further beneficial (to herself and the community) action by individuals. 'To each according to his needs and from each according to his means' should still be our aim, but outside a completely crass materialism the question is about legitimate and desirable needs and means and the ordering of diverse needs and means. Here the crucial paradox so often ignored by socialists (but not by John Ruskin) is that only where there is an agreed hierarchy of values, sustained by the constantly self-cancelling hierarchy of education, can there actually be an equal sharing (according to a continuous social judgement as to who will most benefit from such and such a gift etc) of what is agreed to be valuable. Without such an agreement, sustained through the operation of professional guilds and associations as well as co-operative credit unions and banks, there can only be market mediation of an anarchy of desires – of course ensuring the triumph of a hierarchy of sheer power and the secret commanding of people's desires by manipulation.

For where there is no public recognition of the primacy of absolute good as grounded in something super-human, then democracy becomes impossible, for it is no longer supposed that one should even *search* for the intrinsically desirable. It then follows that

people can only find out what they 'should' desire, or even about the possible objects of desire from the very 'mass' processes that are supposed to represent only the general desires of the people. Liberal democracy is then doomed to specularity: the represented themselves only represent to themselves the spectacle of representation. This is why there is no truth in the Marxist assumption that freed from the shackles of oppression people will 'by reason' choose equality and justice. To the contrary, in the light of a mere reason that is not also vision, *eros* and faith, people may well choose to prefer the petty triumphs and superiorities of a brutally hierarchic *agon* of power or the sheer excitement of a social spectacle in which they may potentially be exhibited in triumph. This is exactly why the vast numbers of the American poor are not waiting to rise up in revolt.

For the same reason, 'pure' democracy would be a *mise en abyme*. One would have to have endless 'primaries' before 'primaries'. Instead, in reality, at the end of the line always, someone puts herself forward as a 'candidate' (in some sense), someone stands up and says something that no-one has voted on or contractually agreed that she should say. Gift always precedes both choice and contract because no formal pre-arrangements can entirely control the content of what we impose upon others in our words and symbolic actions which inevitably sway them in a certain fashion. In the United States part of the problem is that there is a yearning for the madness of pure democracy: thus there is no 'monarchic' body that organises boundaries of voting districts, because this would be considered 'undemocratic'. In consequence this task is left to the reigning political party and the resultant gerrymandering is seen as just a fact of life. In this way the lure of the democratic abyss abolishes democracy, whereas some admission of aristocratic and monarchic principles (as in Canada, for example) actually secure the space of the possibility of democracy.

We need then, in the Europe and the World of the future, a new conception of the economy as exchange of gifts in the sense of both talents and valued objects that blend material benefit with sacramental significance. We need also to encourage a new post-liberal participatory democracy that is enabled by the aristocracy of an education that seeks after the common good and absolute transcendent truth. Finally, we need to see that it is equally enabled by a monarchic principle which permits a unified power at the limit to intervene in the name of non-codifiable equity - the liberal alternative to this being the brutal exclusion of those, like the inmates of Guantanamo Bay, who escape the nets of codes and are therefore deemed to be sub-human.

Does all this sound fantastic? No, the fantastic is what we have: an economy that destroys life, babies, childhood, adventure, locality, beauty, the exotic, the erotic, people and the planet itself.

Moreover, if we refuse a profound and subtle theological social carapace, we will not necessarily recover secularity in the future. Instead, we may witness the effective triumph (in power if not in numbers) of religious fundamentalism - and especially Protestant fundamentalism - in cynical alliance with a liberal nihilism. For the formal emptiness of the liberal market and bureaucracy is now apparent to all. Its heart will be filled with something, and especially with a neo-Calvinistic creed that justifies this emptiness because cumulative success in the reckoning to oneself of its void sums is seen as a sign of favour with another eternal world that alone really matters – although that two is conceived in terms of preferential absolute success in contrast with absolute failure.

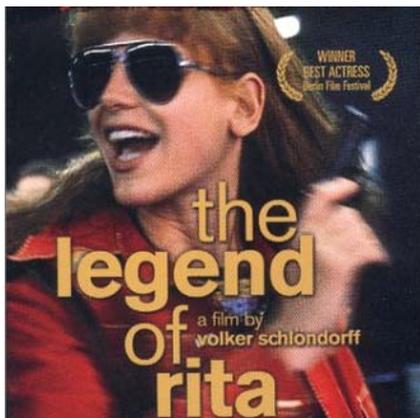
Most, including myself, have hitherto supposed that the religious conflicts in Ireland are an anachronistic echo, in a remote corner of Europe, of ancient European conflicts. But then why have they flared up again so recently (the latter half of the 20th C) and persisted so long? Is not Ireland somewhat like the United States, where a 'belated' avoidance of secular ideologies has turned imperceptibly into a foreshadowing of a time when those ideologies are exhausted? Here again, there is no progressive plot to history. What one has seen in the province of Ulster has often been a conflict between a bigoted, puritanical and hyper-evangelical neo-Calvinism on the one hand, and a largely reasonable, socially and political aspiring Catholicism on the other – the fanatics on this side have tended to be so for socio-political rather than religious reasons. Certainly not in any simple fashion, but nonetheless in a real one, it could be that the Irish conflict is in fact a harbinger of a wider, future and much more complex and many-faceted new struggle for the soul of Christianity itself which may yet dictate the future of Europe and even of the world.

Religion and Politics in the Films of Volker Schlöndorff¹

Graham Ward, Manchester

Der Neunte Tag is Schlöndorff's 17th film, although he has also adapted for television work by Bertoldt Brecht, Henry James and Arthur Miller. I can't possibly do justice in so short a time to this energetic output. I just want take one theme that has run persistently throughout this *oeuvre*, and that is a sustained reflection upon political life. Not that his films have an overt political thesis – although from interviews Schlöndorff is inclined towards socialism – rather his films are often about people caught up in or even caught between conflicting political ideas. They are films about aspirations and ideals and their specific socio-political contexts.

In an interview given to a journalist working for an international socialist movement, Schlöndorff says "I feel we need those films with a conscience to enrich our lives, that movies can do. To put things into their perspective, and to all of a sudden see that in other places and in other time people had similar struggles as we have right now, is enlightening, is enriching and is encouraging. We simply need that." What is interesting in this statement is the phrase "it is encouraging" – because in the politics of his film world it is the struggle to articulate a hope that emerges. And we find him engaged in a crusade for issues of justice in one of his first films, his 1968 film *Michael Kohlhaas: Der Rebell*. We find him struggling



with the issues of civil liberties and the preservation of democratic rights in his critically acclaimed adaptation of Heinrich Boell's story *Verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum*, made in 1975. In both of these films we see the emergence of a cinematic focus, what I want to the call the border-figure: someone not simply caught between two political worlds – like Katherina caught between ring-wing terrorism and liberal democracy; but

someone who is so caught because of conflicting aspirations for a better world. Here it's the vision of the Baader-Meinhof terrorist, in several other films including *Deutschland Im Herbst* (1976) it's the vision of the National Socialists, in *Death of a Salesman* it's Willie Lomax's belief in the American dream, in *The Handmaid's Tale* it's

¹ The film posters inserted throughout this essay are courtesy of www.amazon.com.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

the theocratic visions of Christian Evangelicals and the group who resist them, in *Der Neunte Tag* it's the moral and spiritual vision of the Catholic church.

In the conflicts of all these border characters some succeed like Kate in *The Handmaid's Tale*, but most fail like Rita in *Die Stille nach dem Schuß* or Willie Lomax. But what conflicts themselves articulate, what Schlöndorff's films articulate, is a western sense of post second world war uncertainty – uncertainly in terms of where to go. They articulate a certain political loss, and an unease at what fills the space created by this loss. In an interview given on the release of his 2000 film *Die Stille nach dem Schuß*, Schlöndorff expresses this loss in terms of the fall of the Berlin wall. He speaks about his own confusions about what happened to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe at the end of the twentieth century, confusions that arise because, to quote:

East Germany also had a special meaning for us. It was the Germany that after WWII was going to build a state that would never be fascist again. And it was a very honest attempt right after the war by people like Brecht who emigrated from the US, and others from elsewhere, to build a truly pacific, never again fascist state. Then due to the Cold War and the impossibility to realise a socialist economy, everything seemed to have gone wrong. But the founding fathers of that state really meant well.

What is lost then, the loss his films articulate is a polity in which peace, social and political justice reign. Here the vision is expressed in terms of the promises of socialism, but it is at this point that I want to push further and introduce another aspect of Schlöndorff's films highly relevant to understanding the film we have just watched.

Historically, social utopias whether found in Plato or Sir Thomas More are inseparable from an understanding of a transcendent good; the good from beyond this world, the good to which this world owes its very being. In other words, the common good that is shared among people - that organizes how we govern ourselves and the values we aspire to practising - is recognised to be possible only because there is an absolute form of goodness that guarantees those values. The common good to which a society aspires is then rooted and participates in the power of this transcendent goodness. In the west since at least the fourth *entyrft anno domini*, Christianity has articulated this goodness in terms of the operations of the triune God with respect to a kingdom to be established in this world. But the Christian vision is itself not just dependent upon the words of Christ or St. Paul. It takes up the Jewish legacy - particularly the peaceful coexistence of the twelve tribes that constituted a confederacy ruled over or under the dominion of the

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

Torah, the Law given by God. Historically the socialist visions that were the historical precedents that made possible the politics of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were all ultimately socio-political visions emerging from two streams – the Hellenic politics of Plato and Aristotle and the Judaeo-Christian tradition.



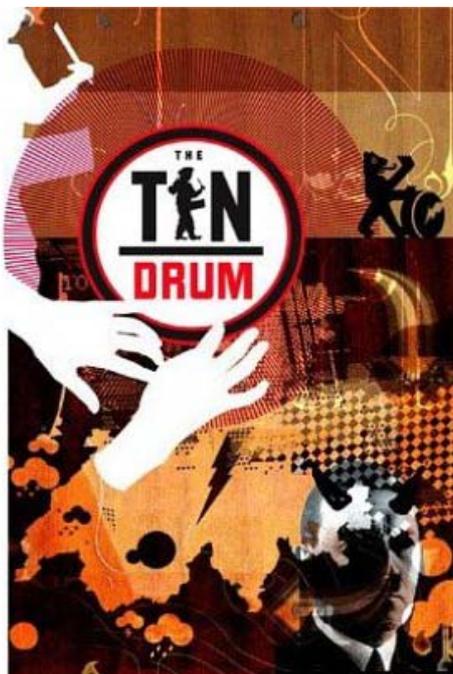
Now why this is important for Schlöndorff and *Der Neunte Tag* (among other films) is that it is not only politics that become the source for alternative and idealistic values, it is religion. One highly critical review of *Der Neunte Tag* saw it as little more than Catholic propaganda on behalf, particularly, of Luxembourg. It was financed to a certain extent by Luxembourg. But is it Catholic propaganda or perhaps an investigation into something more complex, the

pursuit of social values that are inextricably either both religious and political or secularised forms of the religious and political interface? What happens when we put the film we have just seen into a context that includes Schlöndorff's 1981 film *Die Fälschung* which is set among the warring factions of Christians and Palestinians in Beirut; his reflections not just upon the dangers and fascinations of fascism but also upon, as in *Die Blechtrommel* (1979), both Catholicism and Judaism; his representations of Jewish men, notably Swann in his adaptation of Proust's *Une Amore de Swann* and Paul Celan in his 1992 documentary *The Michael Nyman Songbook*; his presentations of right wing politics and American evangelicalism in *The Handmaid's Tale* made in the US in 1990; or the big budget film he is currently working on *Pope Joan* - a film about the ninth century woman who disguised herself as a man and occupied the papal throne for two years as Pope John Angelicus?

To answer this question and to begin to explore those borderland characters in Schlöndorff's films caught between political and religious visions, I have to be selective. So let's begin with two clips from *Die Blechtrommel*. (clip one)

Much depends in this scene on understanding the role Oskar plays - Oskar who threw himself down the cellar steps at the age of three to stop growing in the same year that Hitler came to power; Oskar who throws his drums into a grave and decides to start growing again at the age of twenty one, when Hitler falls from power. Critics

have been undecided about either the role this figure plays in Gunter Grass's novel or in Schlöndorff's film. But I suggest Oskar figures as an ironized myth that lies behind the rise of National Socialism - Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, the embodiment of the will-to-



power. For Oskar, who, you may recall, is gifted with a scream that can shatter glass is an utterly self-absorbed character who ultimately kills everyone around him except his grandmother. And when the Americans come to liberate Poland at the end of the film, and Oskar recovering from being hit on the head and beginning to grow once again, is put by his grandmother on a train out of Poland. The grandmother stands resolutely on the station platform while Oskar frantically shouts at her to get on board the train with him. But she stands unsmiling, unrepentant, glad to see the back of him. Oskar embodies a fascism that comes of age as he does, depicted in terms

of a dwarf - the exact reversal of Nietzsche's own characterisation of the *Übermensch* as the prophet Zarathustra coming down from the mountains to announce the death of God.

In the scene we have just watched, Oskar, now fourteen, is brought by his mother, Agnes (the Lamb) to confession. Agnes has just been visiting Markus, a Jewish toyshop owner, recently baptised, who provides Oskar with his drums. Agnes is married to a German, Matzerath, but is the incestuous lover of her cousin, Bronski, who is Matzerath's best friend. The affair is open and known by all. Markus has just told her that the Germans are coming and she should either reject Bronski because of his Polish nationality or run away with him to London. Rejecting Markus's offer she goes to confession. We have not seen her in a religious context before, but although the narrative focus is Agnes, the cinematic focus is upon Oskar. One notes the composition of the shot, with the confessional box in the centre, both Oskar and Agnes having to cross into the frame. The frame exists prior to them, solid and institutional. It does not open up before them, for them, as the camera tracks their approach to it. Furthermore, it is not the altar that is powerful in this frame, but the priesthood - not the Christian teachings, if you like, but the institution.

Oskar, jealous of anyone who takes his mother from him, at first genuflects, but cursorily, in imitation of his mother. His gaze at the

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

baby Jesus sets up a complex association in the film between the Virgin Mary and her son and Agnes confessing her adultery and Oskar - the monomaniac. The recognition of an affinity comes when, iconoclastically, Oskar climbs the altar, and for the only moment in the film, surrenders his drum and sticks, equipping the Jesus figure with them. What at first, because continually we forget Oskar's real age, seems a childish gesture of giving something to Christ, immediately is reversed as Oskar begins to taunt the Christ for his inability to do anything, rather like Satan tempting Christ to act in the wilderness. The power of Christ is nothing compared to Oskar's power to change the circumstances around him. The desecration becomes aggressive, tearing apart of the sacrament of confession so that Agnes receives no absolution.

The priest immediately acts, snatching Oskar from the altar and hitting him - the only time in the film Oskar is disciplined. The church it seems is again in command, having wrested itself from the destructive absolutism of Oskar's rule. But immediately Agnes asks what she can do with the child. The priest who at first has resisted Oskar's tyranny with a violent force of his own, suddenly withdraws - suggesting the only hope lies in prayer. Now whether this is a good theological answer, the answer a priest might well suggest, for a fallen world stands in need of a supernatural grace - there is no doubt that we, the audience, are to sense the church has failed Agnes, and therefore, politically, failed to address the tyranny of Oskar as the will to power, growing ever stronger in Poland. Furthermore, Oskar's face-to-face with the Christ reveals a deep affinity between the religious and the political - a demonic messianism informs Oskar's will-to-power that stands as a counterpart to the humility of Christ. It also sets up one of the most common *mise-en-scene* oder *Inszenierung* of politics: the one who is commanding and the one who is obeying; the one who has and the one who lacks power. We will see this played out further in Schlöndorff's *The Handmaid's Tale* and through *Der neunte Tag*.

But to return to the theme I am sketching here Agnes is a borderland character, torn between two men, torn between a loyalty to Poland or Germany, torn between the ideals of love for the mild mannered and peacekeeping Bronski and the sinister self-absorption of Oskar, looks for another place. That other place may not be available - or available only as death - but there remains something specifically religious about this alternative place. For, lacking absolution, Agnes kills herself by eating fish. In an interview Schlöndorff explicitly draws attention to the fish symbolism. It represents, he says, Christianity. Agnes then undergoes a certain ludic passion. In the face of her difficult and impossible situation she internalizes Christ in an ironised eucharist. Here is a sacred space, like the one in the sacrament of confession. It is seemingly acting out a withdrawal from the social and political, but what is

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

interesting is the way Schlöndorff shows how that separation of the religious and the political is a false one. The Church cannot withdraw or, rather, by its withdrawal it fails the social which is itself a political act for it is, albeit passively, a surrender to the dominating forces. We come across this again, of course in *Der Neunte Tag*.

But I want to be clear about something here - it is the Church as an institution that is the focus of that scene we have just viewed, its priests and its liturgical practices, not the Christian faith itself. Schlöndorff's film is not an attack upon religion and what it might inspire. The other religion portrayed in the film is Judaism. For we see, as the Nazi party within Poland grows stronger, the setting fire to the Danzig synagogue and the smashing of shop windows belonging to Jews. So look at this scene, for example, later in the film. Agnes is dead. At her funeral Markus appears from behind a tree but is cruelly dragged away by two Nazi guests at the graveside because he is a Jewboy. But when the perfunctory service is over and the others are feasting, Agnes being forgotten, Markus returns to the graveside: (clip two).

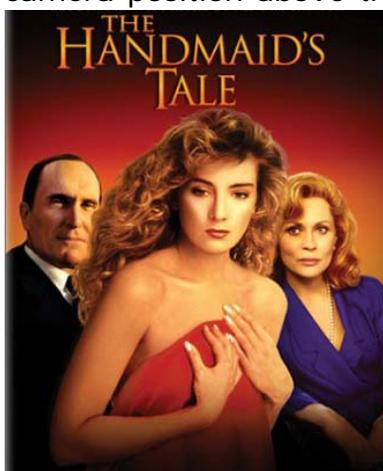
The baptised Markus intones a prayer at the graveside in Hebrew. No such prayers were offered, or shown to be offered, at the earlier funeral. There the camera, situated in the grave, focussed on Oskar's autistic drumming in the silent hole. Here the scene is shot from the side to allow a second figure to enter - the madman who gets alms in the churchyard from people who are passing by. The madman, again another Nietzschean figure, closes in quietly and respectfully, and in a film that is frequently surreal and deliberately filmed with distortion, the ironies and inversions, like the madman, are kept at bay, kept at a distance. What we have here is a brief glimpse into a bravery, a love and resistance, rooted in a Jewish faith and liturgy that is never developed in the film. For this too is a political act. It is his own death also that Markus is staring at, for the next time we see him he is slumped across a desk in his shop, having committed suicide like Agnes. Suicide being a figure for a capitulation to what is no longer possible: an alternative. But it is as if here in this scene, in the Hebrew Kaddish, a memorial prayer for the dead, a new possibility is found - outside the perversions of the narrative and the surreal cinematography. And although it is no more effective than the priest's injunction to Agnes to pray - in fact, it is a performance of the priest's injunctions - we do not, as an audience, feel this act is ineffective because it is tonally and aesthetically effective.

Let's move forward now in Schlöndorff's career to his major success at the US box-office, with his adaptation of Margaret Atwood's novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*. The same ironic inversions are evident, for we are in the land of Gilead. This is a land flowing with milk and

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

honey in the Hebrew Scriptures. Here it is a land, a republic that has survived a major ecological and political disaster. The disasters have sterilized most of the American population and fertile women are sort out like livestock and made handmaids of both God and country. For without children there will be no future republic. Kate has been captured and, because she is fertile, she is being forced into being such a handmaid. We take up the film near the beginning with the initiation ceremony. (Clip 3).

The co-implication of religion and politics is nowhere more evident in Schlöndorff's work before the film we have just seen tonight than in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Most of this initiation scene is shot from a camera position above the heads of the women, a camera position then occupied by the priest. There is an interesting comparison to be made between Schlöndorff's representations of priesthood in *Die Blechtrommel*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Der neunte Tag*.



between Schlöndorff's representations of priesthood in *Die Blechtrommel*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Der neunte Tag*. The overweight and somewhat pompous priest in the first film is replaced in this by a blonde-haired, muscular matinee idol. His liturgical clothes – the liturgical colour worn for Easter and celebrations like weddings – contrast with the blue of the sterile middle-class matrons and the red of the servile, fertile maids. Colour segregates and this is a land of strict

hierarchical apartheid, the powerful and male, the powerless and female. It is a fascism mapped even more closely onto the religious – civil religion itself as totalitarian; a biblical religion but quite remarkably a religion of the Old Testament. It is a religion without Christ, despite all the liturgical and ecclesial setting. The impotence of the church in *Die Blechtrommel* is reversed; the church is now in power.

What is interesting for my own theme of the borderland character is the way Kate is caught between obedience and disobedience. Her friend, Moira, is the one who mocks a fainting fit in a plan to escape the Republic by sucking the cocks of the ambulance drivers. It doesn't work, though later when Moira is returned Kate helps her again to escape – while she herself makes no attempt. There is much in the film to show the world beyond the Republic is in a poor chaotic state, America in anarchy. Gilead is a genuine attempt to create a new world, a kingdom of God, a somewhat suburban paradise – the flip side being the segregation, the violent discipline and the use of unmerciful, indiscriminate power on those who don't play the game. Kate plays the game, having sex several times with the Commander – who wants a child. She plays along not because she is happy with the game but there are no horizons that open up

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

beyond it – other than glimpses of her own intellectual superiority. But ultimately, pregnant by the Commander's chauffeur (who she loves – this is Hollywood, not European cinema) she makes her decision to escape. But her escape is also a betrayal – of the father of her child-to-be. Just as Agnes's suicidal escape and the grandmother's escape from Oskar at the end of *Die Blechtrommel*, are betrayals. And some betrayals have just to be lived with – for the world Schlöndorff portrays is fallen and not easily redeemable. So the final shots of *The Handmaid's Tale* are not particularly comforting, even for Hollywood: Kate waits in a battered caravan for her child to be born. Yes, she has won her freedom at a certain price, but the world she escapes to is red, bruised, dirty, and heavy with post-apocalyptic clouds. Gone are the gardens created in Gilead – even if the gardens mapped out a prison.

It is into the context of Schlöndorff's wrestling with the political and the religious horizons of the political that we must place *Der Neunte Tag*. For once more we have borderland figures caught between conflicting visions of the common good, and their guilt that whatever they do is not going to realise this good unequivocally. Something will always be betrayed. But there is something different in this film: first Kremer does not escape (he returns to the camp because it is impossible to endure the conditions of remaining outside the camp. Secondly, the conflicts of the borderland figure is reduplicated – for *Untersturmfuehrer* Gebhard is Kremer's *Doppoelganger*. There is so much that can be said concerning the relationship between the religious and the political in this film. It would be too easy to concentrate on the relationship between Catholicism and the Nazis. Obviously, on the level of the plot there is a concern with a specific period in German and Catholic history when it is difficult to understand or interpret certain silences, certain attempted collaborations, certain possible betrayals. It would also be too easy to criticise Schlöndorff for sidelining the Jewish question whilst giving prominence to the imprisonment of a number of Catholic priests. The Jewish question is there, of course, but it is not the main political question being addressed. What is being addressed is the conflict of visions for human flourishing in which you cannot separate the political from the religious. I wish to revisit one very important scene, when this whole theme – a theme I would claim is at the centre of many of Schlöndorff's films – is given tremendous dramatic presentation:

No where is the conflict between and the association of the religious and political in Schlöndorff's films more explicit than this dialogue concerning Judas Iscariot and the establishment of the kingdom of God. Some of the same ironization we saw in *Die Blechtrommel* is evident: both figures are wishing to escape returning to the camps; both are seeking a salvation that is not only for themselves; both are struggling for the realisation of a vision in which it is difficult to

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
Conference Proceedings
The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
Berlin, March 2005

see the point at which a betrayal may be necessary so that the promise is fulfilled; both live already with acts that may or may not be betrayals. Is Gebhardt fulfilling the will of God and his own vocation, or has he betrayed both in turning from his priestly ministry? Does Kremer's act of drinking the tap water save himself at the expense of a friend who, in the opening sequence of the film, shared his own cup of water with him? Who can make a judgement in either of these cases? The glass of water given by Gebhardt to Kremer takes on a rich, sacramental significance – it proffers forgiveness, cleansing, life on the one hand, and is a reminder of a guilt, a self-serving love on the other. A small act like the acceptance of the glass or, earlier, the chocolate, and later, a brandy establishes not only a bond but a chain of further actions. The politics and the power of decision, a decision inseparable from an intention for the good, but an intention that can never fully discern where the boundaries of self-sacrifice and self-serving lie become all too evident. The agent of any action cannot calculate all the consequences; there is always a surrender of control to an unknown future. And yet not the act has also its consequences; its politics.

If Kremer's inner conflict is resolved it is by not taking upon himself the burden of an action. Of course he does act by not writing anything on the paper he hands to Gebhardt. But the action is a quiescence, an acquiescence. As a priest he is under obedience. He may not know what his obedience to God requires, but the more immediate obedience is to his bishop. That obedience marks the boundaries of his own decision-making and when he asks his bishop for any further advice, he is not given it. The act of acquiescence has to be enough. It is an ambivalent politico-religious act that parallels not only Bishop Philippe's own notorious 'silence' during the German occupation of Luxembourg. But it parallels also Pope Pius's own notorious 'silence' – a silence in which many are possibly saved (namely, Catholic priests) and many are possibly betrayed (namely, the Jews in the camps). But it is an important matter of 'possibility' – for, given the dense complexity of action and reaction, no one can say whether Pius's direct intervention would have saved the Jews or whether, for that matter, Kremer's agreement with Gebhardt would have saved the priests. That silent acquiescence is conceived as a mode of crucifixion.

Recall that when Kremer was being released from the camp, at the beginning of the film, he feels certain the Lagerfuehrer is going to crucify him as he did the Polish prisoner (who clearly stands for as Christ figure). There is no doubt in the final moments of the film that Kremer's self-sacrifice in returning to the camp, in offering the meat he has brought as if he were offering his fellow priests his own body, is redemptive (for Kremer). There is a smile and the act of keeping the water supply to himself is balanced by this

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

generosity. But even that redemption is bought at a price – possibly his own life and the lives of all those with him.

The ambivalence is heightened by a return to the beginning: for all the action of the film what has been achieved? This is a director's true and existential question. Film-making is about action, the politics and values (aesthetic, moral, spiritual) of action. In a way, all Schlöndorff's meditations on the religion and the political compose a director's reflection upon what he is doing in his films, and why, and to what purpose. What finally is achieved by film-making? Is the world transformed (and if it is transformed is it transformed for the better or for the worse?) or is the world merely entertained? Is the power of film-action waking people to new possibilities and visions, staging a protest against a bourgeois status quo, that is, aesthetic in the Greek sense of invigorating the senses? Or is film-action merely an anaesthetic, justifying, that is, the political and religious orders?

We return to a question about *Der Neunte Tag* that I raised at the beginning: is this a piece of Catholic propaganda? I hope I've shown that it isn't. It isn't because it is uneasy about what it is that has been achieved by these levels of action: Kremer's, the Pope's, the film-director's. The ambivalence of that final position is furthermore heightened by its being the ninth day. For the ninth day is a Jewish liturgical moment – a moment of the deepest repentance for acts of sin that are always acts of betrayal. I am reminded of a sentiment St. Augustine returns to several times in *The City of God*: we have to act, we have to make decisions, we have to judge and we have also to declare our ignorance for we cannot know the truth about our acts, decisions and judgements... until they are judged for us by the one who sees, knows, and understands all things. And until that day, that ultimate Yom Kippur, then politics and values (aesthetic, moral and religious) are inextricably intertwined.

The Art of Disappearing: Religion and Aestheticisation

Yves de Maeseneer, Leuven

1. Aestheticisation: A First Definition

It has become an intellectual cliché to characterise our contemporary context in terms of 'aestheticisation'. But is this notion more than a phrase – as catchy as it is empty? Fortunately, Wolfgang Welsch wrote an elucidating survey of the different aspects involved.¹ Welsch defines aestheticisation as the process in which the non-aesthetic is being made aesthetic or conceived of as aesthetic. Or, to put it the other way around, aestheticisation is the process in which the aesthetic exceeds its bounds and extends over non-aesthetic spheres. But what then is the aesthetic? Generally speaking, the aesthetic concerns the sensible on different levels: sensorial perception, emotions, and more specific, the beautiful, whether with regards to the arts or not. In line with this multi-layered notion of the aesthetic, Welsch distinguishes the process of aestheticisation into different levels, in which various facets of the aesthetic come into play:

a) First of all, one can discern a surface aestheticisation: the emergence of a 'spectacle society' or '*Erlebnisgesellschaft*', in which aesthetic practices like entertainment, face-lifting and fashion provide the paradigms for the different non-aesthetic spheres in society. Politics, for example, becomes a business of spin doctors and image-building advisers.

b) More fundamentally, there is an in-depth aestheticisation of the material and social world, and of the human subject. Reality is virtualising – it loses objectivity – and becomes manipulable by means of mass media, genetic technology, etc. In this aestheticised world, the human subject experiences an increasing possibility of constructing its own identity.

c) Finally, Welsch considers the former processes as manifestations of what he indicates as 'epistemological aestheticisation'². This epistemological aestheticisation refers to a fundamental shift in our perception of what truth, the human subject and reality are. Welsch sketches this process as a modern trajectory that began with Kant's transcendental philosophy, over to Nietzsche's genealogy of knowledge, and towards the widespread postmodern view that truth is always the product of a constructive activity – as Richard Rorty

¹ Cf. Wolfgang WELSCH, *Ästhetisierungsprozesse. Phänomene, Unterscheidungen, Perspektiven*, in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 41 (1993) 7-29.

² Cf. *Ibid.*, 19-27.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

puts it: 'truth is made, not found'. In this perspective, the human being discovers itself as an *animal fingens* – a fictive animal (fictive in the active sense of the word) – and the world as its design.

Along these lines, aestheticisation is to be understood as the radical consequence of the modern turn to the subject and the underlying modern project of emancipation from authority: in an aestheticised context human beings are finally enabled to become the authors of their own life and world. In such a context, the religious system is undergoing a drastic mutation. Aestheticisation fosters an aesthetic, non-committal attitude towards the religious tradition. Postmodern subjects behave as consumers of religious goods: being creative individuals, they consider traditions as a repository of materials for their identity construction. Religious motives are instrumentalised in a process of 'bricolage'. Religious experiences are sought after as far as they reinforce the subjective identity. Religion loses its authoritative power, and becomes a function of the self, a self which considers itself as the author of its own life. From a theological perspective, this evolution of aesthetic subjectivisation seems to imply a drastic devaluation of religion, and a denial of its authority.

2. Prophets for an Aesthetic Turn: Adorno's *Ästhetische Theorie* (1970) and von Balthasar's *Herrlichkeit I* (1961)

In the wake of Welsch, aestheticisation, the process in which the aesthetic functions as a paradigm for non-aesthetic spheres, seems to come down to a radical subjectivisation. At first sight, Welsch's notion of aestheticisation seems self-evident: at least, it corresponds to our spontaneous idea of it. However, Welsch's notion of *aestheticisation* presupposes a specific concept of the aesthetic as a modern, subjective category. In this paper, we want to question Welsch's notion of aestheticisation by challenging it with a different view on the aesthetic and modernity, and on the interrelation between both terms. We shall present a German philosopher and a Swiss theologian who both wrote an epoch-making aesthetics: Theodor W. Adorno's *Ästhetische Theorie* (1970) and Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Herrlichkeit I. Eine theologische Ästhetik* (1961). A close reading of their respective works, brings to the fore a surprising convergence between these two thinkers who were, already in the nineteen sixties, pleading for a turn towards the aesthetic, in order to shatter a logic of modernisation.

In this paper, our focus is not on the detailed comparison of Adorno and von Balthasar – however interesting that may be; it would demand a paper on its own, if not a couple of books. We will only use them to elaborate an alternative notion of the aesthetic, and consequently of aestheticisation, in order to formulate a theological critical perspective on the relation between religion and aestheticisation today. Therefore, we will in the next part focus on

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

the crucial notion of aesthetic experience in Adorno's *Ästhetische Theorie* and von Balthasar's *Herrlichkeit I* respectively. We will thus present their respective ideas of aesthetic experience over against their diagnostics of modernity.

2.1 Adorno, Modernity and Aesthetic Experience

a) Adorno's Critique of the Modern Coercive Identity (Identitätszwang)

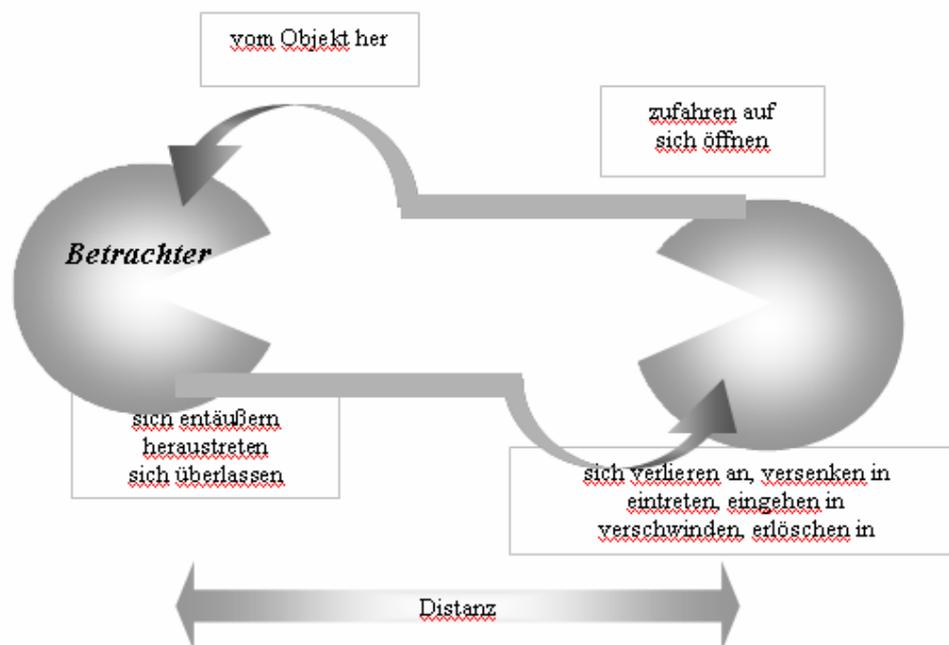
As a member of the Frankfurt School, Adorno formulated a severe critique of Modernity, and proposed an aesthetic turn to break through the modern impasse. Adorno's analysis of the twentieth century context – Nazism, capitalism and Stalinism – comes down to a diagnostic of a modern instrumentalisation of reason.³ This instrumental reason subsists in the levelling out of all differences. The modern subject identifies everything in function of itself. The imposition of a totalitarian identity upon the non-identical serves the aim of a total control. A particular example of this context is for Adorno the modern culture industry, which offers cultural goods for mass consumption. As such, the culture industry fosters a false subjectivisation.

b) Aesthetic Experience

Adorno states that the authentic aesthetic experience (to be distinguished from the surrogate experience offered by the culture industry) breaks through (or shatters) the coercive identity. Adorno is using spatial metaphors to describe this experience. This enables us to schematise his view on aesthetic experience as follows.

³ A brief summary of this analysis can be found in Theodor W. Adorno & Max Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Amsterdam: Querido, 1947, 9-19; ET: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1972.

Scheme 1: Aesthetic experience in Adorno's *Ästhetische Theorie*



b1) Distance

First, Adorno stresses the distance between the experiencing subject and the aesthetic object. 'Aesthetic experience first of all places the observer at a distance from the object.'⁴ The aesthetic object is a form with its own autonomy: as such, it stands apart, *an sich*. This object can never be reduced to the subject, can never be identified as a function of the self. As such the aesthetic experience interrupts the modern instrumental relation to the object.

b2) Inversion of the Subject-Object Relation. *Einverleibung* and *Entäußerung*

Adorno emphasises that with regards to works of art, the relation between subject and object is inverted. While the modern culture industry promotes the consumption (*Einverleibung*) of cultural objects, the true relation to art was never one

of its incorporation [*Einverleibung*, which can mean 'consumption' or 'physical devouring'], but, *inversely*, the beholder disappeared into the material; this is even more so in modern works that run the viewer over like a locomotive does sometimes in a film.⁵

⁴ *AET*, 346; *ÄT*, 514: 'Ästhetische Erfahrung legt zwischen den Betrachtenden und das Objekt zunächst Distanz.' Cf. *ÄT*, 32.40.134.217-218.460.514.

⁵ Translation mine (whenever there is no reference to the English version, the translation is mine); *ÄT*, 27: 'keines von *Einverleibung*, sondern *umgekehrt* verschwand der Betrachter in der Sache; erst recht ist das der Fall in modernen

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

Aesthetic experience involves a going out of oneself towards the object. It is about a 'stepping outside of itself' (*heraustreten*⁶) of the subject in order to 'go into the object' (*in die Sache eingehen*⁷), to submerge in the work of art (*versenken in*⁸), or, 'referring to a comparison by Goethe, to enter into the work of art as you enter a chapel' (*in die Werke, nach dem Goetheschen Vergleich mit der Kapelle, eintreten*⁹). The subject is decentred in order to surrender itself to a movement 'which starts from the object' (*vom Objekt her*¹⁰). This 'freedom to the object'¹¹ opens itself to a

countermovement to the subject [...] It demands something on the order of the self-denial of the beholder, his capacity to address or recognise what aesthetic objects themselves enunciate and what they conceal.¹²

The subject has to become radically receptive in favour of a 'Priority of the Object'¹³:

Involuntarily and unconsciously, the beholder signs a contract with the work, agreeing to submit to it on condition that it speak. [...] a pure self-abandonment [*sich Überlassen*].¹⁴

So, in the aesthetic experience, the consumption relation is blocked and inverted; the same happens to the instrumental relation of projection:

The spectator must not project what transpires in himself on to the artwork in order to find himself confirmed, uplifted, and satisfied in it, but must, *inversely*, relinquish himself to the artwork [*zum Kunstwerk sich entäussern*], assimilate himself to it,

Gebilden, die auf jenen zufahren wie zuweilen Lokomotiven im Film.' All italics in this paper are mine, unless indicated otherwise.

⁶ *ÄT*, 100-101. 361.

⁷ *ÄT*, 409. Cf. *ÄT*, 246.

⁸ *ÄT*, 110. 262. 268.

⁹ *ÄT*, 530.

¹⁰ *ÄT*, 262.

¹¹ *ÄT*, 33: 'Freiheit zum Objekt'

¹² ET: *AET*, 346. *ÄT*, 514: 'Gegenbewegung zum Subjekt [...] etwas wie Selbstverneinung des Betrachtenden, seine Fähigkeit, auf das anzusprechen oder dessen gewahr zu werden, was die ästhetischen Objekte von sich aus sagen und verschweigen'.

¹³ *ÄT*, 111: 'Vorrang des Objekts'.

¹⁴ ET: *AET*, 73 (slightly changed). *ÄT*, 114: 'Der Betrachter unterschreibt, unwillentlich und ohne Bewusstsein, einen Vertrag mit dem Werk, ihm sich zu fügen, damit es spreche. [...] das reine sich Überlassen.' For 'das sich Überlassen' (cf. Hegel), cf. *ÄT*, 166. 494.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

and fulfill the work in its own terms. In other words, he must submit to the discipline of the work rather than demand that the artwork give him something.¹⁵

What is required is an 'inverted identification': the subject does not make the aesthetic object identical to itself (as in an instrumental relation), but the other way around.¹⁶ Over against a subjectivising projection, Adorno pleads for a relinquishment to the artwork in order to fulfil it, an 'aesthetic surrender to the object, the artwork' (*ästhetische Entäusserung an die Sache, das Kunstwerk*¹⁷). Adorno presents this inverted identification explicitly as a disappearing of the subject: 'to lose oneself, forget oneself, extinguish oneself in the artwork.' (*sich vergessen, sich gleichgültig werden, darin erlöschen*)¹⁸. The real relation to art is the one 'in which he [the beholder] vanishes.'¹⁹

2.2 Von Balthasar, Subjectivisation and Christ Experience

a) Von Balthasar's Critique of Modernity

Von Balthasar – albeit in a different language than Adorno's – makes a similar diagnostic of modernity in terms of coercive identity and subjectivisation.²⁰ In the introduction of his theological aesthetics, von Balthasar indicates that his project aims to counter the impoverishment within theology which is the result of the loss of the aesthetic dimension (*Entästhetisierung*). In the modern era this impoverishment, which implies not in the last place a poverty of experience, is closely related to the emergence of a modern subject instrumentalising the world in function of himself.

b) Aesthetic Experience as Analogy of the Christian Experience

Similar to Adorno following structural dynamics of the aesthetic experience can be shown in von Balthasar's work:

¹⁵ ET: *AET*, 275; *ÄT*, 409-410: 'nicht muss der Betrachter, was in ihm vorgeht, aufs Kunstwerk projizieren, um darin sich bestätigt, überhöht, befriedigt zu finden, sondern muss umgekehrt zum Kunstwerk sich entäussern, ihm sich gleichmachen, es von sich aus vollziehen. [410] Dass er der Disziplin des Werks sich zu unterwerfen habe und nicht zu verlangen, dass das Kunstwerk ihm etwas gebe, ist nur ein anderer Ausdruck dafür.'

¹⁶ *AET*, 17: 'The identification carried out by the subject was ideally not that of making the artwork like himself, but rather that of making himself like the artwork.'

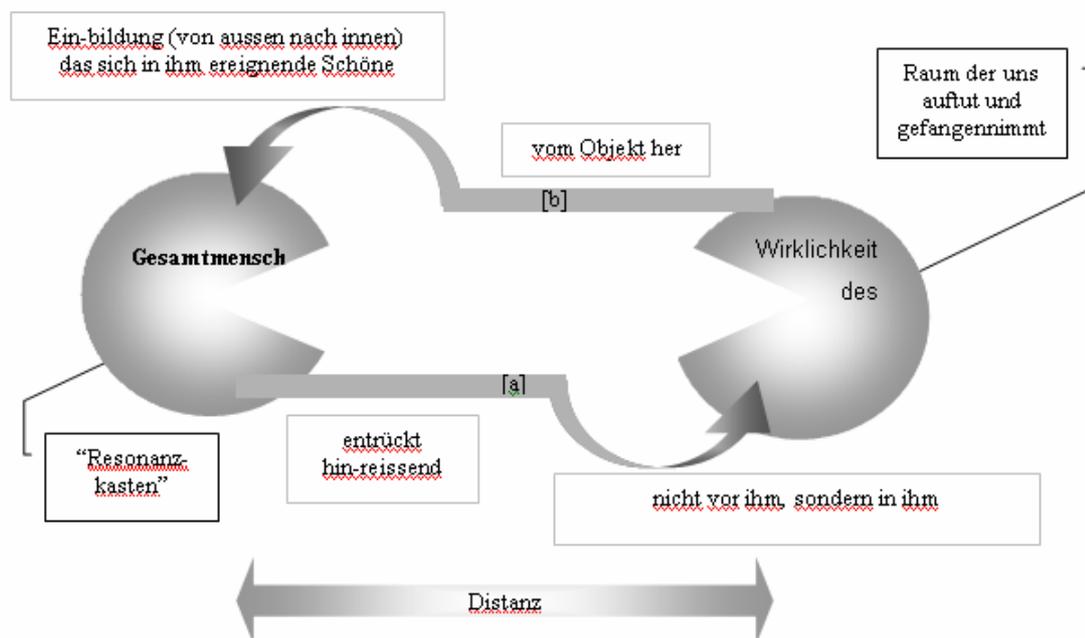
¹⁷ *ÄT*, 178. Cf. *ÄT*, 33. 361.

¹⁸ *ÄT*, 33. Cf. *ÄT*, 267: 'das sich Verlieren an die Kunstwerke' ('to lose oneself in the artworks')

¹⁹ *ÄT*, 27: 'jene genuine Beziehung zur Kunst [...], in der er selber erlischt'.

²⁰ Cf. *HI*, 15-21. 42-53. 66-74. *passim*. A more systematic criticism of Modernity can be found in the following volumes of *Herrlichkeit*, especially vol. II.2 and III.1.2.

Scheme 2: Natural Aesthetic Experience in von Balthasar's *Herrlichkeit* I



b1) Distance

Von Balthasar points to the distance shaped by the aesthetic form (*Gestalt*), 'in its being-in-itself (and not only in its being-for-me)'²¹. The form is irreducible: it blocks every appropriation by the subject:

The quality of 'being-in-itself' which belongs to the beautiful, the demand the beautiful itself makes to be allowed to be what it is, the demand, therefore, that we renounce our attempts to control and manipulate it, in order truly to be able to be happy by enjoying it.²²

In short: it forbids every functionalisation.

b2) Dynamics of Decentring and Incorporation by the Form

Von Balthasar describes the decentring effect of the aesthetic experience: the radical 'Extraversion'²³ of the subject. In the enrapturing experience of beauty, a self-surrender takes place in service of the beautiful. We give up our autonomy in order to obey the law of the beautiful form: the aesthetic experience is in the first

²¹ ET: *GL* I, 152; *HI*, 145: 'das gestalthafte Schöne in seinem Ansichsein (und nicht bloss für-mich-Sein)'.

²² ET: *GL* I, 153; *HI*, 145: 'Das dem Schönen anhaftenden In-sich-sein, die durch es selbst bekundete Forderung, es sein zu lassen, was es ist, die Forderung nach einem Verzicht also (auf Bewältigung und Verbrauch), um seiner geniessend froh werden zu können'.

²³ *HI*, 175.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

place an act of passivity. Beauty is said to be 'literally 'transporting''²⁴:

Before the beautiful – no, not really *before* but *within* the beautiful – the whole person quivers. He not only 'finds' the beautiful moving; he experiences himself as *being moved and possessed* by it. [...] Such a person has been *taken up wholesale into* the reality of the beautiful and is now *fully subordinate to it, determined by it, animated by it*.²⁵

As such, the subject is, as it were, incorporated by the aesthetic form.

Another way to articulate the same relation between subject and object is the following:

all our senses are engaged when the interior space of a beautiful musical composition or painting *opens itself to us and captivates us*: the whole person then enters into a state of vibration and becomes responsive space, the '*sounding box*' [*"Resonanzkasten"*] of the event of beauty occurring within him.²⁶

In this experience, we make room in ourselves in order to correspond to the form that exacts imitation.

b3) The Christian Experience: *Eingestaltung* and *Stimmung*
 Von Balthasar proposes this aesthetic structure as the most appropriate analogy for the Christian experience. Look how von Balthasar is describing the Christian experience along the lines of the same structural dynamics:

²⁴ ET: *GL I*, 221; *HI*, 213: 'buchstäblich hin-reissenden Schönheit'.

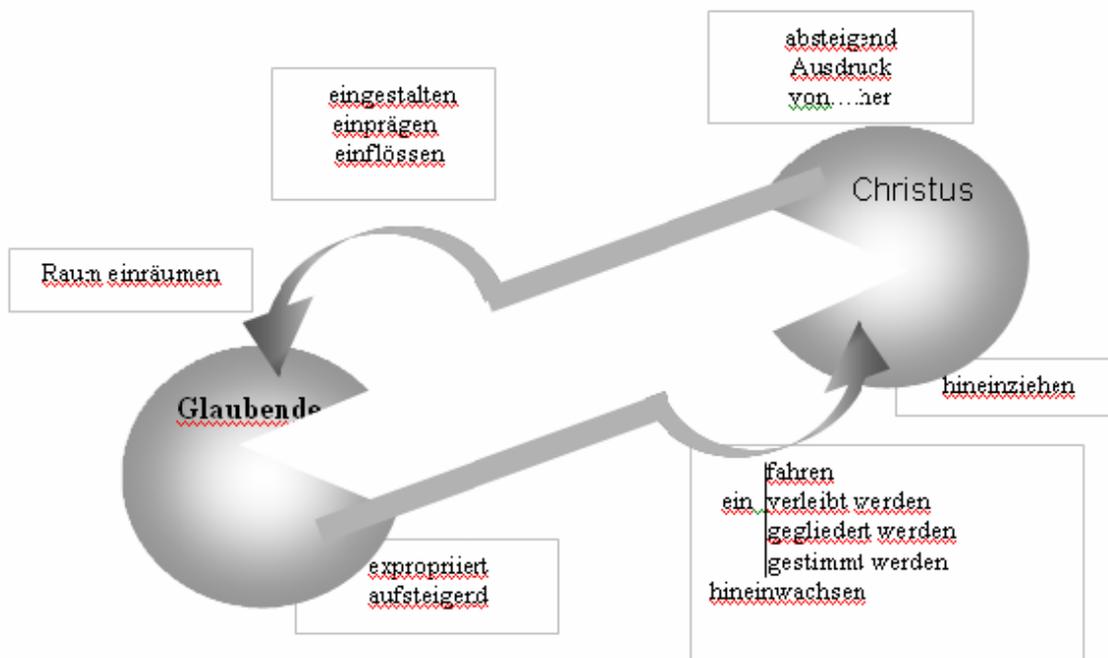
²⁵ ET: *GL I*, 247; *HI*, 238:

'Vor dem Schönen – ja *nicht* eigentlich *vor* ihm, *sondern in* ihm – vibriert der Gesamtmensch. Er "findet" es nicht nur ergreifend, sondern erfährt sich als *davon ergriffen und in Besitz genommen*. [...] in der Wirklichkeit des Schönen gesamthaft *entrückt* und ihr *hintergegeben*, von ihr *bestimmt*, durch sie *begeistert*.'

²⁶ ET: *GL I*, 220; *HI*, 212:

'Schliesslich sind wir doch "mit allen Sinnen" dabei, wenn sich der innere Raum einer schönen Musik oder Malerei *uns auf tut und uns gefangennimmt*, der ganze Mensch gerät in Vibration und wird zum antwortenden Raum und "*Resonanzkasten*" des sich in ihm ereignenden Schönen.'

Scheme 3: Theological-Aesthetic Experience in von Balthasar's *Herrlichkeit I*



In the Christian experience, which consists in the encounter with the image of Christ (*Christusgestalt*), the human being is decentred, 'expropriated'.²⁷ In an exegesis of Saint Paul's letters, von Balthasar develops the notion of Christian experience in line with the aesthetic experience as

the progressive growth of one's own existence into Christ's existence, on the basis of Christ's continuing action taking shape (*Sicheingestalten Christi*) in the believer: 'until Christ has taken shape (*Gestalt*) in you' (Gal 4: 19)²⁸

The German notion '*Eingestaltung*' is hard to translate: it is *in*-formation, literally understood as the impressing of a form into somebody, but it also refers to the entering of someone into a form.

²⁷ *H I*, 216.

²⁸ *ET: GL I*, 224; *H I*, 216:

'das Hineinwachsen der eigenen Existenz in die Existenz Christi auf der Grundlage des wachsenden Sicheingestaltens Christi in den Glaubenden: "bis dass Christus in euch Gestalt gewonnen hat" (Gal 4, 19)'.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

It is a process of a *trans*-formation: the transfer of a form, and the transport into a form. This presupposes a fundamental receptivity, a primal passivity, an openness for an active form. By making room for the form of Christ within oneself, the believer is letting Christ take shape in her/himself, up to the Pauline 'It is not I that live, but Christ lives in me.'²⁹ In this movement of being expropriated for God, of surrender in faith, the believer finds her/himself already being grasped by Christ. Christian experience is 'entering (*einfahren*) into the Son of God, Christ Jesus'³⁰.

The core of Christian experience is *transformation*: 'Constant contemplation of the whole Christ, through the Holy Spirit, transforms the beholder as a whole into the image of Christ' (2Cor 3.18).³¹ Through this imitation of Christ, the believer participates in His life. In this context von Balthasar recurrently plays with a musical metaphor, the metaphor of 'Stimmung', which refers to 'the tuning of an instrument'. The end of Christian experience is 'to make the whole man a space that responds to the divine content. Faith attunes man to this sound [...] preparing him to be a violin that receives just this touch of the bow'³². The fundamental pitch of the Christian experience is the tune of Christ. Feeling the same as Jesus Christ is to attune (*sich-einstimmen*) oneself deliberately to 'the accord (*Stimmen*) between Christ and the mandate from the Father', which is a kenotic accord:

we speak, therefore, primarily of an empathy with the Son who renounces the form of God and chooses the form of humiliation; we speak of a sense for the path taken by Christ which leads him to the Cross; we speak of a sensorium for Christ's 'instinct of obedience'³³.

²⁹ ET: *GL I*, 227; *HI*, 219: "'Nicht ich lebe, Christus lebt in mir'".

³⁰ ET: *GL I*, 222; *HI*, 214: 'das Einfahren [...] in den [...] Gottessohn Jesus Christ'.

³¹ ET: *GL I*, 242; *HI*, 233:

'Die dauernden Kontemplation des ganzen Christus verwandelt die Schauenden durch den Heiligen Geist als ganze in das Bild Christi (2 Kor 3, 18).'

³² ET: *GL I*, 220. See *HI*, 212: 'den ganzen Menschen zu einem antwortenden Raum auf den göttlichen Inhalt zu machen. Ihn auf diesen Klang einzustimmen [...] ihn zur Geige für diesen Bogenstrich [zu machen]'.

³³ ET: *GL I*, 253; *HI*, 243: 'Es ist deshalb primär ein Mitfühlen mit dem auf die Gottgestalt verzichtenden und die Niedrigkeitsgestalt wählenden Sohn, ein Gespür für die Richtung, die er einschlägt, und die ihn ans Kreuz führt, ein Sensorium für seinen "Instinkt des Gehorsams"'.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

The fundamental experience, the disposition (*Stimmung*) of the Christian is to become expropriated for God and for her/his neighbour. This kenotic tune is mediated by the Church, especially in Mary, in the saints, in all of those in which 'the transformation of the individual soul into an *anima ecclesiastica*'³⁴ takes place. In this expropriation to the Church and through it to the world, the Christian experience is brought to the test: the love of the neighbour.

2.3. Ambiguity of the Aesthetic

Thus far we have seen how both Adorno and von Balthasar present late modernity in terms of a coercive identity in which everything is instrumentalised in function of a totalising subject. Over against this subjectivisation, both authors bring to the fore aesthetic experience, an experience marked by an irreducible distance between subject and object: outside of and over against the subject, an objective alterity appears. This irreducible exteriority breaks through the logic of instrumental identification; the subject is not able to control the aesthetic object. In the aesthetic sphere, the subject's relation to reality is inverted; the subject is no longer the centre of its own experience, but is involuntarily oriented towards the aesthetic object. What is more, the object opens itself as a space in which the subject is incorporated and *transformed*. The aesthetic form actively imprints itself on the receptive subject.

As far as they are object-centred (or image-centred), both Adorno's and von Balthasar's aesthetics risk ending up objectivist. It is interesting to have a closer look at this tendency, because we think this objectivist turn is not accidental, but reveals an often-overlooked aspect of the aesthetic. What is at stake here? In the aesthetic experience, the break-through of the modern identification processes risk coming down to a mere inversion of the coercion; instead of the modern subjectivisation, the aesthetic experience risks ending up as a desubjectivisation, in which the subject disappears under the pressure of the aesthetic object. The theme of aesthetic destruction of the self – its disappearance – is obvious in the quotes from Adorno mentioned earlier. In opposition to the consumption by the modern consumer, Adorno hints towards an inversion of the incorporation (*Einverleibung*) in which the subject in its turn is consumed. As such, the aesthetic appears in a cannibalistic form. Similar uncanny overtones surround von Balthasar's view of the aesthetic. Let us look at the quotes again: 'when the interior space of a beautiful musical composition or

³⁴ Cf. *HI*, 246: 'die *forma Christi* sich am besten in der Kirchenform durchsetzt und *ausprägt*: in Maria, in den Heiligen, in allen, die der Kirchenform bewusst in sich das Übergewicht über die Eigenform gegeben haben [...] Das Sein-in-Gott unserer Substanz geschieht in der Form Christi, und die Realisierung dieses zweieinigen Inseins ist Heiligkeit als realisierte Kirche, ist Verwandlung der einzelnen frommen Seele in eine *anima ecclesiastica*.'

painting *opens itself to us and captivates us...*' The beautiful form appears as a cage, imprisoning us. Another quote tells us about the experience of '*being moved and possessed by [the beautiful form] ... fully subordinate to it, determined by it, animated by it.*' Does not this experience turn the human person into a marionette? And what should we think of von Balthasar's musical metaphors? The human person is changed into a '*sounding box*? In its radical receptivity, the subject appears reduced to an 'echo'. Not only in the natural aesthetic experience, but also in von Balthasar's theological-aesthetic account of the Christian experience, one can find annoying images: the Christian 'tuning' seems to reduce the subject to a violin which receives, in a radical passivity, the touch of the divine bow. The human ends up as a mere instrument of the divine; along these lines one could quote von Balthasar recurrently calling the human a function of the divine.³⁵ As such, the aesthetic register allows the theologian to counter modern instrumental reason, but the effect seems the mere inversion of the instrumental relation. To avoid the modern subject functionalising God, von Balthasar, inversely, portrays man as God's instrument.

All of this strongly suggests that the aesthetic manifests a tendency towards a self-enclosing dynamic, an anthropophagous dynamic, in which the subject is completely absorbed by the object, even destroyed. One could object that von Balthasar and Adorno themselves attempt to avoid this negative effect. Indeed they stress that their specific aesthetic objects (*Christusgestalt*, respectively, the modern art) are marked by kenotic brokenness and reticence, which avoids the crushing of the subject.

3. Paradoxical Fulfilment

In a certain way, one can read Adorno's and von Balthasar's aesthetic theories as prophetic texts. Indeed, forty years later, there is a manifest turn towards the aesthetic. In contemporary aestheticised phenomena, one can easily recognise the same structure of aesthetic experience in powerful aesthetic forms decentring the subject. Although, today's aestheticisation is not exactly what they had in mind... Adorno, for example, emphasised that the aesthetic is not to transgress the bounds of its own sphere. Anyway, the fatal transgression did happen. This allows me to interpret today's context as a paradoxical fulfilment of their 'prophesies'. Two brief examples:

3.1 Imagination and the Power of the Logo³⁶

³⁵ E.g. with regards to the archetypal figure of Mary. Cf. e.g. *HI*, 295. 318

³⁶ I developed this analogy between the logo and von Balthasar's idea of the image elsewhere, see YVES DE MAESENEER, Saint Francis versus McDonald's? Contemporary Globalization Critique and Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics, in *Heythrop Journal* 44 (2003) 1-14. in *Heythrop Journal* (2003).

With regards to the aesthetic concept of 'imagination', both Adorno and von Balthasar stress how the relation between subject and object is inverted. Whereas a modern view defines the imagination as the subjective power to produce (or project) images, Adorno and von Balthasar present the process of imagination in objectivist terms. Von Balthasar understands 'Ein-bildung' as 'Ein-gestaltung' (as we saw before, to be understood as 'in-formation' in the literal sense of the impressing of a form into somebody). Imagination subsists in 'imprinting images on the subject'³⁷. Imagination is the process in which images make their way towards and through the subject. As Adorno puts it, imagination is 'the course taken by the form through the subject' (*Durchgang des Gebildes durchs Subjekt*)³⁸. In the relation to the image, a decentering of the subject is at stake in favour of a priority of the image.

Forty years ago, Adorno and von Balthasar appealed to the power of the image over against the almighty modern subject. Today, however, it is fascinating to see how powerful images, such as commercial logos, function in processes of branding. Branding refers to the aesthetic strategies of large corporate brands (e.g., Nike, Coca-Cola, etc.) to imprint their image(s) everywhere. The logo as a major aesthetic figure in the context of globalisation appears surrounded by a kind of religious authority. The reading of von Balthasar and Adorno invites us to understand the current context of aestheticisation in objectivist terms. Concerning branding aesthetics, the initiative is clearly not in the hands of the subject; there is a constitutive power of the image at work, which actively transforms the subject. Between the consumer and the logo, the relation appears as inverted: logos constitute the consumer. Logos not only invade our world and minds, they even build up our identities and reality, up to the degree that the consumers are incorporated in the logo. In a certain way, consumers are themselves consumed by the logo. In this whole process, the subject is disappearing.

³⁷ As von Balthasar puts it in a word-play which is impossible to translate: *HI*, 172: 'Man müsste deshalb die Einbildungskraft, die vor allem von innen nach aussen projiziert, eher Ausbildung nennen, während man den Prozess der Ausbildung, in welchem die objektiven Bildgehalte von aussen nach innen assimiliert werden, eher Einbildungskraft nennen müsste.' ET: *GL I*, 178-179 (slightly changed): 'the *Einbildungskraft* ('imagination') which primarily projects from within toward the exterior, ought rather to be called *Ausbildungskraft* ('power-to-externalise-images'), whereas the process of *Ausbildung* ('education', 'formation', 'development'), in which the objective content of images is assimilated from the outside toward the interior, ought rather to be called *Einbildung* ('imaging', 'imprinting an image on the beholder').'

³⁸ ET: *AET*, 24; *ÄT*, 43.

3.2 Totalitarianism and Aesthetic Ideology

'Postmodern' critical thinkers like Paul de Man have pointed to the fact that totalitarian politicians prefer to think of themselves in terms of the aesthetic.³⁹ A sinister example of this can be found in the following quote:

Art is the expression of feeling. The artist is distinguished from the non-artist by the fact that he can also *express* what he feels. He can do so in a variety of forms. Some by images; others by sound; still others by marble – or also in historical forms. The statesman is an artist, too. The people are for him what stone is for the sculptor. Leader and masses are as little of a problem to each other as color is a problem for the painter. Politics are the plastic arts of the state as painting is the plastic art of color. Therefore politics without the people or against the people are nonsense. To transform a mass into a people and a people into a state – that has always been the deepest sense of a genuine political task.⁴⁰

This is a quote from Joseph Goebbels, Nazi chief of propaganda. Similar aesthetic visions of the political could be found in the speeches of Stalin's cultural commissioner Zhdanov. Paul de Man suggests that these totalitarian excesses reveal an inherent potential of the aesthetic whenever it enters the political sphere. One of the reasons why (totalitarian) politicians like the idea of presenting themselves as artists is precisely due to the fact that a work of art evokes a voluntary surrender to its power, as we saw in our analysis of the structure of aesthetic experience. Even worse, in the aesthetic experience, one does not really choose to surrender. Attracted by the aesthetic object, one is absorbed and, without noticing, one loses oneself in the aesthetic object. Aestheticised politics aims at a state of marionettes. Here again, the subject tends to disappear.

These examples strengthen our intuition that – contrary to a common underestimation of the aesthetic as 'only aesthetic' – aestheticisation does not consist in a weakening of authority (i.e., subjectivisation). Conversely, we claim that aestheticisation implies a specific authoritative dynamics. In this authoritative dynamics, different kinds of distortions can appear with the concurrent result of the disappearance (understood as an undesirable elimination) of the subject.

³⁹ Cf. PAUL DE MAN, *Aesthetic Ideology*, Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota press, 1996.

⁴⁰ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 154-155.

4. Religion and Aestheticisation: Mimesis and Kenosis

Adorno and von Balthasar are themselves aware of these possible undesirable manifestations of the (theological) aesthetic, which have to do with the intrinsic ambiguity of the aesthetic. One could refer here to von Balthasar's comment upon the classical formula '*pulchritudo circuit omnem causam*' ('beauty encircles everything')⁴¹. Referring to this encircling movement, von Balthasar warns that a beautiful image always risks enclosing itself, becoming a closed circuit. Adorno is even more sensitive to the ambiguity. Lucid comments can be found in his *Ästhetische Theorie* on ideological forms of aesthetic objectivism. An analysis of contemporary logos could begin with the following provocative statement: 'The absolute artwork converges with the absolute commodity'⁴². We will restrict ourselves here to Adorno's view on a crucial factor of the aesthetic, namely, aesthetic form. As we saw before, aesthetic experience involves a surrender to the aesthetic object, or in other words, an obedience to its form.

4.1 Adorno on Formalisation

a) The Cruelty of the Form

In his comment on this major characteristic of the aesthetic, Adorno points to the paradoxical character of form. On the one hand, form is precisely the aspect of the aesthetic object which guarantees its objectivity, its autonomy, and its power to resist instrumentalisation. Form is the way in which the work of art is able to distantiate itself from the subject, and from the surrounding context, which is governed by the principle of identity. As such, form can become a kind of asylum for the endangered non-identical, saving it from commodification. At the same time, however, this form involves a kind of violence, which Adorno calls the 'cruelty of the form':

In [aesthetic] forms, cruelty becomes imagination: something is excised from the living, cut out from the body of language, from tones, from visual experience. The purer the form and the higher the autonomy of the works, the more cruel they are.⁴³

Such is the paradoxical law of the form: 'By wanting to give permanence to the transitory – to life – by wanting to save it from

⁴¹ Cf. Hans Urs VON BALTHASAR, *Herrlichkeit. Eine theologische Ästhetik*. II, 1. *Klerikale Stile*, Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1962, 351-352.

⁴² ET: *AET*, 21; *ÄT*, 39: 'das absolute Kunstwerk trifft sich mit der absoluten Ware'.

⁴³ ET: *AET*, 50 (slightly changed); *ÄT*, 80: 'In den Formen wird Grausamkeit zur Imagination: aus einem Lebendigen, dem Leib der Sprache, den Tönen, der sichtbaren Erfahrung etwas herauszuschneiden. Je reiner die Form, je höher die Autonomie der Werke, desto grausamer sind sie.'

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

death, the works kill it.'⁴⁴ Form's attempt at saving the non-identical is ineluctably caught in a deadly dynamics: 'They kill what they objectify by tearing it away from the immediacy of its life.'⁴⁵ And further: 'If the idea of artworks is eternal life, they can attain this only by annihilating everything living within their domain.'⁴⁶ As Adorno puts it, form has something Egyptian, and in this respect, art resembles a process of mummification.

The affinity of all beauty with death has its nexus in the idea of pure form that art imposes on the diversity of the living and that is extinguished in it. In serene beauty its recalcitrant other [the non-identical, the amorphous] would be completely pacified, and such aesthetic reconciliation is fatal for the extra-aesthetic. That is the melancholy of art. It achieves an unreal reconciliation at the price of real reconciliation. All that art can do is grieve for the sacrifice it makes, which, in its powerlessness, art itself is. Beauty not only speaks like a messenger of death – as does Wagner's Valkyrie to Siegmund – but in its own process it assimilates itself to death.⁴⁷

To understand the aesthetic soteriology, which lies behind the last quote, would require a long detour. Let us just limit ourselves to Adorno's interpretation of modern art with regards to form. Adorno distinguish two tendencies in this regard: on the one hand, a radical formalisation of art, and on the other, a kind of modern aesthetic kenosis.

b) Formalisation as Mimesis

⁴⁴ ET: *AET*, 134; *ÄT*, 202: 'Indem die Werke das Vergängliche - Leben - zur Dauer verhalten, vorm Tod erretten wollen, töten sie es.'

⁴⁵ ET: *AET*, 133; *ÄT*, 201: 'sie töten, was sie objektivieren, indem sie es der Unmittelbarkeit seines Lebens entreissen.'

⁴⁶ ET: *AET*, 52; *ÄT*, 84: 'Haben die Kunstwerke ihre Idee am ewigen Leben, dann einzig durch Vernichtung des Lebendigen in ihrem Bezirk'. Cf. *ÄT*, 274: 'Kunstwerke veranstalten das Unveranstaltete. Sie sprechen für es und tun ihm Gewalt an'.

⁴⁷ ET: *AET*, 52; *ÄT*, 84:

'Die Affinität aller Schönheit zu ihm [dem Tode] hat ihren Ort in der Idee der reinen Form, die Kunst der Mannigfaltigkeit des Lebendigen auferlegt, das in ihr erlischt. In der ungetrübten Schönheit wäre ihr Widerstrebendes ganz zur Ruhe gekommen, und solche ästhetische Versöhnung ist tödlich fürs Ausserästhetische. Das ist die Trauer von Kunst. Versöhnung vollbringt sie unwirklich, um den Preis der wirklichen. Das Letzte, was sie vermag, ist die Klage um das Opfer, das sie darbringt und das sie selbst in ihrer Ohnmacht ist. Nicht allein spricht das Schöne, wie die Wagnersche Walküre zu Siegmund als Sendbote des Todes spricht, sondern ähnelt ihm in sich, als Prozess.'

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

First, Adorno interprets modern art as a tendency to emphasise the aspect of form, in one word, a tendency to 'formalisation'.⁴⁸



According to Adorno, this formalisation has to be understood over against the modern context of coercive identity. Form guarantees the autonomy of art as art's distance over against society. However, the law of form at the same time involves violence, namely, 'the cruelty of the form'. In line with this paradoxical

nature of form, the formalisation of modern art is at the same time resistance against coercion and itself showing coercive features. As far as form is violent, it resembles the violence of the surrounding context. Adorno interprets this violence of the form as 'Mimesis der Kunst an ihr Widerspiel' ('the mimesis of art to its counterpart')⁴⁹. As such, modern art's radical formalisation mimes the deadly dynamics of modern capitalist commodification.⁵⁰

Adorno interprets modern art's formalisation as both opposition to modern society and as its mimetic double, or better, in a dialectical twist of the paradox, as opposition through mimesis.

Whereas art opposes society, it is nevertheless unable to take up a position beyond it; it achieves opposition only through identification with that against which it remonstrates⁵¹.

How modern art's 'Mimesis ans Todliche' ('Mimesis to the deadly') can be interpreted as a critical position, is not self-evident, I think. Adorno hints at a kind of 'homeopathic remedy': 'in accord with the ancient topos, to heal the wound with the spear that inflicted it'.⁵² The key to understand this is to examine Adorno's complex and idiosyncratic notion of mimesis, which is not to be equated with

⁴⁸ This is what adversaries of modern art indicate when they complain about its abstract character such as in the following: 'modern art is empty, it lacks soul, it lacks contents'.

⁴⁹ *ÄT*, 201.

⁵⁰ Cf. *ÄT*, 201: 'Ihre Gebilde überlassen sich mimetisch der Verdinglichung, ihrem Todesprinzip.'

⁵¹ ET: *AET*, 133; *ÄT*, 201: 'Opposition gelingt ihr [der modernen Kunst] einzig durch Identifikation mit dem, wogegen sie aufbegehrt'

⁵² ET: *AET*, 134; *ÄT*, 202: 'nach dem antiken Topos, mit dem Speer die Wunde heilen, der sie schlug'. Cf. *ÄT*, 201: 'Ohne Beimischung des Giftstoffs, virtuell die Negation des Lebendigen, wäre der Einspruch der Kunst gegen die zivilisatorische Unterdrückung tröstlich-hilflos.'

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

imitation. Mimesis has to do with a certain self-reflective potential of the form.⁵³

c) Modern Art and its Kenosis

Thus, on the one hand, Adorno interprets the intrinsic violence of the aesthetic – which lies at the roots of the potential distortions we saw in paragraph 3 – as a mimesis which allows for a reflexive attitude towards the modern coercive identity. On the other hand, Adorno points within modern art to another tendency, a kind of ‘aesthetic kenosis’. In line with a growing aesthetic awareness about the violence of form, Adorno writes about the

prospect of the rejection of art for the sake of art [...] This is intimated by those artworks that fall silent or disappear.⁵⁴

These modern works of art can be characterised by a tendency of ‘Entäusserung’⁵⁵. Adorno repetitively uses the word ‘Entäusserung’: it can be translated as ‘relinquishment’, but also as ‘kenosis’. As we have seen before, Adorno uses the same term ‘Entäusserung’ with regards to the aesthetic experience to indicate the required relation of the subject to the aesthetic object.⁵⁶ So, in the modern aesthetic sphere, both subject and object undergo a kenosis.

In this context, Adorno mentions artworks which ‘burn themselves’⁵⁷. According to Adorno, this aesthetic self-cremation could well be the only way to remain faithful to art’s utopian potential: ‘to achieve it [the promise] by casting it away’⁵⁸. Or, in terms echoing the gospel: ‘artworks have to lose themselves in order to find themselves’⁵⁹.

Scars of damage and disruption are the modern’s seal of authenticity; by their means, art desperately

⁵³ *ÄT*, 85. Art is not just a copy of the modern violence, because ‘Sie transponiert den Kreislauf in die imago, die ihn reflektiert und dadurch transzendiert.’

⁵⁴ *AET*, 53; *ÄT*, 85: ‘Absage an die Kunst um der Kunst willen’, announcing itself in ‘Gebilde, die verstummen oder verschwinden’

⁵⁵ *ÄT*, 96. 230. 265.

⁵⁶ Cf. *supra*, 2.1.

⁵⁷ *ÄT*, 265: ‘Denkbar, heute vielleicht gefordert sind Werke, die durch ihren Zeitkern sich selbst verbrennen, ihr eigenes Leben dem Augenblick der Erscheinung von Wahrheit drangeben und spurlos untergehen, ohne dass sie das im geringsten minderte.’

⁵⁸ *AET*, 135; *ÄT*, 204: ‘das [Versprechen] zu gewinnen, indem sie es wegwirft’.

⁵⁹ *ÄT*, 220: ‘Kunstwerke verlieren sich, um sich zu finden’.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

negates the closed confines of the ever-same;
 explosion is one of its invariants⁶⁰.

Adorno adds that this *Entäusserung* of art is motivated by a reflexive mimesis to the surrounding negative modern context: 'Art indicts superfluous poverty by voluntarily undergoing its own; but it indicts asceticism as well and cannot establish it as its own norm.'⁶¹

4.2. Critical Perspectives. Three Scenarios of Disappearing

a) Religion Formalised: Religious Authority Disappears into the Format

Adorno's idea of formalisation offers a conceptual tool to characterise the dynamics of contemporary aestheticisation. The aesthetic implies a predominance of form over contents. If then the aesthetic paradigm is more and more governing the different spheres of our cultural context, formalisation, which involves the incorporation into a form, threatens to eliminate all contents. As such, aestheticisation comes down to the disappearance of all non-aesthetic spheres. One can think here of the formalising process at work in television programs: television makers are using 'formats' and adapt everything to their 'format'. Formalisation means that the format, the framework, determines the contents in advance and, as such, dictates what can be said. When religion, for example, is incorporated in these formats, it stops having a voice of its own.

b) Religion Formalising Itself: Religion Transforms Itself into an Authoritarian 'Format'

Adorno's notion of mimesis challenges us to ask the question of how far our contemporary theological pleas for a turn towards the aesthetic are not just miming the overall context of aestheticisation, which implies a new form of coercive identity – this time not driven by the subject, but by the aesthetic objects. The risk would be that theology (or religion) would transform itself according to the ruling aesthetic paradigm. In this case, religion would not be a victim of the contemporary aestheticisation (as in the first scenario), but religion would become itself an agent of aestheticisation. Religion would become a religious-aesthetic format, which incorporates the faithful by means of authoritarian image strategies, comparable to those of the commercial logo. This would imply the disappearance of true religion, because this aestheticised religion makes the believers disappear in its formats. Because faith involves the free answer of free subjects, faith becomes impossible.

⁶⁰ *AET*, 23; *ÄT*, 41: 'Die Male der Zerrüttung sind das Echtheitssiegel von Moderne; das, wodurch sie die Geschlossenheit des Immergleichen verzweifelt negiert; Explosion ist eine ihrer Invarianten.'

⁶¹ *AET*, 40; *ÄT*, 66: 'Kunst verklagt die überflüssige Armut durch die freiwillige eigene'

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

This critical question targets some major contemporary theologians who try to formulate a critique of today's context, and therein use aesthetic motives. At this point, theology's opposition to the context risks falling back into a mere mimesis of the aestheticised context. We can think here of Jean-Luc Marion's reference to the inverted experience of the icon, or John Milbank's plea for a participation in the divine aesthetic order.⁶² Our analysis of the ambiguity of the aesthetic can serve as a warning against too much theological aesthetic enthusiasm. In the case of, for example, Marion's rediscovery of the icon, we have to draw attention to the fact that the abandoning of the modern instrumentalising subject – its 'relinquishment' – does not necessarily result in a desirable comeback of the religious attitude. Does not the icon's decentring of the subject find a mimetic double in the dynamics of today's corporate logo? Another example, with regards to theology's aesthetic retrieval of participation, concerns how far theology is able to avoid ending up as an uncanny incorporation of the subject? The ultimate cannibalistic fantasy?

c) Kenosis or Self-destruction?

The idea of kenosis as a self-reflexive, critical answer for its part opens up a horizon for formulating a negative-theological critique of aestheticisation. One could think of a negative theological aesthetics, along the lines of the seminal kenotic Christology in von Balthasar's *Herrlichkeit* I. But at the same time, the question must be asked if negative theology today, as a kenotic-mimetic answer, is not risking to end up in an act of mere self-destruction. As theology has lost its traditional authority in an aestheticised context, is negative theology not a vain attempt to make a virtue out of our theological powerlessness today? Is kenosis, i.e., the voluntary self-emptying of the powerful, an option for those who in fact are already powerless, emptied of power? Does it not come down to the kind of regression that is evoked by Adorno in following passage in his *Minima Moralia* (1946-47)?

Seit ich denken kann, bin ich glücklich gewesen mit dem Lied: "Zwischen Berg und tiefem, tiefem Tal": von den zwei Hasen, die sich am Gras gütlich taten, vom Jäger niedergeschossen wurden, und als sie sich besonnen hatten, dass sie noch am Leben waren, von dannen liefen. Aber spät erst habe ich die Lehre darin verstanden: Vernunft kann es nur in Verzweiflung und Überschwang aushalten; es bedarf des Absurden, um

⁶² Cf., e.g., John MILBANK, *Theology and Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991, 422-430: 'Augustine is basically right: truth, for Christianity, is not correspondence, but rather *participation* of the beautiful in the beauty of God' (p. 427); Jean-Luc MARION, *Dieu sans l'Être*, Paris: Fayard, 1982, pp. 15-37.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

dem objektiven Wahnsinn nicht zu erliegen. Man sollte es den beiden Hasen gleichtun; wenn der Schuss fällt, nährisch für tot hinfallen, sich sammeln und besinnen, und wenn man noch Atem hat, von dannen laufen. Die Kraft zur Angst und die zum Glück sind das gleiche, das schrankenlose, bis zur Selbstpreisgabe Aufgeschlossensein für Erfahrung, in der der Erliegende sich wiederfindet. [...] Die List der ohnmächtigen Hasen erlöst mit ihnen selbst den Jäger, dem sie seine Schuld stibitzt.⁶³

Abbreviations:

AET: Theodor W. ADORNO, *Aesthetic Theory*. Newly translated, edited, and with a translator's introduction by Robert Hullot-Kentor, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

ÄT: Theodor W. ADORNO, *Ästhetische Theorie*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1970

H I: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit. Eine theologische Ästhetik*. I. *Schau der Gestalt*, Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961.

GL I: *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics*. I. *Seeing the Form*. Translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982.

⁶³ Theodor W. ADORNO, *Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1951, pp. 381-382 [nr. 128: *Regressionen*].

Response to “The Art of Disappearing: Religion and Aestheticisation” by Yves de Maeseneer

Gerhard Larchers, Graz

Although I am a specialist neither of Adorno nor of von Balthasar I fully agree with Coll. Yves's questioning the easy way 'our contemporary context' is being characterised 'in terms of aestheticisation' and the way how he more precisely narrows down with Welsch the term 'aestheticisation' in its broad spectrum of meaning. Yves distinguishes with Welsch three processual levels of 'aestheticisation'. First of all – the surface aestheticisation of the 'Erlebnisgesellschaft'; 'more fundamentally' the 'in-depth aestheticisation of the material and social world', where the human subject 'experiences an increasing possibility of constructing its own identity.' These processes are said to be altogether manifestations of a fundamental 'epistemological aestheticisation' from Kant over Nietzsche to postmodern (constructivist) positions, where the human being is considered 'as an *animal fingens* and the world as its design.'

'This aesthetic subjectivisation evolution seems to imply' – according to Yves - a 'project of emancipation from authority', which means also a drastic mutation of the religious system – religion becoming an aesthetic function of the self - with a 'drastic devaluation of religion, a denial of its authority'.

But as Yves mentions certain limits of Welsch's 'concept of the aesthetic as a (too) modern, subjective category' one feels invited to ask even more radically and metacritically whether the so called aestheticisation as a general 'subcurrent' must not be seen as the background of a more dramatic rather than merely epistemological level - i.e. of a metaphysical shift taking place in modernity. This metaphysical shift can be traced for instance in Nietzsche's *Geburt der Tragödie* (where *„Dasein und Welt nur noch als ästhetische gerechtfertigt sind“*) and his diagnosis of the death of God with aesthetic consequences (in the *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*: *„welche Spiele werden wir erfinden müssen...?“* um uns zu trösten) and in the status of the 'Übermensch' in *Zarathustra* with the *„Wille zur Macht als Kunst“* (resp. the 'letzte Mensch' in his *„Zarathustra“* with his *„Lüstchen - eins bei Tage und eins bei der Nacht“*). It is in this context, that the particularly high weight of the arts and aesthetics in modernity is to be understood - the arts representing a spearhead as well as a corrective of a modern subjective process of aestheticisation. This ought to be taken into account more explicitly

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

from the very beginning in order to understand the importance of the following steps.

Moreover does Yves in the line of Welsh not overstress the 'bricolage- type of religion' becoming a function of the (consuming) self? Is it not the case, in fact, that in the so called 'return of religion', the self is not becoming much more a function of collective processes – be they fundamentalist Christian with us or ideologically Islamistic some-where else...?

Very pertinently, in a second step, Yves himself goes beyond a 'radical subjectivisation' in the wake of Welsh's notion of aestheticisation. He does so by referring to two 20th century classical positions in the field of aesthetics, namely Th.W. Adorno (*Ästhet. Theorie*, 1970) and H. U. von Balthasar (*Herrlichkeit I*, 1961) indicating a 'surprising convergence' between them regarding 'aesthetic experience' and their critical 'diagnostics of modernity'. Although he does not really explain on what metaphysical grounds he switches over 'to a (compared with Welsch, G.L.) different view on the aesthetic and modernity', and does not give much criteria for his choosing exactly these two by their background in different positions, Yves is at any rate aiming at 'an alternative notion of the aestheti', 'in order to formulate a theological critical perspective on the relation between religion and aestheticisation today'.

In this sense Adorno's critique of modernity, resp. instrumental reason, points to its 'modern coercive identity' (Identitätszwang). And it is the 'authentic aesthetic experience', which breaks through this 'coercive identity' of modern culture industry which levels out all differences. What is important with Adorno's concept of the aesthetic experience is that with regard to art 'there is an inversion of the subject-object relation' 'and a dynamic of



The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

disappearing in the object'. In the sense of an 'inverted identification' 'the subject is de-centered', it 'has to become radically receptive in favour of a 'Vorrang des Objekts'.

The interesting and surprising point of Yves's presentation is how he parallels Adorno's 'critique of modernity' and notion of 'aesthetic experience' alongside the respective positions of von Balthasar. Whereas von Balthasar's critical diagnosis of modernity seems to me to come from a very different background – 'not just a different language game', the affinities of 'aesthetic experience' are astonishing. For instance, 'in the enrapturing experience of beauty, a self-surrender takes place'. And according to von Balthasar 'this aesthetic structure' is 'the most fit analogy to the Christian experience' – in the sense of Pauline theology as 'Christus in sich Gestalt gewinnen lassen' – as *Eingestaltung* - going as far as stigmatisation and the love of the neighbour. The work of art and the status of beauty are thus a true analogy for the theologically supernatural.

Yves indicates however, a problem in these two approaches: just turning around the role of the subject 'both aesthetics risk to end up as objectivist' and – I would add - neglect too much the persistent role of the critical subject. Balthasar and Adorno intend however, to avoid 'the crushing of the subject' by stressing that their specific aesthetic objects (*Christusgestalt*, resp., the modern art, G.L.) are marked by kenotic brokenness and reticence'.

To my mind there is also a basic problem in referring to the positions of Adorno and von Balthasar in this context, insofar as both criticize subjectivity, but from a very different point of view. Whereas Adorno could presuppose already a 'dialectic of *Aufklärung*' and has gone through theories of subjectivity in Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard and of course Marx, von Balthasar as a catholic theologian is perhaps doing in his *Fundamental Theology* (cf. *Herrlichkeit* I) the second step before the first. After a long antimodernist period with a refusal of an anthropologic approach to faith by the subject there is now simply a need for a basic critical transcendental reflection of criteria for any *Eingestaltung* of a Gestalt in a subject in order to avoid uncritical immediacy resp. bad heteronomy. Also the process of *Eingestaltung* should not be seen as too contemplative and neoplatonic but rather, as a real dramatic and dynamic one, interpersonally mediated (cf. in this regard the other volumes of *Herrlichkeit* and especially of *Theodramatik* are important).

Also, the critique of modernity with von Balthasar is, notwithstanding its prophetic pertinence, ambivalent: The *Apocalypse of the German Soul* published already in the thirties was quite accurate but one sided and in general Catholicism badly had

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

to come to terms with the freedom history of modernity after a long 150 years tradition of restorative anti-modernism (we are close to celebrating the 100th anniversary of the encyclical *Pascendi* in 2007), so that a shortcut rejection of modernity was, and is, problematic.

My partner Yves comes then to 'interpret today's context as a paradoxical fulfilment' of their – Adorno's and Balthasar's – 'prophecies'. 'Adorno and von Balthasar plead for the power of the image against the power of the almighty modern subject', and today we can state 'powerful images that decenter the subject.' Yves sees this power of the image today occupied by the commercial logo (we could add: also the media). And the logo is surrounded by a kind of religious authority: 'There is a power of the image, which actively transforms the subject'. ('Logos constitute the consumer'... 'Consumers are... con-sumed by the logo'). A power – as I would say – probably derived from the giving up of the iconoclastic commandment, which is still absolutely of value for von Balthasar and Adorno.

Also very accurate, I think, is Yves approach to totalitarianism and aesthetic ideology. Besides Goebbels and Zhdanov one could of course quote Stefan George, Ernst Jünger and even question, if J. Beuys' 'social plastic' and 'everyman is an artist' is not dangerously close to misunderstandings just like the social and aesthetic utopia of the Viennese actionists H. Nitsch and Otto Muehl. Also a good part of classical modern avant-garde artists – as we know now – were inclined to fascist thinking (cf. Italian futurists, Kandinsky, German expressionism, etc.) although they might have later been qualified by the Nazis as 'entartet' themselves. This shows the general intrinsic ambivalence of aesthetics/art in modernity. Yves therefore states quite justly an authoritative dynamics in modern aesthetics with a tendency towards 'distortions' and a 'disappearance of the subject'.

And perhaps there is another aspect of the problem to be mentioned: that radical metacritique of modernity as aestheticisation is ambivalent. This critique can come from the left and from the right as well – very often both affiliated to Heidegger – and paradoxically meet. This can go so far that the exalted invectives against the culture industry by Adorno and Horkheimer (in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*) somehow meet the Nazi critique of western American lifestyle or the cultural nostalgia of radical conservatives like Sedlmayr with his *Verlust der Mitte*.

Obviously Yves seems to intend a new 'Bilderstreit' about the distortion of images and the disappearance of the subject in society. He thereby brings a necessary political tone in the debate on theological aesthetics. To my mind however, in such a dispute

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

one should also give particular credit to present day arts and artists themselves as far more apt to handle this problem self-critically than the rather elite aesthetic approaches of Adorno and Balthasar and perhaps Yves himself allow. Such a new Bilderstreit would show that a major part of contemporary art itself is critical about the excesses of modernity and that there is in it (cf. the topics religion/mystics, memory, body, etc.) an enormous amount of very often anonymous religious hints, and signs of self-transcendence in media art and in popular culture, including film etc.

A further aesthetic ambiguity with regard to 'religion and aestheticisation' is also worked out by Yves. Whereas 'form is violence' (mimesis) for Adorno, but also 'an asylum for the non-identical' (kenosis), Form und Gestalt seem necessary for von Balthasar in order not to lose the concreteness of revelation and Christian faith (in visual arts it is for him above all the icons, Grünewald and Rouault who represent this formal principle). Adorno sees in form an element of critique, but also of mimetic violence. The kenotic of the work of art leads him however to a growing aesthetic awareness about the violence of form ending up in the development of a form of a negative aesthetic theology, compared with Balthasar who remains within the boundaries of an affirmative discourse.

In his final critical perspectives Yves sketches out 'scenarios of disappearing'. As formalisation 'risks eliminating all contents' and aestheticisation comes down to the disappearance of all non-aesthetic spheres, 'religious authority' might disappear 'into the 'format' (as a cultural schematism) like 'television makers adapt everything to their 'format.' Very justly Yves points out that there is a risk 'that theology (or religion) would transform itself according to the ruling aesthetic paradigm... religion would become itself an agent of aestheticisation'. And Yves finishes with a warning 'for too much theological aesthetic enthusiasm'. Yet I definitely doubt that there is already enough of this enthusiasm, so that we might have too much of it (theology and the churches are culturally far too timid and reluctant). 'The idea of kenosis as a self-reflexive, critical answer opens up a horizon for formulating a negative-theological critique of aestheticisation'. But very justly, Yves questions whether or not negative theology, as a kenotic-mimetic answer, is not risking ending up in an act of mere self-destruction, making 'a virtue out of our theological powerlessness today?'

I cannot but agree fully with Yves' suspicion facing the actual boom of negative theology and of iconoclasm in general. I would just wish he had taken up this point in more detail in regard to von Balthasar's staurocentric aesthetics. We badly need to mediate negative theology with an aesthetic theology of 'real presence' (G.Steiner) and of the kenotic Christian supernatural in liturgy, sacraments, diakonia in order to avoid a religiously 'unglückliches

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
Conference Proceedings
The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
Berlin, March 2005

Bewußtsein' (Hegel). The mediation of the arts can help for that. In this partnership however, theology should look out not only for 'high culture' aesthetical products (cf. Adorno and Balthasar), but for all aesthetic phenomena. Aesthetics should not be isolated in theology but be taken into account attentively in all its issues and matters.

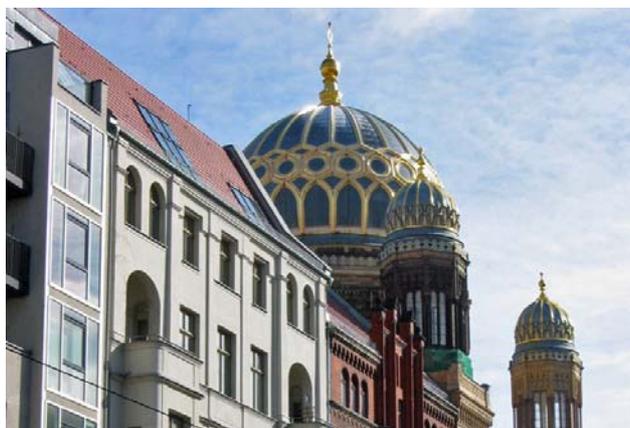
Die Unterbrechung der Christlichen Tradition als Herausforderung für die Identität des Glaubens

Lieven Boeve, Leuven

The transmission of the Christian tradition has lost its self-evidence in most of Europe. *Culturally* speaking, tradition has been interrupted; Christians, and certainly those committed to the Church, constitute a minority in a society that is increasingly reaching de-traditionalisation. In my work, I suggest that this 'cultural interruption' of the Christian tradition should not make Christians look back longingly to that lost 'Christian age'. On the contrary, as with every historical context, so too does our 'postmodern' context offer Christians the chance to reconsider and *recontextualise* their faith. What's more, I argue that the dialogue with this context can make clear that, *theologically* speaking, the category of 'interruption' also stands at the very heart of Christian faith.

Cultural Interruption

A lot of Western societies are today undergoing a process of accelerated secularisation, perhaps better termed *detraditionalisation*. God belongs less and less to everyday life. In



the public as well as the private sphere, Christian tradition not only has lost its quasi-monopoly in matters of meaning and Weltanschauung, but has even become marginal. At the same time our societies have become internally *pluralized*. There are many religions and

Weltanschauungen, and there does not appear to be any that can legitimately claim primacy over the rest to become the measuring standard for them all. Besides Christians (divided into different denominations), there are atheists, agnostics, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, ex-Christians, the indifferent, individualists, people belonging to neo-religious movements (such as New Age), etc., and an important group of post-Christians: having an already deeply secularised Christian affiliation, this group retains at best only a very fragmentary commitment to faith and faith community and a sparse and unintegrated knowledge of the Christian tradition –

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

often despite years of religious education and (possibly even) catechesis.

Summarising: the Christian tradition and the identity of Christians has been *culturally interrupted*. Both secularisation and pluralisation question in their own way the identity of Christians today. What does it mean to be Christian? What does it mean to belong to the Christian community? Furthermore, how is this identity to be preserved? It is this new situation which should be investigated as to *possibilities* for recontextualising Christian faith in order to renew it and in this way prepare for the future. After all, Christians take part, as do their contemporaries, in the prevailing context by participating equally in its sensitivities, attitudes, views and ambiguities. This is where theology is embedded, charged with pondering the internal intelligibility and the external credibility of the Christian faith.

The Interruption of the Encounter with the Other

All the great ideologies, which for several years seemed to shape the social debate, today appear to share the same fate as the Christian narrative and equally have problems in transmitting that for which they stand. In a so-called postmodern frame of thought one refers to this as the end of the 'grand narratives' (J.-F. Lyotard). The grand narratives of rationality and emancipation not only could not carry out their promises, they very often lapsed into their antitheses, being the cause of many victims. This is the paradox of our postmodern time: precisely in a context exploding with knowledge and capability its boundaries have become all but too evident.

Postmodern thinkers have pointed out that the grand narratives did not pay attention to these boundaries - to the uncontrollable that escapes all attempts at controlling it. Said differently and more technically, they point out to us – and this is the key to postmodern critical consciousness – that *the 'other' always and again forms the boundary to one's own identity*. Furthermore, only the one who reckons with the 'other' at its boundary, who knows how to relate to it, and who allows oneself to be challenged by it – only that one can escape the pitfall of the grand narratives. It is this sensitivity for otherness which has made us today become more aware both of the diversity of meaning-giving narratives surrounding our individual narratives, and of the particular place of those narratives within that diversity.

Put this way, the recognition of diversity and otherness, including the irreducible character thereof does not necessarily lead to relativism. Acknowledging plurality and otherness does not mean that religions are simply exchangeable with one another, as though it no longer would matter if one is a Christian, Buddhist or atheist.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

The difference between the Christian faith and Buddhism or atheism is precisely that the Christian faith is the faith of Christians, and that this will always be their point of departure in viewing reality, in this case, the diversity of religions. One's own position cannot simply be placed within brackets. Like all members of *Weltanschauungen*, Christians too cannot retreat to a non-involved observer position, simply putting their own perspective on a level with others. It is because they are already Christians that the other religions and *Weltanschauungen* appear to them as different/other.

In short, this is the opportunity that our current culture of diversity offers to the Christian faith after secularisation. Even though the Christian tradition and identity have been interrupted, there is no reason to simply give in to cultural pessimism. In a time where belief is no longer evident and an explicit choice is demanded from the believer, Christians after all, become more conscious of their *own specific identity*, walking in the footsteps of Jesus whom they confess as the Christ. Moreover, they stand charged with viewing their own way of life from the perspective of a diversity and otherness in fundamental life options. As a result, they share a double task: to take their own narrative seriously (no relativism) *and* to respect other religious positions (no fundamentalism). For the *encounter with diversity and otherness interrupts their own faith narrative* continuously, certainly when it has the tendency to close itself off and in this way make victims – the very first victim being the God in whom they profess to believe. On this last point 'interruption' may become a theological category.

God Interrupts our Christian Narrative

The dialogue with the current culture of diversity thus contains its opportunities. This seems to be the lesson from practical experience as well. In a radio interview a while ago, a woman spoke of an encounter the evening before. She is involved in a Church organisation active in multicultural issues and was invited by a Moroccan community in Brussels to celebrate the 'breaking of the fast' with them. This community had the practice of holding an open house every evening of Ramadan at sundown. The woman recounted that the conversation at table soon took on a profound sense of depth, certainly when religious themes such as the importance of 'fasting' and the relations between Muslims and Christians were being discussed. It struck this woman then that in these conversations, for example on fasting, it was precisely in the similarities between Islam and Christianity that the differences could be noticed at the same time. The outcome of this event was certainly not a relativising 'it actually all boils down to the same thing in the end,' but instead a respectful recognition of difference and self-worth. What is more, this woman then went on to describe how the Christians began to question themselves about the seriousness of their own faith: did they, for example, experience

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

their own fasting authentically enough? Definitely an unexpected wake-up call, she concluded. Respect for the irreducible identity of one's own Christian narrative and for the otherness of the different religions and fundamental life options can thus go together – what is more, the encounter made this woman consider her own identity and its importance precisely through this encounter with 'religious others'.

But can the Christian narrative enter into such opportunities? Can it allow itself to be interrupted by otherness, specifically other religions and Weltanschauungen? Can it be an *open narrative*, a narrative that has learned to remain open for that which is other and thereby be challenged by it? Is not Jesus proclaimed as 'the way, the truth and the life'? Should Christians not be chiefly concerned with setting right those who think differently from them?

Returning to the experience of the woman from the radio interview, it was an experience of a fruitful and productive interruption of her own Christian narrative by the narrative of an other. Are not such encounters the way in which God queries us Christians today? Through the confrontation with the other? Has God not always been the Other in our narratives, certainly when they threatened to close in upon themselves? Viewed from this perspective, this may well be the message of the Old Testament. When Israel sits enslaved in Egypt, God through Moses breaks open this narrative of slavery and alienation. When the Jewish people shut themselves off from God, serve other gods, wreak injustice upon the poor and the stranger and allow their kings to become corrupt, then God sends prophets to pry open these closed narratives. The New Testament is similarly the narrative of the throwing open of closed narratives. In God's name Jesus forgives whoever has come to be entangled in sin, he criticises those who reduce true religion to the dry observance of the law, or to the punctilious bringing of necessary sacrifices, or to the all too easy misuse of religion for political ends. He invites us to follow in the footsteps of the father who embraces his youngest prodigal son (and not to share the incomprehension of the oldest son). He teaches us to see God in the poor, naked, sick, hungry, thirsty, imprisoned, in short, the vulnerable and injured other: 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food...? [...] Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me' (Mt 25,37.40).

The whole metaphor and dynamic of the Christian narrative appears to be permeated with the interruption of its own identity, through the confrontation with the Other, God. The important motifs such as calling, exodus, mount, wilderness, cross, resurrection, conversion, pilgrimage, etc. illustrate this. The Christian narrative simply may not become a closed narrative. For precisely then, God will break it open again. *Interruption becomes here a theological category.*

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
Conference Proceedings
The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
Berlin, March 2005

Naturally, this takes on its ultimate shape in the resurrection of Jesus crucified on the cross. Precisely at that moment God makes it clear that one who lives like this Jesus of Nazareth, professed as the Christ by his disciples, cannot be enclosed by death but instead now has a future beyond it. Following Jesus carries with it the challenge to seek out the other who interrupts our narrative.

The cultural interruption of the Christian narrative offers Christians the opportunity to transform their narrative into an open narrative. Such narrative is not only culturally credible but also theologically legitimate. The dialogue with the current culture, the confrontation with the diversity of religions and weltanschauungen, offers a key to authentically interpret the specific nature of the Christian narrative for today. The cultural interruption may facilitate appreciating that 'interruption' is at the heart of the Christian narrative and, furthermore, that it is precisely there that God might be at work, critiquing narratives closing in on themselves, and indicating new ways to a deepening of contemporary Christian identity in relation to the current context.

Religion and Politics: Conceptual Tools for Understanding Their Relationship

Patrick Riordan SJ, London

There are various ways of conceptualising the relationship between religion and politics. The necessity of doing so has emerged at various times in the course of history, and in various forms. In some cases the question has been posed in terms of the different jurisdictions of Pope and Emperor, Church and Crown. Church State relations are a theme in some modern states in which it has been found necessary to articulate the relevant roles so as to limit and control them.

I do not distinguish between the Church-State and Religion-Politics pairs, but I will deal with what is common to both, namely, the need to deal with a complexity in human affairs, in which diverse domains of human social and moral life are interwoven. The principles to which people appeal in explaining and justifying their activity have different sources. Some appeal to revelation, others appeal to reason. The laws and norms articulated to regulate human dealings similarly have different origins - divine revelation or divinely sanctioned authority on the one hand, human reason and tradition with its corresponding authorities on the other. Laws of various kinds have courts, and officers of courts, and the issues of jurisdiction have highlighted the problem of the relationship of religion and politics. The issues are known from history: disputes about taxes and revenues, disputes about appointments and investiture, disputes about powers and permissions.

It is important to recall that the question of how to express the relationship between religion and politics is not only a modern one. The question arose in early Christian and in medieval times. However, with the enlightenment, the question was posed in a new context, since the assumption of the enlightenment was the deliverance of humanity from oppression. The forces of oppression were taken to be not only ignorance and poverty but also traditional forms of authority including religious authority. The revolutions in the name of freedom and rights saw themselves as challenging the claims of religious authority as much as those of civil authorities. As a result, since the enlightenment, the question of the relationship of religion and politics has tended to assume the need to control and restrict religion lest it claim an oppressive role for itself.

The relationship between religion and politics can be conceived of in various ways. Some forms such as Theocracy subordinate the political dimension to that of the religious. There are many

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

examples of this position, some of them current.⁶⁵ It can be a sophisticated position, and it is always a question whether theological critiques such as that offered by radical orthodoxy amount to a relativisation of the political to a theological agenda.⁶⁶



On the other hand, there are ways of expressing the relationship which instrumentalise religion for the sake of a political cause. The clearest examples of this are styles of political philosophy such as that of Rousseau which recognise the value of religion and its contribution to sustaining social and political order, and so attempt to institutionalise but also domesticate religion for the sake of that order. Civil religion in Rousseau's sense does precisely that.⁶⁷ Spinoza is another thinker, recognising the role of religious sentiment as he observes it in Calvinist Netherlands, who attempts to reconstruct such sentiment and harness it to be of service in sustaining the political and social order.

Both these approaches have in common not only the tendency to privilege one side of the pair, but also to view the other pole through the lens of the privileged stance. So in theocracy, politics is viewed from the perspective of theology, and not allowed an independent conceptualisation. In the civil religion position, the political agenda is privileged, and the religious is considered, not on its own terms, but only in terms of what it might contribute to the well being of the political community.

The challenge is to find a way of dealing conceptually with the relationship between Church and State, Religion and Politics, which respects the autonomy of each pole and its legitimate independence. At the same time, an adequate theoretical conceptualisation must be such that it can be compatible with and hospitable to both a fully-fledged

⁶⁵ Lucas A. Swaine, 'How Ought Liberal Democracies to Treat Theocratic Communities' *Ethics* 111 (2001) 302-43.

⁶⁶ Christopher J. Insole, *The Politics of Human Frailty. A Theological Defence of Political Liberalism*. (London: SCM Press, 2004).

⁶⁷ Andrew Shanks, *Civil Society Civil Religion*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 103-8.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

theological understanding of the nature of religion and an articulated philosophical account of the nature of politics.

I wish to survey a number of such attempts, which are more or less successful in respecting both the difference between religion and politics, and their respective autonomy. There is a danger that we assume that the viable solutions proposed since the enlightenment are more likely to be successful than those attempted in the early Christian and medieval worlds. The latter are less likely to understand the nature of political liberalism as such; that is true. But they may be richer in their capacity to appreciate the nature and contribution of religion. Modern solutions will be up to date on their comprehension of modern political forms, but may not be as able to make sense of religion. While it is true that the referents of 'religion' and 'politics' have changed and evolved over the centuries, the worlds of meaning inhabited by citizens and people of faith today are imbued with influences from the past. The focus of this investigation is not the past, but the present. The question is how a citizen of a liberal polity in a pluralist society, who at the same time is a committed believer, can make sense of her existence in all its complexity. Is there a contemporary account which can do justice to both dimensions, or is there at least a contemporary account which is capable of being enhanced by a complementary theory from an earlier time?

I acknowledge that I ask the question from the perspective of a Catholic Christian who is citizen of a liberal democratic polity, but I hope that the analysis is of use to other citizens with a different religious allegiance. In what follows I survey briefly the following styles of conceptualisation so as to assess their adequacy:

1. Private – Public
2. Eternal Peace and Justice – Temporal Peace and Justice
3. Unrestricted Common Good – Public Good
4. Reasonable Comprehensive Doctrines – Overlapping Consensus
5. Civil Society – State

1. Private - Public

A familiar pair of concepts used to deal with the relationship between religion and politics is 'private – public'. Perhaps this is the thinnest of the conceptual models available, but it is very useful nonetheless. It describes the realm of the political as the public arena, and relies on philosophical attempts to articulate what can be presupposed as shared in the public arena. Hobbes, Locke, Mill, and modern liberals all offer accounts of what the public arena is or might be. Depending on the account offered, standards of argumentation for the public sphere are laid down. Participants in the public forum are required to conform to these standards. Failure

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

to do so, for instance by relying on religious reasons, is an unwarranted importation of what is private into the public arena. But more to the point, as religious reason it is unlikely to find acceptance in the consent of other participants in the public square, since they all have their own affiliations, religious or otherwise. Precisely the problem of diversity of ultimate commitments makes it necessary to secure a public domain in which people can be free from the threat of oppression in the name of another's religion. The price for this freedom and security of course is that they must forego the possibility of using the public power to impose their own religious convictions or practices on others.

Contemporary liberal thinkers take up this emphasis on the restraint required of the religiously committed person when engaging in political debate. Such a person should restrain herself from supporting a coercive law for which no public justification is available, or that a citizen should not rely exclusively on religious grounds for supporting or rejecting a coercive law. Robert Audi for instance formulates two principles 'the Principle of Secular Rationale', and 'the Principle of Secular Motivation'. The first principle 'posits a prima facie obligation not to advocate or support any law or public policy that restricts human conduct unless one has, and is willing to offer, adequate secular reason for this' and the second principle imposes an 'obligation to abstain... unless one is sufficiently motivated by normatively adequate secular reason'.⁶⁸ As we shall see below, Rawls too with his emphasis on public reason belongs in this tradition. However, his development of his views has introduced a dimension of complexity which moves them far beyond the simple conceptual apparatus of the private-public distinction.

This distinction allows a legitimacy and validity to religion, by confining it to a realm apart from that of the public. The result of this confinement is that religion is deprived of some dimensions of its self-understanding, insofar as it sees its own mission in terms of a sanctification or redemption of all of reality. Nonetheless, many religious people have found it a useful compromise since it secures for them a space in which to hold their beliefs and practice their religion without interference from others or from the state.

That the public – private distinction is unsatisfactory is obvious from the social reality of religion. Far from religion having disappeared as a result of modernization, it is very present in the public scene. Liberal political regimes which thought that they could dispense with the consideration of religion, having relegated it to the private sphere, have been left without intellectual and political

⁶⁸ Robert Audi, *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 163-4.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

resources to deal with the reality of religion in international diplomacy as well as in domestic politics. The Israel – Palestine problem, the Iranian revolution and the emergence of Shi'a Islam as a political force, the radicalisation of Islamic parties becoming a significant aspect in states in many parts of the world, the aspect of liberation theology in animating the revolutionary stance of many peoples in Latin America, the countervailing presence of fundamentalist evangelical sects in some of the same regions, and not least the mobilisation by George W. Bush of the Christian right in the USA, all reflect the undeniable presence of religion in political affairs. Any attempt to deal with these without adequate appreciation of their religious dimensions must be doomed. The required comprehension of the religious dimension may not simply be a sociological or anthropological account, but must be such as to appreciate the motivating power experienced by the adherents for the political stances they take.

The weakness of the public-private distinction has been exposed for liberal political philosophy, however, not primarily by the recovery of religion, but by the critique offered by feminism. Religion is not the only significant dimension of human life which had been relegated to the private sphere: feminist critics have drawn attention to the way in which the relationships between the sexes and the divisions of labour in the domestic sphere had been dismissed as private. The uncovering of structures of domination and oppression, and the revelation of injustice in the power balance meant that it was no longer acceptable to describe it as private. As the feminist slogan has it, 'the personal is the political'.⁶⁹

The criticism from this perspective revealed the inadequacy of the private-public distinction as drawn. It also revealed that the apparent simplicity concealed a complexity which had to be

⁶⁹ Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self. Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*. (Cambridge: Polity, 1992). So for instance, '...the transition to modernity does not only privatise the self's relation to the cosmos and to ultimate questions of religion and being. First with western modernity the conception of privacy is so enlarged that an intimate domestic-familial sphere is subsumed under it. Relations ... come to be viewed as spheres of "personal decision-making". At the beginning of modern moral and political theory, however, the "personal" nature of the spheres does not mean the recognition of equal, female autonomy, but rather the removal of gender relations from the sphere of justice. While the bourgeois males celebrates his transition from conventional to post-conventional morality, from socially accepted rules of justice to their generation in the light of the principles of a social contract, the domestic sphere remains at the conventional level. The sphere of justice from Hobbes through Locke and Kant is regarded as the domain where independent, male heads of household transact with one another, while the domestic-intimate sphere remains at the conventional level. ... An entire domain of human activity, namely, nurture, reproduction, love and care, which becomes the woman's lot in the course of the development of modern, bourgeois society, is excluded from moral and political considerations, and relegated to the realm of "nature".' Pp. 154-5.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

addressed. Honohan's analysis of the terms is illustrative of a wider debate.⁷⁰ The liberal philosophical usage privileges one way of drawing the distinction, and it does so in terms of control. A power agenda is operative here. What is in public control is subject to the norms and standards insisted upon by the liberal justification, for instance, the respecting of rights. But private control seemed to exempt whatever fell under this category from public scrutiny. Other ways of drawing the distinction, e.g. in terms of access, or in terms of interest, made it possible to relativise the political use of the terms.

2. Ultimate Peace and Justice – Temporal Peace and Justice: Augustine

Augustine's attempted conceptualisation of the relationship between religion and politics is particularly privileged, because he could be said to stand in both camps simultaneously. As a scholar in the Roman cultural world, he had a deep appreciation of the history and ethos of the political.⁷¹ As a bishop of the Christian Church, he had a sound theological appreciation of created reality within the divine economy.

There is a profound irony in the fact that Augustine's thought was developed in response to the allegation that Christianity had destroyed the proper balance between religion and politics.⁷² Pagan refugees from Rome maintained that the fall of Rome was due to the abandonment by Rome of its traditional religious practices. Rome's divine patrons had withdrawn their favour and protection because the city had transferred its worship to the God of the Christians. The traditional view represented in this challenge was of a single economy incorporating both Rome and its gods. It was as if the city had a contract with its divine protectors and the failure on the part of the city to keep its side of the bargain resulted in a withdrawal of divine favour. This was an integrated vision of the political and the cosmic-theological, and various versions of it are found in the ancient world. Rather than accepting this compact vision, to which some of his fellow Christians were inclined, Augustine developed an analysis which effectively de-divinised politics.⁷³ This analysis was presented in the collection of books known as *The City of God*.⁷⁴ His argument hinges on a contrast

⁷⁰ Iseult Honohan, 'Dealing with Difference: the Republican Public-Private Distinction', in: *Pluralism: The Philosophy and Politics of Diversity*, edited by M. Baghramian and A. Ingram, (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 156-76.

⁷¹ Eugene TeSelle, 'The Civic Vision in Augustine's *City of God*', *Thought* 62 (1987) 268-80.

⁷² R.A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine*, (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 1970).

⁷³ Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

⁷⁴ Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*. (Harmondsworth: Pelican Classics, 1972).

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

between two polarised cities, the City of God and the *civitas terrena*, the earthy city. The contrast is drawn in terms of the motivating goods and the typical psychological states of the members of both cities. Love of God is contrasted with love of self, the desire to serve and obey is contrasted with the desire to dominate, the pursuit of God's glory is contrasted with the pursuit of fame and honour, the harmony of peace and justice is contrasted with the constant battling for domination among nations and within nations. These two cities are in conflict with one another, but it is a conflict of a different order to that found within the earthy city. The battle lines are drawn through the hearts of men and women as well as through societies and states. The victory is assured, the Bishop Augustine affirms, but beyond history.



Within history, within the age (*saeculum*, origin of our word 'secular'), the human political community is a complex of the dynamics of these two cities.⁷⁵ Far from denying the goodness of the historical community, Augustine acknowledges that it pursues *temporal* peace and justice, which although they are limited and flawed when compared with divine peace and justice, nonetheless provide the conditions in which people can pursue their calling to love their neighbour and to serve God. The flaw in temporal peace and justice is that it must inevitably rely on domination, on

coercion. The assertion of human will is at the core of Augustine's understanding of sin, and the rebellion of human will against the divine will is the ultimate source of the disorder he analyses. But for order to be maintained in the political community there must be a dimension of domination. Providentially, according to Augustine, this dimension of domination is God's way of controlling and limiting the destructive forces which are rooted in the rebellious human heart.

In some respects this looks like a version of the public/private distinction, whereby the norms guiding private life (the Christian household, the Church) are different from and opposed to the norms guiding public life (the state, civil law, politics). Love and service opposed to domination and command, etc. But there are reasons for not accepting this reading. First, the position is

⁷⁵ *Saeculum*, p. 58.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

articulated from a theological standpoint, confronting an alternative cosmic or theological account of political events. The realm of politics is assessed from the perspective of the theological. Its boundaries and its competencies are defined from the perspective of the vision of the ultimate triumph of the City of God beyond history. This is very unlike the way in which the private realm is defined from the perspective of the public in the previous model. And it is unlike the way in which the public is understood to place limits on what legitimately may be introduced from the private into public debate.

Second, Augustine's contrast of the temporal peace and justice attainable by the city in history with the ultimate peace and justice of God's kingdom constitutes a de-divinisation of the secular. The claims of any human community to the ultimate loyalty and obedience of its citizens are undermined. That community is always capable of being relativised to the transcendent. And because of the inherent sinfulness of the human community (assertion of will and self), the claims of any state or system of human law to represent the good unqualifiedly, or to incorporate a regime of moral perfection, are shown to be illusory. A Platonic or Aristotelian style politics of perfection is abandoned.⁷⁶

Third, while typically the public/private distinction allowed the public domain to determine what it would tolerate from or in the private, Augustine's solution reverses this order. His discussion of the Christian community and the household of believers, whose own life is facilitated within the order achieved in politics, demonstrates that the Christians set limits to what they will tolerate from the political. Any attempt by the political to revert to the compact cosmological view of Rome and its civil religion will be rejected. Augustine's formulations seem so modern, and yet it is noteworthy that the party likely to fail in the appropriate distinction and division is the political. He writes that the Church 'could not have laws of religion common with the earthly city, and in defence of her religious laws she was bound to dissent from those who thought differently and to prove a burdensome nuisance to them.' The Church does not offer a political agenda, 'she takes no account of any difference in customs, laws, and institutions, by which earthly peace is achieved and preserved – not that she annuls or abolishes any of those, rather she maintains them and follows them (for whatever divergences there are among the diverse nations, those institutions have one single aim – earthly peace), provided

⁷⁶ *Saeculum*, p. 100. The contemporary relevance of this stance to constitutional legal debates is well illustrated by Graham Walker, *Moral Foundations of Constitutional Thought. Current Problems, Augustinian Prospects* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

that no hindrance is presented thereby to the religion which teaches that the one supreme and true God is to be worshipped.⁷⁷

Fourth, Augustine allows that the human goods of the city in history are truly good. But they are limited in being relativised to the life of humans in history. Their enjoyment is appropriate so long as people appreciate that they are limited and not ultimate.⁷⁸

3. Public Good – Common Good

Alasdair MacIntyre remarks that Aquinas was one of the educational failures of the University of Naples.⁷⁹ A failure because he did not conform to that model of the graduate which the founder of the university, the emperor Frederick II, had hoped clerks and lawyers would emulate to administer his empire. Instead of becoming an obedient and bureaucratic clerk, Aquinas turned out to be subversive in teaching a philosophy of law and politics which was directly critical of the stance adopted by the emperor. He was also critical of the policies of the saintly King Louis IX of France. These criticisms are to be found in the *Summa Theologiae* in the questions on law and the common good. The notion of Aquinas as subversive is perhaps surprising, but recent historical and exegetical work is revealing a complexity which demonstrates the lie of the standard rendering of his teaching on law. It shows that, as in other areas of theology, Aquinas's presentation of his views on law was situated in a lively debate with real political implications. Later medieval debates were also occasioned by a particular crisis concerning the relationship between imperial and papal jurisdiction.⁸⁰

Aquinas distinguished between a limited good as the proper object of political order and the unrestricted common good as the ultimate object of human striving.⁸¹ This is not the same as the Augustinian distinction between the two cities, which leaves the political community in history in the position of compromising with evil. For Augustine, political power of its nature relies on coercion, and so is animated by the distorted human impulse to impose its will on others, *libido dominandi*. For Augustine, therefore, political power is inevitably sinful. Aquinas did not share this view, even though he adopted the strong sense of realism which Augustinian awareness of history brought to the idealism of Aristotle. For Aquinas, the good pursued in political life is a real good, and part of the great scale of

⁷⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, Bk XIX, chap. 17, p. 878.

⁷⁸ *City of God*, Bk XV, chap. 4, p. 600.

⁷⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Natural Law as Subversive: The Case of Aquinas' in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 26:1 (1996) pp. 61-83, at 73.

⁸⁰ M. S. Kempshall, *The Common Good in Late Medieval Political Thought*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

⁸¹ J. Finnis, 'Public Good: The Specifically Political Common Good in Aquinas' in *Natural Law and Moral Inquiry: Ethics Metaphysics and Politics in the Work of Germain Grisez*. Edited by Robert P. George, (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1998), 174-209.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

goods which are reflected on in ethics. The challenge for that reflection is to identify the nature of the good pursued in politics, and to locate it in relation to other goods. The questions which arise require investigation into the relationship between temporal goods of justice and peace, and the unrestricted goods of beatitude. If that relationship is one of instrumentality, or subordination, does that imply obligation to apply the means appropriate to the inferior good so that they also bring about the higher good? In other words, should the political regime use the instruments of human law to ensure that its people obey God and do His will?

Aquinas's distinction between different levels of good parallels his distinction between different types of law. In this context, the relevant distinction is between divine and human law. His definition of law as an ordinance of reason directed to the common good, made by one who has responsibility for the community, and promulgated, leaves open the possibility that there are different goods in common for different communities. It also leaves open the possibility that the methods to be employed in the application of law are different.

A human law's purpose is the temporal tranquillity of the state (*temporalis tranquillitatis civitatis*), a purpose which the law attains by coercively prohibiting external acts (*cohibendo exteriores actus*) to the extent that those are evils which can disturb the state's peaceful condition (*quantum ad illa mala quae possunt perturbare pacificum statum civitatis*). The purpose of divine law is to lead one to the end (*finis*) of eternal fulfilment (*felicitas*), an end which is blocked by any sin, and not merely by external acts but also by interior ones. And so what suffices for the perfection of human law, viz., that it prohibit wrongdoing (*peccata*) and impose punishments, does not suffice for the perfection of divine law; what that needs is that one be made completely ready for participation in eternal fulfilment.⁸²

This text draws the distinction between the types of law in terms of their objects (temporal peace, eternal beatitude), and the kinds of compliance that they can expect (external performance, interior submission). Other texts draw the distinction in terms of the relationships and virtues to be fostered.

In considering the appropriate common good for political community, Aquinas sometimes uses the term 'public good', but he does not rely on the terminological distinction so much as on his clarification of the different purposes of law in different kinds of society. The appropriate focus for human law in a political community is the relationship of people to one another. This

⁸² Aquinas, S.th. 1a2ae q98 a1c, quoted by Finnis at p. 177 and p. 199.

specification leaves out the dimension which belongs to the moral or divine law as such, namely, the relationship of persons to God as their creator and redeemer.

Finnis discusses this distinction in relation to texts in which Aquinas also treats the appropriate goods of individuals, families and households. Individual persons themselves have the responsibility to lead their lives in such a way that they achieve their ultimate end. The contribution of the political community to that project is the maintenance of the public good of peace and justice, and the provision of that measure of security which will allow individuals and families to live well. So, as Finnis admits, the correct answer to the question 'Can a state's common good, being the good of a complete community, be anything less than the complete good, the fulfilment of its citizens?' has to be both yes and no.⁸³ Insofar as families and religious communities are part of political community, their common good designated as the life of virtue is attainable in that community, on condition that everyone, including civil authorities, exercises his or her responsibilities appropriately. So the answer can be yes, admitting that the common good of a flourishing life can be attained in political community, but it requires that the civil authorities do not overstep their proper boundaries, and deprive households, families or religious groups of their autonomy in pursuing the life of virtue as they see fit. If they do remain with proper boundaries, then the public good which they pursue is a limited good, instrumental to the more ultimate goods which persons and households should pursue for themselves.

Aquinas's views on the purpose of human law in relation to divine (moral) law are made explicit in his discussion of two questions, namely, whether human, civil law should command all the virtues, and whether it should prohibit all vices. When he asks if the purpose of human law is to prevent all wrongdoing he notes two things. The first is that it would probably be impossible to prevent all wrongdoing. The second remark is that the law forbids precisely those wrongful acts which undermine social order, and from which good people might be expected to abstain. He identifies those as actions which not only harm others, their direct victims, but which if they were permitted would make social existence impossible, such as theft and murder.⁸⁴ From this distinction we can see that Aquinas is aware that there will be wrongful deeds committed with

⁸³ Ibid. p. 176.

⁸⁴ Aquinas, S.th. 1a2ae q96 a2: 'Whether it belongs to the human law to repress all vices? ...Now human law is framed for a number of human beings, the majority of whom are not perfect in virtue. Wherefore, human laws do not forbid all vices, from which the virtuous abstain, but only the more grievous vices, from which it is possible for the majority to abstain; and chiefly those that are to the hurt of others, without the prohibition of which human society could not be maintained: thus human law prohibits murder, theft and suchlike.'

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

which human lawmakers and enforcers will not concern themselves. But their attention is directed to those misdeeds that affect not only the quality but the very possibility of social life, since their concern is primarily for the public good. Two examples, obvious ones, are given, but it is clear that Thomas expected a longer list. Were theft or murder permissible, were perjury and fraud to be tolerated, then we would be in precisely that state of war which Hobbes described: the war of each one against each one, since no one could trust another, and each must consider his neighbour with suspicion, 'and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.'

The use of this distinction between two kinds of wrongdoing from the perspective of the human lawmaker is a good example of the realism which Aquinas brought to Aristotle on the basis of his Augustinian heritage. And so he is not blind to the fact that there will always be a number of people and a range of activities about which the law will be ineffectual. This nuanced stance is evident in his discussion of a typically Aristotelian topic, namely, whether it is the purpose of law to make people good.⁸⁵ With Aristotle he wants to answer yes, that the law is aimed at the quality of citizens, but with Augustine he qualifies what is meant by 'good' by distinguishing different respects in which people are considered good. It had been pointed out in one of the opinions cited by Aquinas in relation to this question that some people act well in relation to public affairs, whose private lives are not above reproach.⁸⁶ In his answer Aquinas does not deny the different degrees of virtue present among people, but he makes an interesting point about different expectations applicable to lawgivers and subjects of law: '...the common good of the state cannot flourish, unless the citizens be virtuous, at least those whose business it is to govern. But it is enough for the good of the community, that the other citizens be so far virtuous that they obey the commands of their ruler.'⁸⁷ These texts confirm that Aquinas is using the notion of common good in a more restricted sense than the life of virtue. Otherwise it would not be meaningful for him to write of the common good of the community being realised while some citizens only conform to the law in their outward behaviour, and not interiorly on the basis of virtuous character.

Alasdair MacIntyre has provided illuminating backgrounds for these discussions, revealing that they are derived from real issues debated in the political world of the thirteenth century.⁸⁸ He

⁸⁵ S.th. 1a2ae q92 a1. See Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III chap. 9, in which this is discussed. Concern with the quality of citizens is what distinguishes a polity or political community from a mere alliance for mutual protection, or a business deal for the exchange of goods and services.

⁸⁶ q92 a1 Obj 3.

⁸⁷ S.th. 1a2ae q92 a1 ad3m.

⁸⁸ MacIntyre, 'Natural Law as Subversive.'

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

situates them in the stances adopted by two very different monarchs, Louis IX of France, and the Emperor, Frederick II in the Kingdom of Sicily. Louis IX understood his royal authority in theological terms, considering it his duty to enforce the moral and religious teachings of Scripture and the Church. He applied the law as an instrument of moral education. Laws promulgated by him in 1254 prohibited cursing and swearing, games of chance, gambling, and attempted to abolish various vices including usury and prostitution. Aquinas experienced this while in Paris. This is the background to Aquinas taking the position that human law should not repress all the vices. His arguments are directly opposed to those relied upon by King Louis IX. Where Louis appeals to Christian theological reasons, Aquinas argues from human reason, generating standards which should apply to all rulers, whether Christian or not. In the context of his reflection on natural law, Aquinas holds that the promulgation of law by one with authority and power to make law is not sufficient to confer the status of law. Coherence with reason is required for reasonable citizens to accept that the promulgated law is binding on them. It is not necessary for valid human law that it be made by a Christian prince using Christian principles. It is necessary that it be reasonable, and recognisable as such by rational citizens.

Aquinas had also experienced the Emperor Frederick's style of rule while a young student at the University of Naples. As MacIntyre notes, the Constitutions of Melfi, promulgated in 1231 for the Kingdom of Sicily to which Naples then belonged, attempted to repress vice but most importantly to extend the power of the centralized royal authority at the expense of local custom. 'Blasphemy, games of chance, adultery, prostitution, and the dispensing of love-potions were made punishable offenses, and the keeping or frequenting of taverns were made grounds for exclusion from civic life... Local custom was allowed the status of law only insofar as it had acquired royal, or rather imperial approval...'⁸⁹ But as in the case of King Louis, Aquinas's difference with Frederick was not based on theological reasons but was related to his view of imperial lawmaking and the centralization of power. In those 1231 Constitutions the emperor claimed a divine source for his authority, as the providential instrument to correct the weaknesses of fallen humankind. The emperor appears as the only source of peace and justice, with his authority direct from God. This placed him in a position of independence vis-à-vis papal authority. Unlike Louis IX, who accepted the spiritual authority of the Church, Frederick understood his imperial position as giving him pre-eminence over the Church. Any questioning of his authority was interpreted as a rejection of divine authority. MacIntyre notes how this could not be acceptable to Aquinas on his understanding of law and its source.

⁸⁹ 'Natural Law as Subversive' p. 71.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

Aquinas in his *Summa* affirmed that people have the ability to judge by the light of their own reason whether or not some law is just or unjust. This doctrine is precisely the kind of questioning of imperial authority which had been forbidden - hence the subversive nature of Aquinas's doctrine of natural law.

As a practical instance to illustrate the differences, MacIntyre reports the attitude of the law-makers to wandering minstrels. Both rulers saw these travelling entertainers as threats to social order, because of the ribald and subversive nature of their songs and plays, which were often directed against authority in all its forms. They attempted to outlaw them, and to prohibit attendance at their entertainments. The Pope had done likewise in his dominions. But Aquinas, who along with his fellow Dominicans in Paris had been a target of a mocking ballad and so might be supposed to have reason to support the law against balladeers, was prepared to see the positive contribution which such performers make to social life. He acknowledges a positive function for fun and games, including the entertainment provided by minstrels, and he recognises this as legitimate occupation.

Over against both Louis IX and Frederick II, Aquinas's doctrine of natural law and the common good is radical and subversive. It is subversive in denying a source of political authority other than the reason of citizens, and in affirming the capacity of citizens to judge for themselves whether law is just or unjust. Where both of those monarchs relied on theological reasons to support their claims to authority, Aquinas countered with philosophical arguments. 'It is the rulers who speak as theologians, Aquinas who speaks as a philosopher.'⁹⁰

This third model for conceptualising the relationship between religion and politics draws on Aquinas's parallel distinctions between divine (moral) law and human law, and between the unrestricted common good of God's kingdom and the restricted common good of any political community. In his use of these distinctions, he denies that the restricted is simply instrumental to the unrestricted, so that he explicitly rules out the use of the instruments appropriate to human law (e.g. coercion) so as to ensure the achievement of the goods corresponding to divine law (e.g. salvation).

4. Rawls: Reasonable Comprehensive Doctrines – Overlapping Consensus

There has been a significant development in John Rawls's understanding of the relationship between religion and politics. This is clear from an article entitled 'The Idea of Public Reason Revisited' (1997) in which he reworked the position as presented earlier in

⁹⁰ 'Natural Law as Subversive' p. 73.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

Political Liberalism.⁹¹ In contrast to the earlier prevalent disjunction of public and private, which Rawls had glossed as public and non-public, he begins to consider different levels of the public. He distinguishes three aspects.

1. The background culture of civil society.
2. The public, political culture, viewed widely.
3. Public reason: public political culture, viewed narrowly.

What is new in his thought is the consideration given to the second aspect, best understood in contrast to the others.

The background culture (1) is said to be the culture of civil society. This has available to it many forms of conversation and argument and various media through which communication and information flow take place. The idea of public reason in the narrow sense (3) applies in the public political forum. Rawls restricts the idea in terms of context, content and persons.⁹² The *context* of public reason is the discussion of the law which is to be enacted and applied for a democratic people with the coercive backing of the state. The *content* of public reason is provided by the family of reasonable political conceptions of justice on which people draw in making their proposals and criticisms in the discussions about coercive law. The *persons* involved are judges, public officials, and candidates for public office in their public capacities. Citizens also are included in the requirements of public reason insofar as they subject their own proposals to the criterion of reciprocity. This criterion requires of them to make only proposals that they can expect would be found reasonable by their fellow citizens, considered as free and equal.

It is evident from this brief presentation that the narrow view of public reason is very narrow indeed. The typical image for it is the judges of the US Supreme Court giving a judgment in relation to constitutional rights. The persons, content and context of the judgment are very specific and limited. But the possibility of sustaining such a view and practice of public reason depends on there being a public political culture in the wide sense (2). In what follows, I will outline the wide sense of public reason while at the same time considering Rawls's understanding of the relationship of religion and politics.

⁹¹ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, second paperback edition 1996); 'The Idea of Public Reason Revisited', *University of Chicago Law Review*, 64 (Summer 1997), subsequently reprinted in John Rawls, *Collected Papers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999) and in John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999). Citations are from this last edition.

⁹² John Rawls, 'The Idea of Public Reason Revisited', p. 133.

In dealing with the question of religion and politics in *Political Liberalism*, Rawls imagined several reasonable comprehensive doctrines, including religious ones, coexisting in a liberal, pluralist polity, each with its view of the good life and its notions of justice and truth. The polity is only possible, however, because the adherents of a comprehensive doctrine exercise restraint, not insisting on their view of the true and the good, but willing to accept the content of the overlapping consensus between the reasonable doctrines as a basis for regulating the common life. Each one will have her own reasons for seeing this content as true and good, based on her comprehensive doctrine. But the grounds for arguing in favour of this content with representatives of other reasonable comprehensive doctrines will not appeal to these reasons, but only to public reason.

There are several reasonable comprehensive doctrines, some of them religious, but in the liberal polity as envisaged by Rawls there is one overlapping consensus which relies on notions of the politically reasonable rather than on notions of truth. This seems to require considerable restraint on the part of the religiously committed citizen. Only what could belong in the overlapping consensus might be part of the public discourse between a representative of a Christian world-view and, for instance, a defender of secular liberal individualism. Rawls asks:

Is it possible for citizens of faith to be wholehearted members of a democratic society who endorse society's intrinsic political ideals and values and do not simply acquiesce in the balance of political and social forces?... How is it possible – or is it – for those of faith, as well as the nonreligious (secular), to endorse a constitutional regime even when their comprehensive doctrines may not prosper under it, and indeed may decline?⁹³

It is very significant here that he writes of both secular, i.e. non-religious, reasonable comprehensive doctrines and religious ones in their relation to the constitutional regime. That is, he does not consider the constitutional regime as automatically favouring a secular worldview over against a religious worldview.

Political liberalism requires there to be comprehensive doctrines which ground for their own adherents the validity of the elements on which consensus can be attained, even though the reasons for assenting to the consensus will be different for the various doctrines. 'It is central to political liberalism that free and equal

⁹³ Ibid. p. 149.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

citizens affirm both a comprehensive doctrine and a political conception.⁹⁴ Judgments grounded in a comprehensive doctrine may be true or false; judgments which are part of the overlapping consensus are said to be reasonable. Citizens who endorse a reasonable judgment in the overlapping consensus will hold it to be true or right on the basis of their comprehensive doctrine.

While Rawls considers some religious comprehensive doctrines to be unreasonable, his mature position includes religious comprehensive doctrines with their appropriate languages as among the reasonable doctrines which uphold and sustain the overlapping consensus. At the same time, the content of public reason is not secular. On the contrary, secular in the sense of deliberately non-religious doctrines are among the comprehensive doctrines supporting the political conception. It is neither religious nor secular, but is capable of being accepted by proponents of both religious and secular comprehensive doctrines.⁹⁵

Rawls insists that there is no single unique public reason but several varieties. He admits many possible political conceptions of justice and so many forms of public reason. 'There are many liberalisms and related views, and therefore many forms of public reason specified by a family of reasonable political conceptions. Of these, justice as fairness, whatever its merits, is but one.'⁹⁶ Rawls now includes within the family of possible political conceptions 'Catholic views of the common good and solidarity when they are expressed in terms of political values'.⁹⁷ He also includes Habermas's discourse conception of legitimacy. Important in this quoted passage is the qualification about expression in terms of political values. Rawls refers to John Finnis and Jacques Maritain in a footnote, which seems to suggest that their works achieve such expression. It suggests that the type of argument in terms of natural law which builds its understanding of social and legal order on the basis of the dignity of the human person could offer a candidate for a political conception of justice. This possible political conception might offer an alternative to Rawls's own proposed justice as fairness. Acceptable political conceptions of justice propose principles which apply to the basic structure of society, which can be presented independent of any comprehensive doctrine, and which is grounded in such fundamental ideas as the freedom and equality of citizens and the idea of society as a fair system of cooperation.

Thus, the content of public reason is given by the principles and values of the family of liberal political conceptions of justice

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 172.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 143.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 141.

⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 142.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

meeting these conditions. To engage in public reason is to appeal to one of these political conceptions – to their ideals and principles, standards and values – when debating fundamental political questions. This requirement still allows us to introduce into political discussion at any time our comprehensive doctrine, religious or nonreligious, provided that, in due course, we give properly public reasons to support the principles and policies our comprehensive doctrine is said to support.⁹⁸

Far from excluding religious considerations, Rawls here allows for religious considerations to be part of political debate, with the proviso that if any policy or legal measure is being advocated that the appropriate public reasons be provided at some later date. Religious reasons are not being excluded; but only those religious reasons may be advanced in support of political proposals which are capable of being translated into public reasons in the strict sense.

This tolerance for religious and secular reasons in public discourse characterizes what Rawls terms the wide view of public political culture. The *proviso*, the injunction to present proper political reasons in due course, protects public reason and marks off public political culture from the background culture of civil society. But Rawls also emphasizes that there are positive reasons for introducing comprehensive doctrines into public political discussion. That citizens would have knowledge and understanding of each other's comprehensive doctrines strengthens the viability of an overlapping consensus since proposals made in public reason for legislative measures will respect the reasons that others will have for supporting or rejecting the proposals.

Public political culture in the narrow sense is confined to the use of argument by a limited number of people acting in official capacities within rather narrowly defined roles. Public reason as Rawls has introduced it, is restricted in this double sense. But at the same time, civil society embraces many areas of engagement in which people associate only or at least primarily with those who share their religion, their values, their convictions or their interests. The background culture as Rawls has characterized it can be very tolerant, in allowing diverse groups to coexist, but such groups do not necessarily interact. The many organizations and institutions of civil society can be discrete and independent, so that on their own they do not support a properly political discourse, even if they do contribute many aspects of socialization. This becomes a problem in some contexts, when a society comprising a plurality of cultures and groups is not actually pluralist in its shared culture but is tolerant of diversity so long as groups are confined to ghettos.

⁹⁸ Ibid. pp. 143-4.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

The interaction which takes place in public reason can only lead to the formation of overlapping consensus if there is some other arena in which citizens and groups can interact in a process of dialogue and deliberation. Rawls's idea of the wide view of public political culture seems to be an acknowledgement of the need for a bridge between public reason in the narrow sense, and the range of comprehensive doctrines in the background culture of civil society. The need is for a forum of some kind which mediates between and overlaps both the private domains of civil society and the arena of public reason. In practice, in our experience in pluralist societies with liberal polities, this forum is provided in a fluid way by the media, educational institutions, and cultural and religious groups including churches, which contribute to fostering the relevant encounter.

Rawls's discussion of public reasons suggests that religious arguments do not have to remain confined to the non-public realms of civil society. Believers, speaking from their faith convictions, do not have to be on the defensive within liberal political communities. However, the condition under which their contribution is welcome is that citizens of faith continue to abide by reasonable norms of argument and reasonable standards of participation in public discourse. Rawls has a specific meaning for the term 'reasonable' in this context:

Citizens are reasonable when, viewing one another as free and equal in a system of social cooperation over generations, they are prepared to offer one another fair terms of cooperation according to what they consider the most reasonable conception of political justice; and when they agree to act on those terms, even at the cost of their own interests in particular situations, provided that other citizens also accept those terms. The criterion of reciprocity requires that when those terms are proposed as the most reasonable terms of fair cooperation, those proposing them must also think it at least reasonable for others to accept them, as free and equal citizens, and not as dominated or manipulated, or under the pressure of an inferior political or social position.⁹⁹

Is this a satisfactory model for the self understanding of a religiously committed citizen? The advantages are notable, in that the distinctiveness of politics is preserved, the narrow sense of public reason is protected, and the use of coercive force is limited and controlled. At the same time, the background culture of civil society as so conceived provides the private sphere in which the

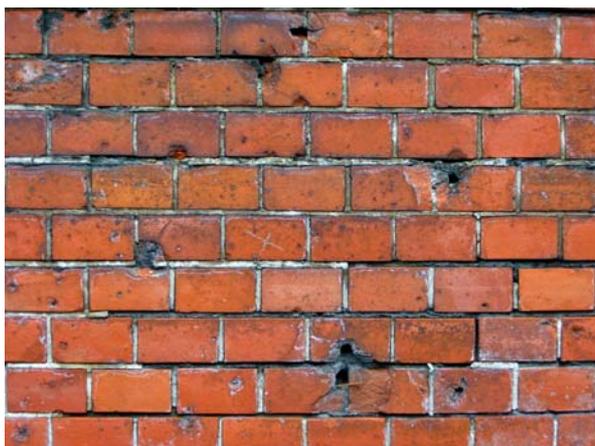
⁹⁹ Ibid. pp. 136-7.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

diversity of religious cultures can be tolerated. However, religion is not confined to the private domain, but its contribution to political discourse is welcomed both within the political culture broadly conceived, and also within public reason in the narrow sense. This model can accommodate the kinds of questions which religiously committed citizens might wish to raise in dialogue with fellow citizens. Such questions can be asked and pursued rigorously in the wide public political culture, without thereby intending to impose answers, or more specifically, constitutional arrangements and coercive laws derived exclusively from those answers on fellow citizens.

5. Civil Society – State

The final model considered here locates religion in civil society as a way of understanding its public role. The revival of interest in the notion of civil society provides a new context for considering the place of religion within the polity. Two major developments have precipitated the renewed interest in the topic of civil society, the



collapse of the Soviet block, and the process of globalisation. In the first of these processes, the notion of civil society has played a double role. Civil society is used to label and reflect on the agents of change nurtured by Church groups and dissidents and others such as the Solidarity trade union. At the same time,

the difficulties experienced in the attempt to implement free markets and liberal democratic systems were accounted for as due to the lack of civil society. The absence of certain practices and habits among the population, the lack of a moral order in which expectations are sustained by social sanction, and the impoverished relationships and networks comprising social capital have revealed that the functioning of markets and democratic processes is not to be presupposed simply because the formal structures are in place. Hence the renewed attention paid to the old notion of civil society.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ *Trust and Civil Society*, edited by Fran Tonkiss and Andrew Passey, with Natalie Fenton and Leslie C. Hems, foreword by Ralf Dahrendorf. (London: Macmillan/New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

The second dynamic drawing attention to civil society is globalisation (economic, cultural, military, diplomatic).¹⁰¹ The worldwide impact of economic activity and markets reveals an absence of state, while at the same time a market based shared order emerges. There is a search for forms of global governance. In this context a third sector apart from multi-national corporations (MNCs) and state based bodies (such as the IMF) seems desirable, and is already functioning through international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). This is spoken of as global civil society.

The new contexts and discussions are generating a new notion of civil society. Where traditionally civil society was one of a pair of concepts, it is now located in a triad. The traditional pairing was of civil society and the state. In early forms of its usage, civil society was used to identify society under government and law. This usage is found in Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke, for instance. Civil society is paired with the state, on which it depends for its existence.

Hegel and Marx also relied on a dyad, but for them the realm of civil society was the realm of market and property relations. Hegel emphasised the dimension of freedom in the contracts on which all economic activity was based. Marx brought his analysis to bear on 'bourgeois' (= civil) society showing that the supposedly freely entered contracts were illusory, and that there was no freedom for those who had nothing to trade but their labour power.

All the more interesting then that the current usage of civil society distances it from the realm of the market and the economy. The *Economist* magazine uses the term in the sense it finds the UN using it, to refer namely to NGOs who are outside the realm of the state and of the market place. The international dimension whereby global civil society is a counterbalancing power to that of economic forces is leading to a clarification whereby civil society is distinguished from the economy. In more recent usage, civil society is seen as one factor in a triad of factors, making one point of a triangle along with the state and the economy.

The role of NGOs in many developing countries has grown and their importance in protecting the rights and interests of people, especially the poor, has been considerable. Several of these are now so well established, that as international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) they provide a great service where there is still a lack of international government. Amnesty International, the Red Cross (Red Crescent) and Greenpeace are examples. The role of NGOs and INGOs, especially in relation to the interests of the

¹⁰¹ John Keane, *Global Civil Society?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
Conference Proceedings
The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
Berlin, March 2005

developing world, is now so well established that organised civil society and global civil society are specified in these terms. All of these bring their efforts to bear so as to ensure that there are countervailing pressures balancing the power of states as well as the vested interests of business corporations who are effective in mobilizing their governments to represent them.

Where formerly, civil society was seen as paired with the institutions of government and law, and these were held in a dialectical tension with one another, the new model sees a triad of the state, the economy, and civil society. The dialectical tension of mutual dependence along with autonomy has been replaced by antagonism. Civil society is antagonistic towards the economic powers, and also towards the state insofar as it fails to distance itself critically from the interests of the market. At the same time, the original antagonism towards religion in the depiction of civil society has not entirely disappeared.

In part, the problem is that the concept of civil society was developed by early modern writers (for example Locke, Ferguson, Hobbes) who were concerned about how societies would hold together under newly emerging modern conditions in which traditional sources of authority – including religion – were losing their grip. Civil society – arising out of voluntary relationships between people – was seen as an important part of the solution. Religion, at least the predominant forms of Christianity in its early modern setting, especially Roman Catholicism – with its traditional hierarchical notions of authority – was conceived from the beginning in opposition to civil society.¹⁰²

There is a new visibility of religion in the public space. So the churches and religious bodies are spoken of as belonging to civil society, as the realm of socially organized activity and participation. This is the recent usage of civil society, which is one corner of a triangle. Among the valued contributions of civil society on this view is the creation and maintenance of social capital. This function explains the respect expressed from the perspectives of both politics and economics. The literature recognises the contribution of the churches in particular societies in fostering the constituent elements of democratic culture in facilitating the formation and education of citizens, the habituating of people, in the capacities to engage in argument, and to accept conciliation in conflict. Religion is acknowledged to have contributed to the development of civil society in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in providing

¹⁰² José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) p. 71.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
Conference Proceedings
The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
Berlin, March 2005

an institutional space, a wealth of symbols, metaphors and stories, an international dimension, and an intellectual heritage.¹⁰³

If its self-understanding as a corporate citizen in a liberal democratic polity is primarily in terms of civil society in one corner of the triangle, the Church is likely to find itself restricted in definition and constrained when it comes to action. There are three principal strands of limitation: assumption of particularity of interest, confinement to an advocacy stance, and exclusion from politics and the market.

Among the organizations belonging to civil society are vested interest groups whose perspectives are not universal and general, but are particular and local. Accordingly, there is a danger that the Church, by association, can appear as only representing particular and special interests. This would undermine its ability to proclaim its message which is universal and not restricted to any race, class, culture or aspect of human existence.

Because of its involvement in education, health care and the provision of supports for the poor, the Church and Church organizations have often engaged in advocacy on behalf of groups which have been neglected by the market or by governments. The danger is that its contributions to political culture and to public debate be seen exclusively as advocacy. While this is an appropriate and important role for the Church, or perhaps more precisely, for Church organisations, it does not exhaust its mission, which requires of it to speak of the unrestricted common good of all humanity, and to challenge everyone, whether rich or poor, to revise their priorities.

Within the triad of state, market, and civil society, the identification of civil society as the proper social location for the Church brings with it the danger of being excluded from participation in the discourses about politics and the economy. Its politically recognized entitlement to contribute to the public debate as a corporate citizen might be jeopardized by a too hasty relegation to civil society, thereby excluding the Church from consideration of the market or the state. Were it to accept a description of its role confining it to civil society, it would risk colluding in its own exclusion from a large part of political and economic life.

The Church requires a positive understanding of its self-limitation as a corporate entity within the liberal polity. But this requires that it be able also to remain consistent with its understanding of itself and its mission in a theological context. These limitations of the civil

¹⁰³ David Herbert, *Religion and Civil Society. Rethinking Public Religion in the Contemporary World* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 69-71.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

society category pose a problem for this requirement. The mission which has led the late Pope John Paul II to speak out against injustice, violence, oppression and poverty on his international visits and which has inspired Bishops of many local churches to address questions of the economy, politics, peace and justice is not to be comprehended within the category of civil society alone. Of course, in these contributions to public discourse, the Church renounces any reliance on coercion or implementation of the power of the state, but seeks to convince solely through the strength of its message.

Conclusion

I have surveyed and reviewed five different ways of conceptualising the relationship between religion and politics. My concern has been to focus on models which respect the distinctiveness of both dimensions, and avoid collapsing one into the other. Which of these models best succeeds in acknowledging the autonomy of both religion and politics and their independence of one another? Which facilitates the self-understanding of the religiously committed citizen?

Two of the models are rooted in theological world-views, namely, those associated with Augustine and Aquinas. Common to both is a recognition of the need to limit the claims of religion so as to allow the proper sphere for the political. Aquinas does it with more of a positive regard for the secular domain. Both of them challenge theological accounts which would claim to have the overriding say on the purpose of human law and rule, Augustine facing down the pagan cosmological views, as well as the Christian interpreters of the fall of Rome, Aquinas denying the pious and centralising claims of King Louis and the Emperor Frederick. The Churchmen appear in defence of the secular, over against other theological voices.

While the advantages of the private-public distinction and the concept of civil society as locus for Church involvement in public life are evident, there are major disadvantages with both models. Rawls's late model which includes the idea of public reason in the narrow sense preserves something of value from the private-public distinction. It also incorporates a concept of civil society with its background culture, so that it can carry forward whatever is of use in the civil society model.

The disadvantages of both the private/public and the civil society/state/economy models for religiously committed citizens' self-understanding of their role in political life have been noted above. The private/public model effectively silences any distinctively religious voice in the sphere of politics. The civil society model confines the religious contribution to a restricted area of public life, one which is possibly in tension with religion's own

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
Conference Proceedings
The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
Berlin, March 2005

aspirations. Rawls's model goes beyond the other two in providing a place for the religious contribution to public life. The notion of the broad sense of public political culture developed in his late article outlines a domain of public life which is more closely linked to public reason in the traditional sense. With this notion, religion is released from any confinement to the private, or to civil society as the background culture. It is thereby recognised as capable of making a contribution to public political life beyond a merely narrow or sectional interest, but potentially of relevance to the whole political sphere. Rawls's later thought is very accommodating and respectful of religion, while limiting religion at the same time. His views facilitate a contribution to public discourse on the basis of religious commitments, while setting standards to which religious contributors must adhere. Those standards, however, are not such as to deprive religion of its say in public life.

What Rawls contributes from a political philosophical standpoint, complements what Aquinas contributes from a theological standpoint. Aquinas, writing from a theological perspective, respects the autonomy of the political. At the same time he provides reasons for restricting religious authorities or political leaders who claim to speak with religious authority. Rawls, writing from a political philosophical perspective, respects the autonomy of religion. He provides a view of public reason in the narrow sense whereby it is confined within definite parameters as to persons, content and context. There is a further complementarity between these two models. Rawls himself has acknowledged the usefulness of the language of the common good. The common good / public good distinction which Finnis finds in Aquinas parallels and is complementary to the distinction of reasonable comprehensive doctrines / overlapping consensus in Rawls.

Finally, the limitations of this survey of models should not be overlooked. These limitations are built in to the approach as dictated by the starting question. The task set was to find a way in which a person who is both a committed religious believer and a responsible citizen could understand her involvement in both dimensions of her life without downplaying or instrumentalising any one dimension. Clearly the assumptions of this question carry significant limitations. First of all it is assumed that a positive regard to both dimensions is available to such a person. And second, it is assumed that an intellectual account of involvement in both domains is of value to such a person. The concluding suggestion of the useful complementarity of the models drawn from Aquinas and Rawls, for instance, is of little value to anyone who does not share the assumptions of the original questions. Those models in turn place a high value on reasonableness as the currency of public engagement. Where adherents of religions reject reason, or where public authorities - whether texts, institutions or

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
Conference Proceedings
The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
Berlin, March 2005

persons - succeed in insulating themselves from critical questioning, Aquinas or Rawls will not be taken seriously. However, despite these limitations, the exploration of available models does offer religiously committed citizens of liberal polities in pluralist societies a way of self-understanding which can support and strengthen both dimensions.

Response to “Religion and Politics: Conceptual Tools for Understanding Their Relationship” by Patrick Riordan SJ

Alexander Darius Ornella, Graz

In his paper on ‘Religion and Politics: Conceptual Tools for Understanding Their Relationship’ Patrick Riordan, SJ provides a comprehensive overview on various concepts of the relationship between religion and politics throughout history. He points out that the ‘question of how to express [their] relationship [...] is not only a modern one.’ Today, however, this question gains new importance. Even though traditional religious communities are declining in Western Europe, the religious itself is omnipresent. In Western societies, religious symbols are re-entering the public sphere - among other things through media – and peace and stability are threatened by religious fundamentalists. In the US, the religious landscape and the relationship of religion and politics are yet very different from the European experience. Not only a broad, ‘civil religious’ reference to religious ideas is omnipresent, but very specific religious views are important. The Pew Research Center in its US post-election survey concludes that a polarization and a shift in religious voters took place. Church attendance was a more reliable factor for determining voter behaviors than gender or race.¹⁰⁴

Patrick Riordan SJ focuses on five concepts and their adequacy:

1. Public – private relationship
2. Eternal peace and justice – temporal peace and justice with regards to Augustine
3. Common good – public good with regards to Aquinas
4. Rawls: reasonable comprehensive doctrines – overlapping consensus
5. Civil society – state

Natural Law

An important issue seems to be the question of natural law. Aquinas argues that ‘[c]oherence with natural law is required for reasonable citizens to accept that the promulgated law is binding on them.’ Rawls argues, referring to Finnis and Maritain, that the ‘type of argument in terms of natural law which builds its understanding of social and legal order on the basis of the dignity of the human person could offer a candidate for a political conception of justice.’

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Pew Research Center, Trends 2005, <http://pewresearch.org/trends/>, Accessed Feb. 2, 2005, p. 26.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

In this context, the argument of natural law and 'natural reason', however, seems to need further clarification. For Aquinas, the connection between natural reason and the existence of God is very important.¹⁰⁵ Accordingly, one can assume that there is a relationship between divine law and natural law in Aquinas's concept. What then is the difference of Aquinas's understanding of 'natural law' and 'natural law' that — according to Rawls — can be a 'candidate for a political conception of justice'?

Independent from the understanding of 'natural law' one could also ask whether recurring to 'natural law' is not problematic in itself for



who defines what natural law is? An approach to natural law can be very different from a theological and from a secular perspective — if there is such a thing at all from a secular point of view. A good example for the

difficulties posed by the natural law argument can be found in the argumentation on homosexual marriage. While the Roman Catholic Church argues that a gay or lesbian relationship is against natural law, supporters argue that it is indeed something natural and that human beings should be free to choose their partners according to their preferences.

Civil Disobedience

Aquinas argues that while valid human law does not necessarily have to be 'made by a Christian prince using Christian principles' it is still necessary for the 'promulgated law to [be] binding on' reasonable and rational citizens to be coherent with natural law. What options would Aquinas allow in the case that a promulgated law should interfere with natural law? Does Aquinas have any thoughts on civil disobedience? In Rawls's concept, civil disobedience — at least one that is based on natural law — does not seem to be an option since in the case of disagreement participants would just not be able to form an overlapping consensus.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Gebhart, Jürgen, "Politik" and "Religion": Eine historisch-theoretische Problemskizze, in: Walther, Manfred (ed.), Religion and Politik. Zu Theorie and Praxis des theologisch-politischen Komplexes, Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2004, pp. 51-71, p. 58.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
 Conference Proceedings
 The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
 Berlin, March 2005

Understanding of the Terms "Religion" and "Politics"

Patrick's overview expands over roughly 1500 years. Within that time span, the understanding and the notion of what religion and politics are and what belongs to each of their domain probably have changed. With the crisis of the *Res Publica Christiana* and the beginning of the pluralization of power structures and institutionalized religions and denominations a change in the understanding of 'religion' and 'politics' and the term 'religion' occurred. 'Religion' is now being conceptualized in a broader context than before. While the concept of the 'natural' and the 'supernatural', of 'natural reason', and 'supernatural revelation' provided a framework on a cultural as well as on a spiritual level during scholasticism it is now being understood in a more irrational, mythical or magical context.¹⁰⁶

Is a change in the understanding of the meaning of 'religion' and 'politics' reflected in the concepts themselves? How does the interrelationship between the understanding of 'religion' and 'politics' and the various concepts look like?

The European Union and the relationship of religion and politics

In the course of developing a constitution for the EU, the appropriateness of a reference to God or to the European religious heritage in general was discussed. The heated debate showed that the relationship of church and state and of religion and politics in the European Union is far from being settled. What can the concepts presented, esp. Rawls, contribute to the discussion of church and state/religion and politics in the EU?

John Rawls

Regarding Rawls's concept of reasonable comprehensive doctrines and overlapping consensus I would be interested in who the participants in a 'public political culture' are. Rawls suggests that the public political forum 'excludes discussions by ordinary citizens.'¹⁰⁷ In his paper, Patrick argues that for a 'formation of overlapping consensus' to happen, a forum of some kind, like the media or educational institutions are necessary. Media, however, are ambiguous. As Habermas, in his *Theory of Communicative Action* points out, they can advance democratization. They also have the potential of manipulating their users. Another trend can be recognized as well. Weblogs — a very subjective form of information — are becoming a new source for news.

¹⁰⁶ CE Gebhart, Jurgen, "Politik" and "Religion": Eine historisch-theoretische Problemskizze, in: Walther, Manfred (ed.), *Religion and Politik. Zu Theorie and Praxis des theologisch-politischen Komplexes*, Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2004, pp. 51-71, pp. 58f.

¹⁰⁷ Weithman, Paul J., *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002, p. 185.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
Conference Proceedings
The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
Berlin, March 2005

Would such a forum — as the media — then be part of the 'public political forum', or how would the discussion in this forum affect the 'public political forum'?

Further, how is the 'public political forum' to be understood, and how would it apply to actual societies, such as the European Union? Rawls himself seems to have realized that too few public forums are available for citizens to exchange their views on public political issues.¹⁰⁸ Another important issue is citizens becoming more and more uninterested in political agendas since they have the feeling that they cannot participate in political decisions - a feeling that is especially present among the younger generation in the context of the political processes in the EU.

¹⁰⁸ CE Weithman, Paul J., *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002, p. 184.

The New Visibility of Religion in European Democratic Culture
Conference Proceedings
The Denial of Religious Authority in Democratic Culture
Berlin, March 2005