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12 The shape of post-secularity

Why the United States is more religious but less Christian than Europe

Adrian Pabst

The transatlantic debate on secularisation has crystallised a series of disagreements that in reality mask a shared perspective.¹ As José Casanova has suggested, European theories that link secularisation to modernisation capture much of Europe's evolution but they do not fit the facts of religious vibrancy and denominational pluralism that are emphasised by American accounts, which in turn cannot explain significant variations across Europe.² This impasse has reinforced rival ideas of exceptionalism, either in relation to US religiosity or in respect of 'Eurosecularity' (or indeed both at once).³ However, these competing interpretations share the fundamental view that the USA and Europe constitute opposing ends of a broad spectrum of different 'political-religious' models. The United States is associated with the enduring – and many argue excessive – influence of faith in politics. By contrast, most of Europe is equated with the demise of organised religion and the advance of what Rowan Williams has termed 'programmatically secularism' in the public political sphere.⁴ Given this, the European experience appears to illustrate certain versions of the 'secularisation' thesis whereas the American experience seems to exemplify certain variants of the 'de-secularisation' thesis. Common to both theses is an essentialist view of religion that reflects a shared secular perspective underpinning the sociological analysis of religion in politics.⁵

This chapter argues that the standard theories of secularisation and de-secularisation cannot explain the representation of faith in the European or the US political system. In fact, the current phase of late (or post-)modernity is synonymous neither with increasingly secularised societies⁶ nor with a sustained return to religion⁷ but in fact both at the same time. What we are seeing is an increasing contest – within as well as across different religious traditions – between traditional, orthodox faiths and modernising creeds. It is this contest that will largely determine the shape of the emerging 'post-secular' age.

The first section suggests that the sociological analysis of religion lacks certain theological concepts that are necessary for a proper account of the links between politics and faith. The second section links Protestant secularisation to North American religiosity and argues that much of mainstream US Protestantism represents a post-Christian Gnostic spirituality that perpetuates the myth of American exceptionalism. The third section concedes that Europe is the most secularised

continent but contends that it remains a vestigially Christian polity. What emerges from this analysis is a paradox: just as the United States is more religious than Europe, so too the ‘old continent’ is more Christian than the ‘new world’.

(De-)secularisation in question

Faith beyond the categories of religious studies and the sociology of religion

The dominant models of secularisation and de-secularisation analyse the historical and social evolution of religion in the modern era from an essentially secular perspective that is founded upon certain sociological, anthropological, philosophical and (mostly hidden) theological claims which are conceptually and empirically problematic.

In religious studies and the sociology of religion, the paradigm of secularisation and de-secularisation is closely connected with the concept of modernisation and other characteristically modern concepts such as disenchantment, rationalisation, bureaucratisation, industrialisation, individualisation, privatisation and liberalisation. What underpins these and cognate categories is an ahistorical and positivist notion of ‘social system’ that precedes and grounds living communities and the body politic. Indeed, the premise of much sociological analysis is that social systems are sets of general social facts and laws which are prior to – and more fundamental than – actual societies. Based on the idea of social systems, sociologists of religion as diverse as Émile Durkheim and Max Weber (as well as their present-day heirs) view the growing crisis of religious consciousness as a conclusive proof for the progressive secularisation of modern life.⁸ Likewise, Peter Berger and other sociologists who defend the seemingly opposite thesis of de-secularisation point to the persistence of religious consciousness in individuals and groups as strong evidence that modernisation is compatible with the enduring presence of faith traditions.⁹ Linked to this is a second foundational premise of religious studies and the sociology of religion: that faith itself is primarily about individual belief and the inner self rather than communal practice (both liturgical and social) or associative ties.

As such, both the secularisation and the de-secularisation thesis are grounded in a peculiar conception that views the social as a product of human artifice over against the externally given reality of unalterable nature. This contrasts sharply with ancient and medieval ideas of society as having organic links with all its constituent members and with the divinely created universe as a whole. Connected to the human construction of the social is a predominantly instrumental account of religion that sees faith as satisfying some primordial emotional or spiritual need rather than responding to the natural desire for the supernatural. Moreover, recent research in anthropology suggests that diverse cultures have tended to view instrumental motivations and transactions as embedded in non-instrumental interests and relations exemplified by customs of gift-exchange.¹⁰ Both social bonds and

intermediary institutions have traditionally been more fundamental than either formal constitutional-legal rights or formal economic-contractual ties. Thus, what constitutes societies and provides the glue for cultures is not some social facticity or a set of regularities but instead the formal institutions and informal practices of households, groups and communities. Aided by trade and communication, it is the cross-border flow of ideas and customs (including religious belief and rituals) that most of all links nations to one another and binds the globe together.

Anthropological research also indicates that notions such as general social systems and purely individual consciousness do not reflect the reality of most cultures around the world. Furthermore, the standard models of both secularisation and de-secularisation theories defend essentialist conceptions of religious faith that disembody religions from their distinct contexts and reduce religion to a series of abstract, uniform principles or sentiments. Whether these are either inner psychological phenomena linked to human nature (instead of the entire cosmos) or outer social phenomena tied to formal institutions and general spiritual exercises (instead of specific communities and practices of worship) – or indeed both at once – sociological analysis imposes these and other ahistorical categories on diverse traditions. Here it is instructive to draw on the work of Talal Asad, who argues that seventeenth-century conceptions of religion amounted to an invention of a new category of ‘natural religion’, which is closely correlated with the rise of natural science independent of any other disciplines. This configuration is itself the product of a split of philosophy and physics from theology, as both Amos Funkenstein and Peter Harrison have documented.¹¹ The modern focus on ‘inner’ belief at the expense of ‘outer’ revelation views religion in terms of ‘a set of propositions to which believers gave assent, and which could therefore be judged and compared between different religions and as against natural science’.¹²

Such and similar accounts, which underpin Locke’s idea of the reasonableness of Christianity and Kant’s notion of a single, universal religion, not only eliminate the idea of divine self-revelation in the world but also posit a unitary, transhistorical essence of faith that can ultimately be reduced to non-religious aspects, notably modern notions of immanent nature or consciousness. As such, religion is redefined in one of two ways: either as innate, natural religion that is in line with rationality or as blind, fideistic belief in the external intervention of divine providence. These two apparently incompatible conceptions are in fact conceptual mirror images that are opposed to two anthropological findings: first, that religions constitute distinct forms of belief and practice irreducible to any other sphere (whether nature, human consciousness or social activity); second, that religious symbols embody models *of* and *for* reality that are inscribed in narratives, meaning and culture that escape the cognitive control of Cartesian rules of the mind or the voluntarism of Kant’s categorical imperative. For narratives, meaning and culture cannot be subsumed under any abstract, disembodied concept representing general laws of natural regularity or human consciousness, or else again both at once.

Philosophical theology and the secular redefinition of religion

From the perspective of philosophical theology, the primacy of these and other modern general categories over premodern conceptions of the link between universal principles and particular practices can be traced to a variety of traditions, beginning with Roger Bacon, Petrarch, Machiavelli and the influential Jesuit thinker Francisco Suárez. The late scholastic separation of supernatural faith from the ‘pure nature’ (*pura natura*) of the material, physical world introduced an unbridgeable dualism into Christian theology and paved the way for the early modern empiricism of Francis Bacon as well as the rationalism of Descartes and Leibniz. Common to these and other modern thinkers is a rejection of classical theism in favour of either transcendentalism or positivism. The latter is not confined to Enlightenment figures such as Voltaire but extends to influential nineteenth-century thinkers who shaped the sociology of religion, notably the post-theistic social theory of Auguste Comte.¹³ Crucially, the positivist legacy continues to shape much of the contemporary philosophical discourse on religion, including the atheism of Bertrand Russell and Richard Dawkins but also the religious fundamentalism of al-Qaeda’s intellectual founding fathers.¹⁴

Theologically, the centrality of positivism in the sociology of religion has provoked a robust critique of the secular nature of sociological discourse as well as the recognition that the shared origins of modern philosophy and social theory are distinctly theological, as John Milbank and Charles Taylor have argued in different yet complementary ways.¹⁵ Much of modern sociology is secular in the sense of positing an autonomous understanding of religion independently from other disciplines and on the basis of an undemonstrated dualism between nature and the supernatural. Linked to this is a hidden dependency on theological concepts which social theory attempts to conceal, most notably the modern idea of society as a self-grounded positive *datum* rather than part of a transcendent cosmic reality such as the divine gift of creation.

Similarly, much of modern philosophy either is theological in origin or requires theology to make sense of its own claims. Indeed, the idea that philosophy (and later natural science) is the only universal discipline concerned with the *datum* of pure nature, and that theology is a merely regional science investigating the supernatural ‘realm’ of revelation, is the product of a redefinition of theology (compared, say, with St Thomas Aquinas’s theory of the subalternation of all disciplines to the science of theology). Even a brief genealogy of this and other related changes is beyond the scope of the present chapter. However, the crucial point is that the concept of transcendental, univocal being (a single concept of being that includes creator and creation) and the idea of representation – which, taken together, constitute the ultimate foundations of modern and contemporary thought – can be traced to the proto-secular transformation of theology at the hands of John Duns Scotus, William of Ockham and Francisco Suárez, as the work of the Swiss philosopher André de Muralt and the French political theorist Pierre Manent on the intellectual origins of liberalism attests.¹⁶

What links late medieval scholasticism to modern philosophy and to contemporary liberalism is the shift of emphasis away from the analogical participation

of immanent reality in the transcendent source of being in God towards a dualism whereby, first of all, the sacred is transcendentalised and relegated to the supernatural realm of faith and revelation, which are henceforth unintelligible to reason. Second, the secular ‘domain’ of society is positivised and equated with the purely natural sphere of material reality and human volition. Concomitantly, the patristic and medieval idea of real embodied relations between persons and groups was abandoned in favour of the nominalist poles of the individual and the collective. These and other modern categories underpin the political poles of the ‘left’ and the ‘right’ that have been dominant since the French Revolution. They are also correlated with the subsumption of religious institutions and civil society to the central state and the free market.¹⁷ Thus, secularisation reconfigures and constrains the realm of civil society that mediates between the individual, the state and the market¹⁸ – a free realm that is ultimately secured by the Judaeo-Christian separation of political from religious authority.

This has far-reaching implications for religion in Europe and subsequently in North America. Instead of binding believers together in a universal brotherhood, faith is increasingly tied either to individuals or to nations (or again to both at once), and the secular space of the social is seen as an autonomous, self-standing, general facticity that predefines the ground for supernatural revelation and religious practice. To be sure, the secularisation of thought was not linear, nor did it translate directly into the secularisation of practice. However, the modern redefinition of religion along secular lines has had a profound and lasting impact on the complex links between faith and politics in the European and American West, as the following section suggests.

Protestant secularisation and North American religiosity

On protestant secularisation

Historically, the decisive difference in relation to the secularisation of society and politics is between Protestantism and Catholicism, but in ways that go far beyond Max Weber’s thesis on the work ethic. The three key Protestant North Atlantic powers of England, Holland and independent North America rejected the overarching ecclesial and social unity of their Catholic rivals, both in terms of their own (philosophically and theologically shaped) self-conception and also as a principle of socio-economic and political organisation. As David Martin argues, this led to three long waves of secularising modernisation:

beginning in the 1590s, accelerating from 1790 to 1850, and renewing the impulse again in the early 1900s. Very loosely these stages correspond to a movement towards a lay, popular and enthusiastic Christianity, culminating in Pentecostal awakenings with a particularly powerful and influential eruption in Los Angeles in 1906. These awakenings were themselves harbingers of global society and their spread corresponded to the movement of lay people around the globe, to South Africa, Norway, Sicily, Korea or the Southern Cone of Latin America.¹⁹

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Thus, the origins and evolution of the Protestant Reformation contained the seeds of a vast process of secularisation in the sense of displacing Catholic and Orthodox Christianity in favour of new lay cultures that initially detached religion from statehood, territoriality and nationhood – only to be co-opted by princes and kings in the late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century ‘wars of religion’ and the subsequent foundation of new liberal-Protestant kingdoms or empires. Much later, various strands in the wider Protestant tradition came to form powerful social movements that are now attempting to capture state power in countries as varied as Guatemala, Brazil and South Korea.²⁰ Here one can suggest a paradox: by subordinating the religious freedom of individuals and communities to the central state, Protestantism simultaneously secularises religion and sacralises politics.

Coupled with the exceedingly short history of Protestantism sketched above, one can also suggest against Marcel Gauchet that secularisation does not mark the progressive exit of religion from religion.²¹ Instead, the secular turn of modernity was the outcome of a series of shifts in theological ideas that led to changes within and across religious traditions, frequently boosting the vitality and dynamics of specific faiths. In the case of the West’s main Protestant powers, popular religious practice and the political influence of faith grew strongly and at times even spectacularly. This is evinced by Holland’s and Britain’s liberal-Protestant imperialism, linked to certain strands in Calvinism and the increasing influence of Methodism. Indeed, Britain’s rise to hegemonic status within the international system was connected with the modernising creed of the Methodists, who instituted a moral economy that was largely shared by the elite and the populace.²² Likewise, the Evangelical awakening throughout the ‘long nineteenth century’ (c. 1800–1950) coincided with a period of wholesale modernisation, setting the USA firmly on the path of global hegemony.²³ The following section explores the nature and extent of North American exceptionalism compared with the European experience.

On North American exceptionalism

North America can be described as much more religious than Europe in terms of personal observance and political discourse, linked as it is to competitive pluralism and a vibrant religious market. However, the United States is far more secular in terms of equating faith with private therapy and with a directed, unmediated link between the individual and the Almighty. This underplays other key aspects of traditional, orthodox religion such as sacramentality and the communal character of faith. Indeed, the fact that most American churches have functioned as voluntary associations has tied them much more closely to the idea (going back to the founding fathers) that the USA is a ‘commercial republic’, blending certain civic virtues with economic values as part of a divinely instituted ‘economy’ of market competition.²⁴ This also helps explain why in some important sense even observant believers tend uncritically to embrace core features of secular culture – for instance the idea of a ‘gospel of wealth’ that equates the rich with the elect and sanctifies the pursuit of power and pleasure.²⁵

Moreover, the US ‘civil religion’ is largely governed by a post-Christian, Gnostic spirituality that bears increasingly little resemblance to creedal Christianity.²⁶ Its liberal polity, based on a total church–state separation since its inception,²⁷ is structured by specifically American holidays rather than universal Christian festivals that still regulate public life, even in the secular French Republic. Paradoxically, America’s more strongly privatised public sphere opens up a space for a more explicitly politicised and moralised creed that is more fundamental than the rivalry between traditionalist-conservative and progressive-liberal values fuelling the ‘culture wars’. The other paradox is that the country’s vague ‘religiosity’, which pervaded US politics, feeds on the Manichean moralism taught in mainstream churches in order to reinforce and perpetuate a sense of national exceptionalism,²⁸ rather than a more plural universalism associated with Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy or Anglicanism. Indeed, the constant appeal since independence to notions such as New Rome or New Jerusalem – coupled with the promotion of global market democracy as America’s mission for the world – reveals a form of modern messianism which nonetheless has roots in medieval millenarianism and is deeply secular.²⁹ All of this helps account for the tendency of US Catholics (and Jews) to become more like Protestants, even though strong Catholic immigration might change this in future.

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There are also signs that the progressive tradition of evangelicals is being revived. Indeed, large sections of North American evangelicals have sought to transform modern secular politics and economics. Until the First World War and again during the Civil Rights movement of the late 1950s and the 1960s, they were in fact politically progressive.³⁰ Evangelicalism was anti-elitist, anti-authoritarian, economically egalitarian (against corporate banking and wealthy landlords) and socially interventionist on behalf of the common good: running social programmes for the poor, vastly expanding popular institutions such as the US postal service and providing some of the earliest critique of laissez-faire capitalism. Partly in response to the Democratic Party’s growing secular agenda in the late 1960s, both evangelicals and Catholics embraced the New Right and formed a coalition with the Republicans,³¹ endorsing the sort of ‘small government’ economic policies first advocated by Ronald Reagan and now defended by the Tea Party movement.

At the same time, the United States is currently witnessing a rapprochement between certain evangelicals and Catholics that attempts to re-orient the American Dream away from right-wing market-driven materialism (or the social-democrat alternative of statist welfare) towards greater self-organisation of communities and the associative ties of intermediary institutions. Linked to this is the argument that civil society is neither synonymous with commercial exchange nor the same as purely voluntary action but instead represents a more primary realm that is ultimately upheld by the church. This vision is advanced by a new generation of influential evangelicals like such as Wallis, Richard Cizik and Rick Warren, whose work resonates strongly with Catholic social teaching and cognate traditions in the Episcopalian Church.³² This, in turn, suggests that Protestant secularisation is neither unilinear nor irreversible but is itself a dialectical process that

oscillates between a dominant secularism, which is positively correlated with modernisation, and a more traditional faith, which challenges the secular orientation of modernity. As the work of José Casanova shows, a number of religious movements become significant social and political actors precisely to the extent that they renounce the complicit collusion with old structures of power (e.g. states/governments, oligarchic elites).³³ Here one can go further and suggest that such movements establish themselves as genuinely prophetic voices in so far as they offer new models of economic modernisation that are neither exclusively religious nor purely secular.

However, much of the United States remains wedded to the characteristically American ‘civil religion’ that resembles more a vague religiosity than the distinctly Christian faith tradition. Based on all these elements, one can arguably reverse conventional characterisations and speak of an American exception or rather an American exceptionalism that fuses elements of medieval millenarianism with modern Puritanism and Calvinism as well as ‘post-modern’ Pentecostalism. By contrast, Catholic and Orthodox Europe has largely rejected messianic and apocalyptic visions as incompatible with the shared doctrine of the first 1,000 years of the Christian era. Despite the Great Schism and the Protestant Reformation, Europe is and remains a profoundly Christian culture and polity, as the following section argues.

Catholic–orthodox countermodernity and the endurance of ‘Christian Europe’

Modernity and counter-modernity

Just as the process of secularisation leads in some dialectical fashion to a resurgence of religion, so modernity contains within itself the seeds of countermodernity. Thus, there is no unitary trend whereby Europe becomes either steadily more secularised or somehow more de-secularised. Instead, what we are witnessing is a coincidence of more secularisation and a sustained return to religion. Europe is experiencing an increasing bifurcation – both within and across different faiths – of more traditional, orthodox traditions such as Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, on the one hand, and more modernising creeds such as certain evangelical and Pentecostal strands, on the other hand. Indeed, more historicised and contextualised sociological analysis suggests a number of ‘stylised facts’: first of all, the fundamental differences between Protestant countries, where religion and modernity have been compatible, and Catholic countries, where they have tended to clash; second, the significance of degrees of pluralism and religious monopoly, including church establishment in the United Kingdom or disestablishment in certain parts of Scandinavia such as Sweden; third, the fusion of religion with ethno-national identities and the rise of denominational plurality, for example in countries of post-communist Eastern Europe; fourth, the divergence between secularised elites and ordinary believers within and across the growing gulf that separates urban centres from rural peripheries, for example in countries

with strongly secular constitutions such as France or Turkey; and, fifth, the rise of individualism and the privatisation of social life, coupled with the resurgence of religion in society and also politics. All of this underscores the difference between those religious strands that espouse modernisation and those that reject it.

Moreover, the emergence of a culturally and socially secular Europe in the sense of popular religion and mass practices is in fact quite recent. In spite of violent clashes between the French state and the Roman Catholic Church from the inception of the Protestant Reformation and the Revolution until total separation in 1905, the population remained predominantly Catholic until the 1950s or so, when French Christendom (*chrétienté*) begins to disappear from the regions and the countryside, as vividly depicted in the writings of George Bernanos.³⁴ Secularisation is similarly recent in the other Mediterranean parts of Europe, including the Iberian peninsula and Greece. Even in Britain, arguably one of Europe's most secularised societies today (besides the Czech Republic, Iceland and East Germany), the 'de-christianisation' of the public sphere and social life did not begin in earnest until the mid- and late 1960s.³⁵

Likewise, Scandinavia and other European countries became markedly more secular only from the mid-1970s and early 1980s onwards. Even after seventy years of state-sponsored atheism and the violent destruction of Christian culture in the Soviet Union and its satellites, Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia are characterised by profound contrasts between a strong and sustained religious revival in countries such as Poland and (to a much lesser extent) Russia, and a growing tendency towards agnosticism and atheism in countries such as the Czech Republic.³⁶ If Europe's socio-cultural and political secularisation is far more recent than commonly supposed, then it seems that its Christian legacy is not quite as marginal as is frequently claimed.

On 'Christian Europe'

Europe is in many ways the most secularised continent in the world,³⁷ but it remains a vestigially Christian polity that initially developed from the fusion of biblical revelation with Greco-Roman philosophy.³⁸ Following the demise of imperial Rome, three forces competed for its legacy and shaped European civilisation: first, pagan tribes from Germanic, Turkic and Slavonic territories; second, Christianity and its network of local parishes and transnational monasteries; third, Islam and the establishment of a caliphate from Arabia to the Iberian peninsula. Of those, as Rowan Williams argues:

the Christian Church is quite simply the most extensive and enduring, whether in the form of the Western Papacy or of the 'Byzantine Commonwealth', the network of cultural and spiritual connections in Eastern Europe linked to the new Roman Empire centred on Constantinople.³⁹

After the fall of Byzantium in 1453, the Protestant Reformation accelerated the slow disintegration of pan-European political Christendom and the rise to

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power of sovereign nation-states. However, this did not inaugurate a linear process of secularisation. In fact, certain strands of Renaissance humanism and the Enlightenment provided a religious corrective to secular ideas and practices such as the early modern doctrine of the ‘divine right of kings’, which itself marked a departure from the patristic and medieval opposition to the sacralisation of secular power.⁴⁰ In addition to debates about the relative balance of state and church or the mix of different sources of law (canon, common and civil), the presence of Jewish communities and Muslim-ruled lands on the Iberian peninsula ensured that ‘Christian Europe’ was not a clerically dominated monolith but rather a realm of political argument within and across different faith traditions.

Crucially, Europe’s unique legacy of faith and reason provides the basis for European claims to an ‘organically’ plural universalism that avoids both moral relativism and political absolutism by offering a free, shared social space for religious and non-religious practice: the realm of civil society that is more primary than either the central state or the free market. Moreover, Hellenised Christianity blends the principle of free association in Germanic common law with the Latin sense of equity and participation in the *civitas*. In this manner, European Christendom defends a more relational account (in terms of objective – not subjective – rights and reciprocal duties) that outflanks the dialectic of the individual and the collective that has been dominant since the American and the French Revolution. Thus, creedal Christianity does not simply underpin many European political and legal systems by distinguishing – without, however, separating – religion from politics. It is also instrumental to the integration of believers and non-believers by providing a common civic culture and social bonds that are more fundamental than either formal constitutional-legal rights or economic-contractual ties.

However, appeals to Europe’s Christian roots are viewed as either naïve or suspicious. The Enlightenment that sought to separate religion from politics is widely credited with abolishing the unholy alliance between the church, monarchical absolutism and the feudal capitalism of the landed gentry. Moreover, the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox churches are seen as bulwarks of reactionary thinking opposed to liberal democracy and representative government, until at least the post-1945 and the post-1989 era respectively. Moreover, ever since Jacques Delors served as President of the European Commission (1985–95), the European (Economic) Community and later the European Union have been described as a Christian club that is determined to exclude non-Christian nations such as Turkey. Linked to this is the accusation that Roman Catholic Christians within the Union look back to Constantine’s and/or Charlemagne’s alignment of the church with the state – a putative challenge to the secular settlement of the French Enlightenment championed by Anglo-Saxon and continental European thinkers of the left and the right alike.⁴¹

However, the European Union is neither a Franco-German federalist superstate nor a purely Anglo-Saxon free-trade area. Rather, the Union is best described as a neo-medieval polity with a political system *sui generis*, characterised by hybrid institutions, overlapping jurisdictions, polycentric authority and multi-level

governance.⁴² What ultimately underpins this model is a long tradition that views Europe not as a foundation in or of itself but as the continuous unfolding of the Hellenistic fusion of Jerusalem with Athens, as Cardinal Angelo Scola has remarked.⁴³ In the long Middle Ages, Hellenised Christianity integrated and transformed other European traditions such as elements of Germanic law or the Celtic language. Linked to this blending of diverse cultures is the twin notion that the distinction of religious from political authority creates a ‘free space’ between political rule and society, as I have already hinted. At its best, the church – together with other communities and bodies – upholds this freedom from political coercion and thereby helps protect the autonomy of Jewish, Muslim and other religious minorities.

In turn, this gives rise to the idea that the ‘intermediary institutions’ of civil society are more primary than either the centralised national state or the transnational ‘anarchic’ market. Intermediary institutions include groups and bodies such as professional associations, manufacturing and trading guilds, cooperatives, trade unions, voluntary organisations, universities and religious communities. In parts of Italy, Germany, France or Spain, they exemplify the concrete reality of a mixed economy that combines gift-giving with economic exchange. In Britain, there are even grassroots initiatives to apply this approach to public services and welfare provision. The idea is to foster civic participation based on self-organisation, social enterprise, reciprocity and mutuality, which help produce a sense of shared ownership. This approach seeks to balance liberty and responsibility as well as rights and duties. As such, it differs markedly from centralised state models that reduce people to needy recipients of public benefits and also from free-market models that degrade citizens to passive consumers of private services. By contrast, the real ‘third way’ of Catholic social teaching and cognate traditions in Anglicanism and Eastern Orthodoxy encourages active, voluntary membership of people who give as well as receive. There can also be secular intimations of this: mutualist arrangements such as employee-ownership that share both ownership, profit and risk are in the medium and long term economically more viable than many ordinary businesses that seek to maximise short-term return for their institutional investors and the top management.

The European model is neo-medieval in this sense that it combines a strong sense of overlapping jurisdictions and multiple membership with a contemporary focus on transnational networks as well as the institutions and actors of ‘global civil society’. Nor is this model limited to the sub-national level. Rather, modes of association and corporation apply to neighbourhoods, communities, cities, regions and states alike. The idea of Europe as a political union is inextricably linked to the idea that national states are more like regions within a wider polity – a subsidiary (con)federation of nations rather than a centralised superstate or a glorified free-trade area. Indeed, this suggests that even nations can uphold and promote relations of mutual giving and reciprocal help. As such, Europe offers a vision of associative democracy and civil economy beyond the authoritarian central state that seeks to regulate the transnational, anarchical ‘free market’.⁴⁴ Such a vision is inspired by the twin Catholic Christian principles of subsidiarity and solidarity

that underpin the entire project of European integration and enlargement and that we owe to Europe's Christian heritage – in particular Catholic social teaching.⁴⁵

This legacy has been undermined and in large measure destroyed by the collusion of the central state and the free market since the advent of neo-liberalism that both the left and the right have enthusiastically embraced. However, twenty years after the collapse of state communism, the continuing crisis of 'free-market' capitalism provides a unique opportunity to chart an alternative path that re-embeds the state and the market into the relations of civil society. Thus, the principles and practices of reciprocity, mutuality and solidarity do not simply underline Europe's Christian heritage but also offer an alternative future for the European Union and the continent as a whole.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to show that the standard versions of the secularisation and the de-secularisation thesis are obsolete. Neither can explain why the current phase of late or (post-)modernity is characterised by more secularisation and at the same time by a sustained return to religion. Just as many forms of traditional belief and worship are declining, so other forms are progressing (e.g. Catholic charismatic movements; the growing role of the laity; various forms of youth participation across different faith traditions). This, coupled with a reversion of faith to a more 'normal' presence in (inter)national politics, gives credence to the idea that we have already entered a post-secular age in which secular principles are no longer seen as neutral, normative or hegemonic.

However, both the United States and Europe remain wedded to models that are ultimately secular. American exceptionalism separates church from state but ties religious faith to a vague yet dynamic 'civil religiosity' that is closer to post-Christian Gnostic spirituality than to creedal Christianity. The US settlement also equates civil society bonds with commercial exchange whereby different religions and denominations compete for souls in the marketplace. By contrast, European countries features a variety of different arrangements, but they all enshrine the primacy of secular law over against religious principles. Far from ensuring neutrality and tolerance, the secular European state arrogates to itself the right to control and legislate about virtually all spheres of life. Thus, the alternative to both the statist model prevalent in Europe and the market-based model predominant in the United States is to view religion in general, and Christianity in particular, as indispensable to the autonomy of civil society and the 'intermediary institutions' – including groups, associations and corporate bodies such as guilds, universities and religious communities.

Yet, at the same time, contemporary Europe remains a vestigially Christian polity that is to some extent governed by the catholic-orthodox principles of solidarity and subsidiarity. This is true of the European Union, which is neither a federal superstate in the making nor a glorified free-trade area but rather a neo-medieval empire, which pools national sovereignty and views states more like regions in a wider federation of overlapping jurisdictions and multiple levels of

membership. As such, political Europe is certainly less religious but perhaps more Christian than the United States.

Beyond the fundamental differences between the United States and Europe that this chapter has suggested, there are two wider, parallel developments that both continents seem to share in common. First of all, a growing opposition between a militant, atheist secularism and a violent religious fundamentalism that are mirror images of each other; second, and perhaps more importantly, an increasing bifurcation – within as well as across different religious traditions – of traditional, orthodox faiths, on the one hand, and modernising creeds, on the other hand. In the United States, we are seeing a significant rapprochement of Catholics and evangelicals on economic issues. Likewise, in Europe, where secularisation continues to spread, there is also a growing convergence of important strands in Christianity, Islam and Judaism around their shared opposition to ‘programmatic secularism’ and their social and moral teaching (e.g. in relation to free-market capitalism, bioethics or aspects of popular culture). The shape of our post-secular age will in large part be determined by the contest between those traditions that endorse the secular outlook of late modernity and those that seek to transform it.

Notes

- 1 Steve Bruce (ed.), *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992); William H. Swatos Jr. and Daniel V. A. Olson (eds.), *The Secularization Debate* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).
- 2 José Casanova, ‘Beyond European and American Exceptionalisms: Towards a Global Perspective’, in Grace Davie, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (eds.), *Predicting Religion. Christian, Secular and Alternatives Futures* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 17–29.
- 3 Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case: Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2002); Peter Berger, Grace Davie and Effie Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe? A Theme and Variations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).
- 4 Rowan Williams contrasts ‘procedural’ with ‘programmatic’ secularism, arguing that the latter constitutes ‘the empty public square of a merely instrumental liberalism, which allows maximal private license’. In this way, programmatic secularism seeks to privatise specific ethical and religious commitments and thereby hollows out the predominantly Christian culture on which Western democracy rests. See Rowan Williams, ‘Secularism, Faith and Freedom’, lecture given at the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences in Rome, 23 November 2006, available at <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1175/rome-lecture-secularism-faith-and-freedom> (accessed 1 February 2011).
- 5 This essay extends some of the arguments that I first developed elsewhere. See Adrian Pabst, ‘The Paradox of Faith: Religion beyond Secularization and Desecularization’, in Craig Calhoun and Georgi M. Derlugian (eds.), *The Deepening Crisis: Governance Challenges after Neoliberalism* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), pp. 157–82.
- 6 See Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (London: Penguin, 1968); Steve Bruce (ed.), *God Is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).
- 7 See, *inter alia*, Peter Berger (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999); Pavlos

- Hatzopoulos and Fabio Petito (eds.), *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile* (London: Palgrave, 2003); Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations: The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-First Century* (London: Palgrave, 2005); John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *God Is Back: How the Global Rise of Faith Is Changing the World* (London: Allen Lane, 2009); Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott and Timothy Samuel Shah, *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011).
- 8 David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 17–25.
 - 9 Peter L. Berger, 'The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview', in *The Desecularization of the World*, pp. 1–18.
 - 10 Marilyn Strathern, *Partial Connections* (Oxford: AltraMira Press, 2004); Jacques T. Godbout, *Ce qui circule entre nous: Donner, recevoir, rendre* (Paris: Seuil 2007).
 - 11 Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 25–63; Peter Harrison, 'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 19–60, 130–72.
 - 12 Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 41.
 - 13 Andrew Wernick, *Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity: The Post-theistic Program of French Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
 - 14 Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities* (London: Verso, 1993); John Gray, *Al Qaeda and What It Means to Be Modern* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003).
 - 15 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). Cf. Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
 - 16 André de Mural, *L'unité de la philosophie politique: De Scot, Occam et Suarez au libéralisme contemporain* (Paris: Vrin, 2002); Pierre Manent, *Histoire intellectuelle du libéralisme: Dix leçons* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1987).
 - 17 Adrian Pabst, 'Modern Sovereignty in Question: Theology, Democracy and Capitalism', *Modern Theology*, 2010, 26 (4), pp. 570–602.
 - 18 Antony Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (London: Methuen, 1984).
 - 19 Martin, *On Secularization*, p. 27.
 - 20 Martin, *On Secularization*, pp. 26–43, 141–54; Micklethwait and Wooldridge, *God Is Back*, pp. 213–42.
 - 21 Marcel Gauchet, *Le désenchantement du monde: Une histoire politique de la religion* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985); M. Gauchet, *La religion dans la démocratie: Parcours de la laïcité* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000).
 - 22 E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the 18th Century', *Past & Present*, 1971, 50, pp. 76–136; David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, c. 1750–1900* (London: Routledge, 1996); David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).
 - 23 Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), esp. pp. 194–224 and 257–288; Michael Young, *Bearing Witness against Sin: The Evangelical Birth of the American Social Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), esp. pp. 54–85.
 - 24 Thomas Frank, *One Market under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism, and the End of Economic Democracy* (New York: Random House, 2000).
 - 25 See H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, repr. (New York: Holt, 1957), in which he suggests that 'Laissez-faire and the spirit of political

- liberalism have flourished most in countries where the influence of Calvinism was greatest', p. 95. Cf. William E. Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 17–68.
- 26 Will Herbert, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, rev. edn. (New York: Doubleday, 1960); Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1967); Harold Bloom, *The American Religion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992); Nancy Ammerman, *Congregation and Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997). For this and the following paragraphs, I am indebted to John Milbank's work and conversations with him.
 - 27 Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
 - 28 Arguably, this strand can be traced to late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Calvinist and Puritan migrants who built the new world of the Atlantic North. Numerous American theologians re-interpreted Christ's passion as a necessary precondition for the restoration of economic and political justice after the Fall and the foundation of America's 'commercial republic'. Cf. Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 227–367.
 - 29 Michael Northcott, *An Angel Directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004).
 - 30 Marcia Pally, *The 'New Evangelicals': The Making of a Just Social Contract* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).
 - 31 Mark Stricherz, *Why the Democrats Are Blue: Secular Liberalism and the Decline of the People's Party* (Jackson, TN: Encounter Books, 2007).
 - 32 See, for example, Jim Wallis, *God's Politics. Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005). As a former community organiser who was trained in the tradition pioneered by Saul Alinsky, Barack Obama worked with local communities and different faith groups to help regenerate Chicago's most deprived inner-city areas – a 'people's politics' that differs markedly from the collusion of big government and big business since Nixon. Thus, Obama is uniquely positioned to draw on the new rapprochement between Catholics and evangelicals in order to advance an agenda that is both economically egalitarian and socially transformative. At the time of writing, however, this vision remains unrealised.
 - 33 José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); José Casanova, 'Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective', *Hedgehog Review*, 2006, 8, pp. 7–22.
 - 34 George Bernanos, *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (Paris: Plon, 1936); George Bernanos, *La France contre les robots* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1947).
 - 35 Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001); Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson, 2006). The centrality of women's religiosity in Brown's account has been critically discussed by Grace Davie, Tony Walter and Linda Woodhead.
 - 36 Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 111–32; Martin, *On Secularization*, pp. 47–90; Sabrina P. Ramet, 'The Way We Were – and Should Be? European Orthodox Churches and the "Idyllic Past"', in Timothy A. Byrnes and Peter J. Katzenstein, *Religion in an Expanding Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 148–75; Vjekoslav Perica, 'The Politics of Ambivalence: Europeanization and the Serbian Orthodox Church', in Byrnes and Katzenstein, *Religion in an Expanding Europe*, pp. 176–203; Berger *et al.*, *Religious America, Secular Europe?*, pp. 23–122.
 - 37 René Rémond, *Religion and Society in Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom*

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- in *Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Andrew M. Greeley, *Religion in Europe at the End of the Second Millennium: A Sociological Profile* (London: Transaction, 2003).
- 38 Hilaire Belloc, *Europe and the Faith* (London: Constable, 1924); Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1932); Rémi Brague, *L'Europe, la voie romaine*, rev. and enlarged edn (Paris: Gallimard, 1999); Sylvain Gouguenheim, *Aristote au Mont Saint-Michel: Les racines grecques de l'Europe chrétienne* (Paris: Seuil, 2008).
- 39 Rowan Williams, 'Religion Culture Diversity and Tolerance: Shaping the New Europe', address given in Brussels, 7 November 2005, available at <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1179/religion-culture-diversity-and-tolerance-shaping-the-new-europe-address-at-the-european-policy-centr>. (accessed 1 February 2011). See also Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500–1453* (London: Continuum International Publishing, 1984).
- 40 John Neville Figgis, *The Theory of the Divine Right of Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896).
- 41 Jürgen Habermas, *Der gespaltene Westen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004); trans. as *The Divided West*, ed. by Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), pp. 113–93; Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French, and American Enlightenments* (New York: Random House, 2004).
- 42 Simon Hix, *The Political System of the European Union*, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Jan Zielonka, *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Zielonka cites Hedley Bull's seminal book *The Anarchical Society* – a crucial influence on the English School of International Relations that championed the idea of neo-medieval polity and was largely Christian in origin, notably the work of Martin Wight and Herbert Butterfield. See Scott M. Thomas, 'Faith, History, and Martin Wight: The Role of Religion in the Historical Sociology of the English School of International Relations', *International Affairs*, 2004, 77 (4), pp. 905–29.
- 43 Cardinal Angelo Scola, 'The Christian contribution to the European Integration Process', lecture delivered in Cracow, 10 September 2010, available at <http://english.angeloscola.it/2010/10/07/the-christian-contribution-to-the-european-integration-process/> (accessed 1 February 2011).
- 44 Paul Hirst, *Associative Democracy: New Forms of Economic and Social Governance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996); Paul Hirst and Veit-Michael Bader (eds.), *Associative Democracy: The Real Third Way* (London: Routledge, 2001); Luigino Bruni and Stefano Zamagni, *Civil Economy: Efficiency, Equity, Public Happiness* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007); Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate: Charity in Truth* (Dublin: Veritas, 2009). Cf. Adrian Pabst (ed.), *The Crisis of Global Capitalism: Pope Benedict XVI's Social Encyclical and the Future of Political Economy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011).
- 45 Wolfram Kaiser, *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).