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Political Theology and the Dialectics of (Counter)Secularization

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Abstract: This article builds on Habermas's hypothesis of a post-secular world society and on Voegelin's philosophy of consciousness. It first analyzes the genesis of the post-secular hypothesis in the work of Habermas. It then looks at the historical roots of the post-secular world society since the Axial Age. Finally, it delineates the evolution of religious actors in modern societies, at the political and cognitive levels, focusing on the European Counter-revolutionaries, the Islamist and post-Islamist movements of the Middle East, and the Hindu Nationalists. The article concludes that Habermas's hypothesis provides a plausible alternative to neo-Schmittian theory of the Clash of Civilizations proposed by Huntington.

INTRODUCTION

This article builds on the recent works of Jürgen Habermas regarding the problem of secularization, in which he offers a dialectic approach to secularization, as a mutual process of learning between religious and non-religious actors within the public sphere. Habermas focuses on Western European societies but he nevertheless formulates the hypothesis that the trajectory of secular modernization might be the exception rather than the rule and that humanity as a whole would be entering into a post-secular age. This hypothesis challenges the theory of convergence according to which modernization will make the world more like us and is in more in line with the work of Shmuel Eisenstadt (2000) about the existence of "multiple modernities" across the globe with deep cultural roots.

Our focus will be on the *prehistory* of the post-secular global society. In what follow, we will first analyze the genesis of the post-secular

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hypothesis in the work of Habermas. We will then take a step back and look at the historical roots of a post-secular society since the Axial Age. We will finally delineate the evolution of religious actors in modern societies, both western and eastern, how they have been forced to reflect on their presuppositions about the relation between religion and politics.

Compared to what Habermas is doing, we will therefore broaden the horizon by breaking the spell of the "secularization narrative," by dissociating two processes that are often confused namely secularization and the disenchantment or rationalization of the world. We will also decenter the debate and look at the dialectic of secularization not only in Europe but also in the Islamic Middle East and in India. Displacing the center of gravity will allow us to challenge common assumptions about secularization and the process of modernization that are often imagined as going hand in hand.

This article is guided by a normative questioning about what happens when, as Habermas himself put, "the secularization of society goes off the rails." It starts from a hypothesis formulated in the later work of Habermas but is also deeply influenced by the philosophy of consciousness of Eric Voegelin. In *Order and History*, Voegelin shows that times of crisis can be overcome by a "leap in being" and a new symbolization of the "Divine Ground." What can these new symbols be in our global age, nobody knows. But we would like to suggest more modestly that if *muthos* and *logos* are two elements in the "structure of consciousness" and not two stages in the "history of consciousness," we may still need the ethical resources of the Axial Religions, and of those societies that are still in contact with this normative source to overcome the civilizational crisis opened up by the secularization in the West.

POST-SECULARISM

The thought of Habermas represents an important chapter in the post-weberian reflection on the problem of modernization and its ethical implications. Having witnessed the rise and fall of the Third Reich, Habermas proposes a defense of modernity as an "unfinished project." Against the solipsist conception of reason since Descartes, Habermas developed the notion of communicative reason. Rationality progresses and corrects itself through public debates within the public sphere. Habermas's defense of modernity as a normative and self-sufficient project is rooted in his theory of communication.

Although, as Robert Bellah remarks, Habermas has long acknowledged "the critical importance of the Jewish, Christian, and Hellenic movements in our past, moments that laid the foundation for the ethical possibilities of modernity, his appreciation of the religious traditions of the West … seemed for a long time to end with the dawning of the Enlightenment." Adopting a "methodological atheism," Habermas famously wrote "that the truths of religion will probably all eventually be translated into rational discourse" (Bellah 2010). In his most recent works, his dialogue with Cardinal Ratzinger (Habermas and Ratzinger 2006) and his book *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Habermas 2008), Habermas has nevertheless moved away from this project of rationalization of religion, suggesting on the contrary that certain intuitions found in scriptures and religious traditions and certain values still alive in religious communities could contribute to a renewal of the social contract in our post-metaphysical and post-secular societies.

The immediate context for the formulation of his post-secular hypothesis was provided by his debate with Rawls about the place of religion in the public sphere. Rawls had argued that in the secular liberal State, not only should State and Church be separated, but religious actors have the duty to translate their arguments into a universally accessible non-religious language.

Habermas does not call into question the separation between State and Church but he argues that the *proviso* places an asymmetric and unreasonable mental and psychological burden on religious citizens, excluding those citizens that may not have the cognitive capability of translating religious reasons into secular reasons.

The *proviso* also betrays the ideological assumptions of a militant secularism that takes for granted that ultimately religion should and will be eradicated. For Habermas, this reading of the process of modernization is one-sided. Not only do we have to acknowledge the complex *genealogical* connection between modernity and the religious traditions going back to the Axial Age, but secularization itself cannot be reduced to a process of liquidation of religion. In *The Dialectics of Secularization*, he proposes to redefine "cultural and social secularization" as "a double learning process that compels both the traditions of the Enlightenment and the religious doctrines to reflect on their own respective limits." Post-secularism does not refer to a stage after secularism but to *a state of mind* in which secular actors themselves come to reflect critically on their own presuppositions and to acknowledge their own limits.

Habermas formulated his post-secular hypothesis in reaction to Rawls. But Rawls was not the only interlocutor of Habermas. We need to take

into account the existence of a more hidden dialogue between Habermas and the "crown jurist of the Reich," namely Carl Schmitt. Habermas has recurrently confronted the political and ethical challenge of the Schmittian thought, indirectly in *The Dialectics of Secularization*, through his disciple Ernst Wolfgang Böckenförde and more directly an article titled "'The political': The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology" (Habermas 2011).

For Habermas, Schmitt sought to reclaim "the unifying and integrating power of the political" under the form of the authoritarian state of the early modern period, to restore a religious aura for the political beyond the democratic revolution. Schmitt's "identitarian conception of authoritarian mass democracy" gave birth to a "clerico-fascism" that ultimately failed. But as Habermas himself acknowledges, the problem of the political, i.e., of the political problem of the influence of religion in civil society, remains open.

The confrontation with Schmitt seems even more crucial for post-secular thinking that he belongs to a tradition of conservative European intellectuals who have questioned the very possibility of reconciling religion with the Enlightenment project. In the name of his decisionism, Carl Schmitt has stigmatized the liberal disease of "political romanticism," the very Hegelian idea that oppositions like the one between reason and faith can be transcended in a "third term."

Schmitt's role in resurrecting the topic of Political Theology makes him our contemporary but we should not fall under the spell of his powerful but in fact esthetical conception of the political and ignore its limitations. Schmitt seems in particular unable to account for the possibility, historically attested, of *constructive* interactions between religious and secular actors that are at the center of Habermas's analysis.

Unlike Hegel, Habermas does not seek some type of Absolute Science that would miraculously reconcile faith and knowledge but describes a process of "mutual learning." If he has to assume some type of democratic and epistemic minimum on the side of the religious actors so that they might be willing to take part in a secularized public sphere, he generally eschews making too costly assumptions about their ultimate goals. Habermas's post-secular hypothesis, unlike Schmitt's decisionism, does not take the identity of the actors as a given but as part of an evolving process of communicative interactions.

Habermas's analysis tends to focus on the European context, in which the separation between State and Church has been almost universally accepted since at least the Second World War. The secularization has

been accomplished and the post-secular mood represents an *internal* development of the liberal secular political order. Still, in an interview with Eduardo Mendieta (Habermas 2010), Habermas makes steps toward the idea of "a post-secular world society."

In what follows, I will argue that Habermas's constructivism proves better than Schmitt's decisionism not only at conceptualizing non-violent interactions between religious and secular actors but also at accounting for the *empirical* phenomena of religious-friendly democratization that we are witnessing on the ground today: the emergence of the post-Islamic discourse, the dynamics at work with the Arab Spring, or the integration of the Hindu Nationalists into Indian democracy. Habermas's post-secular thinking also suggests a way out of the contemporary ethical crisis that worried so many thinkers like Carl Schmitt or Leo Strauss. In the end, we may still be spared from the threatening prospect of a single nihilistic modernity and see instead a new equilibrium between *logos* and *muthos* within the *Lebenswelt*.

DISENCHANTMENT AND SECULARIZATION

The foundations of a post-secular world society lay deep in time, at the period when the great world religions took shape in the Axial Age (between the 8th and the 2nd centuries BC). This second part will analyze the emergence of the theologico-political question in the Axial Age and compare the Western and Eastern paths of modernization.

Both religion and the State predate the Axial Age, but it is in this critical period that a new type of relationship between the two appeared. The State itself, at least in an embryonic stage, seems to have emerged around 3000 BC in Egypt and Mesopotamia. At the risk of over-simplification, in pre-Axial societies, the ruler himself represents the divine Truth, often conceived in a cosmological manner. Eric Voegelin (1952) has conceptualized the notion of "transcendental representation" to describe this phenomenon of symbolization of the Sacred in the political. In this archaic configuration, there is an analogy between the power of God (or gods) and the power of the king, who is seen as part of the "great chain of being." He occupies the center of the human order as the ontological mediator between the visible and the invisible.

The Axial Age marks a fundamental mutation of human consciousness with the double discovery of an extramundane Transcendence (be it that of a God or a "state of consciousness" like in Buddhism or Jainism) and of

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the human subjectivity, creating the condition for the emergence of political theology. The period is characterized by a new tension between the mundane and the Transcendence that breaks the more "compact" experience that men had of the world and the Sacred.[1] The legitimacy of the (pre-modern) State becomes problematic, creating the need for a political theology as the gap between the Sacred and the political widens. If in some cases, the ruler continues to be seen, in an archaic or pre-Axial manner, as the *personal* representative of God on earth, in other cases, the ruler is no longer divinized. He simply receives a mandate from the hierocratic class to protect an impersonal socio-cosmic order (or *nomos)* such as the Hindu *dharma*.

This discovery of the Transcendence went hand in hand with the discovery of individual subjectivity. Whereas pre-Axial religions entailed a fully holistic conception of society, Axial religions opened up the possibility for the individual to emancipate himself from the human collectivity. The individualism of Axial Age religions was however not a modern type of individualism but an "extramundane" type of individualism. The individual was caught between holistic structures and a transcendent Absolute, the union with this extramundane Reality entailing a destruction of individuality *per se*. That is, for instance, the ambiguous position of the Hindu *sannyāsin* vis-à-vis on the one hand the system of castes (*varṇa*) and on the other hand the *Brahman*, the supreme Reality revealed in the *Upaniṣads*.

The rise of this premodern individualism had very important political consequences. To the extent that the individual has a subjective relation to the Transcendence, he/she can call into question the legitimacy of the Order, subvert political power as the latter starts to lose its numinosity. In the history of religions, "charismatic prophets" have sometimes served to legitimize an order but they have also often opposed an existing system of domination in the name of a Higher Norm that they had discovered through spiritual practices.

The rise of individualism also entailed the development of secondary-level thinking, with the flourishing of disciplines such as speculative mysticism, theology, and philosophy. The Axial Age thus initiated the process of disenchantment or rationalization of the world. As a whole tradition from Hegel to Weber (and now Habermas) tends to acknowledge, the history of religion is also part of the century-old process of rationalization of the *Lebenswelt*, although it is only with the Enlightenment that the *logos* turned against the religious *muthos*. Weber's sociology of religion describes a process of rationalization with the progressive replacement

of magical means of salvation by moral means and a parallel process of emancipation of the four spheres of human activity, namely politics, the market, art and sexuality from a transcendent norm, ending up in modernity with the "polytheism of values."

The contribution of Weber to the prehistory of modernity was more recently revisited by Marcel Gauchet and Charles Taylor. In *Le Désenchantement du Monde*, dropping the problem of magic, Gauchet (1985) redefines disenchantment in term of "exit from religion." With the rise of the archaic State and later monotheism, man has progressively become "producer of his own world." Taylor (2007) tends to focus more on western secularization. In *A Secular Age*, building upon Heidegger's history of Being, he describes the advance of modernity as a "change of pre-reflexive background," a gradual transition from a "porous subject" to a more and more monadic subject. Taylor only refers to the transition from the premodern to modern notion of subject but we can make the argument that the evolution can be traced back much earlier than he and Heidegger with his ambiguous notion of "metaphysics of subjectivity" would think, to the Axial Age in which disenchantment began. What Taylor describes as the properly "modern" background would correspond to the radicalization of certain possibilities that first emerged with the Axial Religions.

From Weber to Gauchet, we find the idea that disenchantment refers essentially to a negative process for religion, the loss of an enchanted experienced of the cosmos. Voegelin developed the parallel (but not equivalent) notion of "differentiation." According to his philosophy of consciousness, the experience with the Sacred was originally "compact" and became more and more "differentiated" throughout history, leading to the discovery of the *psyche*, most notably in Greece. As the idea of an extramundane God, beyond the cosmic gods of the polytheistic pantheon, emerges, cosmological symbols prove more and more inadequate and the soul becomes the true seat from where the "Divine Ground" can be experienced. Voegelin describes this tension toward the Beyond using the platonic symbolism of the *metaxy*. The loss of the enchanted experience of the cosmos, to which Voegelin refers as the "dedivinization" of the world, went hand in hand with a more demanding experience of the Sacred in the depth of the *psyche*. One can therefore describe differentiation as the *positive* side of disenchantment.[2]

As such, the *rationalization* or *disenchantment* of the world and the *differentiation* of consciousness have roots as far back as the Axial Age and should therefore not be confused with *secularization*, understood as

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some sort of withdrawal of religion from the public sphere or a decline of religious authority, typical of western modernity. What *we call* secularization corresponds in the Weberian narrative to the transition from a "supramundane asceticism" as exemplified by Catholicism to an "intramundane asceticism," the "protestant ethics" that in the end cannot not help turning into a this-world utilitarian hedonism, once its religious impulse has vanished.

The concept of secularization contains several inter-related but not equivalent meanings that Jean-Claude Monod (2002; 2007) has sought to analytically distinguish. Secularization can refer to (1) *the liquidation of religion* assimilated to a residue of superstition and vowed to disappear (or to be entirely privatized) with the progress of science and reason. In an older sense though, secularization can also signify (2) *the realization of the promises of religion* by modernity. Voegelin identified the immanentisation of religion (and more particularly eschatology) from Joachim of Flore to Hegel and beyond as a significant feature of modern Gnosticism. Finally, secularization can indicate (3) *a transfer of symbols or practices from the religious sphere to the secular sphere.* For Karl Löwith, Providence was secularized with the idea of Progress. For Carl Schmitt (2006), "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts."

This third understanding of secularization has been criticized by Blumenberg (1985) for postulating the permanence of a religious "substance" beyond "historical thresholds," for confusing genealogical lineage with mere literary metaphors, analogies and linguistic transfers. It seems at least necessary to distinguish between a first case in which an intellectual or a movement consciously and intentionally borrows a religious symbols and apply it to a secular issue and a second case in which the borrowing is largely unconscious, reflecting a phenomenon of cultural and collective *inertia*. The case of the Hegelian dialectics and Trinitarian theology shows the link between the second and third meaning of secularization. The borrowing of a religious symbol by the philosopher is aimed at a re-enchantment of modernity, itself considered as the potential fulfillment of the Incarnation. In the case of Weber's protestant ethics and capitalism, the transfer is more difficult to decisively pinpoint but to the extent that it concerns *practices* rather than *representations,* it seems more immune to Blumenberg's objections.

More fundamentally, the narrative of secularization confronts us with the question of the responsibility of Christianity in the secularization of the West. The idea can be traced back to Augustine's *City of God* that

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Christianity contributed to a higher differentiation of the political and the spiritual. In the Schmitt-Peterson debate, Erik Peterson made the argument that the Christian dogma of the Trinity had undermined the possibility of a political theology. The Christian mystery cannot be translated into political institutions because there is *no* political representation of the Trinity, be it the ruler of a universal Empire like Rome. More recently, Gauchet has made a relatively similar point. Shifting the attention from the Trinity to the Incarnation, he argued that the coming of Christ, "the perfect mediator" had contributed to a radical dedivinization of the ruler. Obviously, theological doctrines exercised a powerful political influence throughout the Middle Age and Christian monarchs have claimed to rule by "Divine Right." But from the very beginning, the archaic notion of "Transcendental representation" was placed under extreme pressure in the Christian world.

The focus on the shape of political institutions in a Christian society is however insufficient. Christianity also played a significant role in the transition between the extramundane individualism of the Axial Age and the intra-mundane individualism of modernity. Christian worship is focused on the figure of the mediator, not on the invisible Reality *per se*. If other traditions such as Hinduism have developed a relatively similar doctrine of the divine incarnations (*avatāra*), the more personalist and anthropomorphic conceptions of the divine were always compensated by metaphysical and aniconic approaches. In Christianity on the contrary, the original tension captured with the dogma of the two natures, formulated at the Council of Chalcedon, gave way to an increasing humanization of God over the centuries, ending with the depiction of Christ in the 18th century as a moral teacher illegitimately divinized by his disciples.

The dogma of the Incarnation had far-reaching consequences. Christianity never devalorized the body to the same extent as other Axial traditions like Hinduism, Buddhism, or Platonism, giving a more this-worldly orientation to the Christian faith. This concern for the body may have also contributed to the evolution already noticed by Weber in the Western monastic orders, from a mystical or contemplative posture to a more ascetic or activist one.

Another consequence of this emphasis on the person of Christ was the emergence of what Dumont (1991) has called a distinctive Christian "personalism." In the older Axial religions, the individual state was conceived as transitory and salvation as a mystical absorption of the individual into an impersonal Absolute. Later under the pressure from the lower *strata* of society, Axial religions were often forced to adjust their theology, making

the means of salvation available to all. This religious demand explains for instance the emergence of a devotional *bhakti* in medieval India, a worship of personal deities (*iṣṭadevatā*) superimposed rather than organically connected to the metaphysical substance of the *Upaniṣads*. In many respects, Christianity is similar to the Hindu *bhakti*. Salvation depends upon the development of an interpersonal relation between the individual and his Savior. But these personalist tendencies were not balanced by more metaphysical conceptions and, as a result, the individual was increasingly seen as an end in itself, as we move forward in the history of Christianity.

Certain theological features of Christianity contributed to undermine the concept of "Transcendental representation" and to change the place of the individual. The critical point, at the theological level, may have been reached only lately, with the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. The Axial Revolution had not destroyed pre-Axial symbols but integrated them into new noetic synthesis. By seeking to rationalize Christianity, to liquidate cosmological symbols of pre-Christian and in fact pre-Axial origin, the Christian reformists destroyed the spiritual balance of the West. The complete withdrawal of the Divine from the cosmos, by liquidating the symbols of God's presence put too much pressure on the average believers, paving the way for a backlash, the rise of a largely post-Christian society in the West.

The "exit from religion" was accelerated by the rise of the modern State, which destroyed entirely the possibility of a representation of the Sacred in the political and contributed to the development of an intra-mundane individualism. The act of philosophical foundation of the State in Hobbes is the liquidation of the question of the *summum bonum* as the theological principle of the order and the replacement of *amor Dei* by *amor sui*, as the driving force behind individual behaviors. As a "mortal God" and a "machine," the *Leviathan* is disconnected from the "great chain of being" and can no longer represent the "Immortal God." When liberal thinkers like Rousseau proclaimed the sovereignty of the people, they only pushed to its logical conclusion the secular immanentisation of the order initiated by Hobbes.

The *Leviathan* also contributed to free the individual from the power of holistic structures and religious communities. Politically, the affirmation of the subject, which is at the heart of the Enlightenment project, proved emancipatory. Authors like Heidegger nevertheless lamented that the "modern metaphysics of subjectivity" had also divorced man from Being. The self was more and more conceived as a self-sufficient

monad, ontologically closed onto itself, a small *Leviathan* and the care for the self was gradually disconnected from the concern for salvation. The central stage occupied by the *secular* subject has also translated into a subjectivization, if not a psychologization of Truth itself, a relativistic reduction of ethical norms to "questions of values."

This "subjectivization of the truth" is *not* the equivalent (or the continuation) of the process of differentiation of consciousness as analyzed by Voegelin. When cosmological symbols are replaced by noetic ones, the Ground is not immanentized in the *psyche*. On the contrary, the *psyche* discovers itself through its experience of *participation* in the Divine perceived as *a Beyond*. The soul is the seat of the meeting between the individual and the Divine but not the Divine itself. Compared to the spiritual outburst of the Axial/Ecumenic Age, western modernity distorts the noetic experience. In the egophanic faiths of modernity, be it atheist ideologies or *ersatz* religions, man no longer experiences Being as a Mystery attracting the soul but as a reality immanent or dependent upon the soul. Modernity has turned on its head the heritage of the Axial Age. Subjectivity, which was seen by the prophets and philosophers of the Axial Age as the royal road to the Divine, rebels against the luminous source that had revealed the *psyche* to itself.

We have delineated the specific trajectory of secular modernization in the West. In the West, disenchantment and secularization went hand in hand, as two mutually reinforcing mechanisms. The western path of secular modernity needs to be contrasted with the path in other parts of the globe, that were shaped by other religious forces than Christianity and in which the Hobbesian State was "imported."

In the cases of Hinduism and Islam, an evolution from compactness to differentiation took place historically, characterized by a growing separation between the religious and the political. In premodern society, the paradigm was not the unitary national-state but the empire, with its loose boundaries and a weak level of centralization of power. Traditional Islamic and Hindu political theologies did see the ruler as the protector of the *sharia* or the *dharma*. In practice though, the implementation of the laws fell mostly on the shoulders of local social and religious authorities. Dumont insists on the progressive autonomization of the political power of the King (*raja*) vis-à-vis the Brahmans in traditional India. According to Feldman (2008), Muslim societies have increasingly moved away from the theocratic experience of the Prophet at Medina. He describes the traditional Islamic State as a State based on "the rule of law" and in which the power is shared between the temporal

rulers and the religious authorities (*fuqahā*). This process of differentiation should not be confused though with a process of secularization, as it did not induce a decline of religious authority *per se*.

The traditional political order in Hindu and Muslim-Majority countries was radically undermined by European colonial imperialism. According to Bertrand Badie (1992), what contributed to the Westernalization of international politics was the diffusion of the principle of territoriality, of a normative system based on the western concept of the Law, and finally of certain rules regulating inter-state relations. It is through the same channels that the western conception of the individual and citizenship also began to take roots. After decolonization and in the context of the Cold War, the coming to power of western-educated elites gave the illusion that the world would soon converge around the secular model. This expectation proved however premature. Whereas the revolt against secularism in the Western Europe, led by the Counter-revolutionaries, failed to prevent a massive dechristianization, we have been witnessing since the 1970s a religious counter-offensive on the Eastern front.

THE REVOLT AGAINST SECULARISM

The second part of this article approached the question of the prehistory of the post-secular world society through a macro-level comparison between the Western and Eastern paths of modernization. The third part reduces the scope of the analysis to sociology of mass movements and to a hermeneutics of philosophical and political discourses. It traces the intellectual genealogy of the religious actors of the post-secular focusing on two groups: the European Counter-Revolutionaries and the New Religious Political Movements (NRPM) in the Muslim Middle East and India. As we shall see, they are located at the center of the dialectic process of cognitive adjustments of their religious traditions to modernity.

Joseph de Maistre laid the foundation of the Counter-Revolutionary tradition by criticizing the very principle of liberal democracy, namely the idea of "popular sovereignty" in the name of a conservative political theology. Later Donoso Cortes has argued that all the modern political ideologies from liberalism to socialism and anarchism can be traced back to a religious heresy already condemned by the Church, to the negation of the original sin and the divine Providence.

What is particularly striking in the case of the early Counter-Revolutionaries is that their discourse combines two antagonistic

tendencies: on the one hand a conservative skepticism toward philosophical abstraction and a religious horror toward the Enlightenment project to transform human nature; on the other hand an apocalyptic anti-modernism originating in the work of Joseph de Maistre. Maistre was influenced by Masonic and illuminist milieus and he expected during his lifetime some "great event in the order of the divine," a third effusion of the Spirit or a miraculous renewal of Christianity. The Counter-revolutionaries illustrate the paradoxical posture of "conservative utopias" (to use Mannheim's terminology). They appeal to an imaginary of the Golden Age but they end up producing (against their own will) new myths that accelerate the dissolution of traditional structures and hierocracies.

This counter-tradition did not die out with the failure of the restorationist project of the Holy Alliance and the dismembering of the last vestige of the "Ancient Regime" in Europe. But the turmoil of 1848 induced a split within the Counter-revolutionary movements: one trend moved in the direction of a "religious nationalism" and became part of the intellectual fabric of Fascism; the other took a path that led to "Christian democracy."

The first trend began with Donoso Cortes. From the pan-European revolution of 1848, he drew the conclusion of the bankruptcy of the legitimist principle. Monarchies by divine right were disappearing. To maintain social order, religious conservatives should give their blessing to a military dictatorship. The consequences of Cortes's break with Maistre's metapolitics were far reaching. The Nation and the State which were associated in the earlier counter-revolutionary imaginary with Jacobinism and the collapse of monarchy became the new axis of the counter-revolutionary program at the risk of putting its political theology at the same level as a secular ideology.

Despite his role in resurrecting the topic of political theology, Schmitt illustrates the paradoxical phenomenon of *inner-secularization* of the counter-revolutionary tradition after Donoso Cortes. For Schmitt, modernity both secularized and neutralized the heritage of Medieval Christendom. His decisionism sought to reclaim through the metaphysical moment of the decision and a theory of the "Total State" the compact symbol of a primordial unity of the political and the religious.

Compared to Maistre, Schmitt failed to theorize however the problem of the representation of the Sacred in the political. The authoritarian Schmittian sovereign represents only himself, his legitimacy proceeding from the power of coercion in his hands, not from any meta-political Truth. The idea of transcendental representation totally vanishes, replaced by a crude *realpolitik,* the assumption that a political community finds its

unity only in the experience of conflicts. In *The concept of the Political*, Schmitt famously defines the core of the political as the ability to distinguish between friends and enemies, offering a sort of *cogito* of enmity. "I know my enemy, therefore I am." Instead of producing a Catholic theory of the State, Schmitt had just laid down the foundations for a modern, potentially secular, dictatorship.

The orthodoxy of Schmitt's faith proves questionable. His God is the absolutely "Other," a God of pure Transcendence that annihilates the free will of the creatures and is incompatible with the catholic rationalist tradition of natural law. Not only that, but Schmitt's political theology leaves no room for *agápē*. Seeing evil everywhere, Schmitt, like many inquisitors, probably ended up believing more in the Devil than in God and one may wonder if what he managed to resurrect was not a genuine Catholic Political Theology but a new *avatāra* of the Gnostic heresy, with its vision of the world as totally emptied by God and the idea of a radical dualism between Good and Evil.

For Voegelin however, these historical features of the gnostic theology are secondary. At a deeper level, Gnosticism is the pathology of the soul. The gnostic wants to "redivinize" the world by "immanentizing the eschaton" but manages only to distort reality.

The Counter-revolutionary tradition from Maistre to Schmitt can be characterized as a form of anti-modernist gnostic political theology. Since the Axial Age, the symbol of "political theology" has fundamentally two sides. On one side, political theology may simply legitimize the powers in place. But on the other, it may also question (and even subvert) the political order in the name of a higher Truth, accessible to man by subjective enquiry about the "Divine Ground" of existence. This other side of political theology is totally overlooked by the counter-revolutionaries who tend to confuse subjective-enquiry with the critical thinking of the liberal tradition. In the hands of the counter-revolutionaries, Political Theology becomes a close and mutilated symbol. Agitated by chiliastic dreams, the counter-revolutionaries think the religious on the model of the political and therefore regress toward a compact and pre-Axial experience of the Sacred. These gnostic features were originally compensated by a metaxic orientation toward the "Divine Ground" (particularly visible in the case of Maistre) but transcendent openness gradually vanished as Counter-Revolutionaries embraced modern ideologies like the Nation and the State. Schmitt's choice of Hitler was more than an individual sin, it was the symbol of the bankruptcy of a whole intellectual lineage.

The second trend in the late counter-revolutionary tradition moved in the opposite direction, welcoming differentiation as a way of perfecting the Christian experience. It originated in the writings of Hugues Felicité Robert de Lamennais, a Maistrian who came to the conclusion that the supremacy of the spiritual over the temporal was better guaranteed by a separation between Church and State. What has later become known as Christian democracy is also based on the assumption that the substance of the Gospel can be immanentized in modernity. Lamennais advocated a new alliance between the mystical Church and the Proletariat. Charles de Montalembert and Jacques Maritain have rather insisted on the Christian foundations of the idea of inviolability of the human person interpreted as a form of transcendence vis-à-vis the City.

If we want to delineate the evolution of the counter-revolutionary tradition in the West, we can summarize it as a process of evolution from regressive or gnostic compactness to differentiation. The world was not re-enchanted. Rationalization is an irreversible process. But there was a choice to be made between compact and differentiated symbols. After the Second World War, the experience with Fascism and the threat of Communism finally led the Catholic Church to gradually embrace democracy and liberalism, giving a posthumous victory to Lamennais. But the same period also witnessed an acceleration of the dechristianization of the old continent. In a way, differentiation had also lead to a flattening of the tension toward the Ground and finally a deepening of the disorder both at the collective and individual levels. This unfortunate outcome seems to be the consequence of the fateful convergence between secularization and differentiation/disenchantment in the Western trajectory of modernization. Europe failed to produce a new symbolization of the Ground that could meet the demands in a time of crisis or to renew with the founding experience of Christianity.

The NRPM[3] share a lot in common with the European Counter-revolution: conservative if not reactionary values especially about genders; a mysticism of the Golden Age (the prophetic community of Medina or the Vedic Age); a rejection of secularism and the pretention of man to build a world outside of a Transcendent norm. Maistre's metapolitical theocratism finds its most direct equivalent in the core-idea of classical Islamist discourse from Abul Ala Mawdudi to Seyyed Qutb, namely the unconditional assertion of "divine sovereignty" (*hākimīyah'*) against disorder (*jāhilīyah'*) and the tyranny of human rules. In the Indian context, the ideology of the *Hindutva* is more akin to the later manifestations of the counter-revolutionary tradition, although the *Sangh*

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Parivar[4] did borrow (selectively) topics from the Political Theologies of Sri Aurobindo Ghose and Gandhi. Even in the case of the Islamists, whose reference to religion *per se* is more central, their political theology proves to be Schmittian rather than Maistrian in its structure. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the conception of the absolute power (*motlaqeh*) of the Supreme Guide, that emerged fully only after the constitutional amendment of 1989 and defended today by hardliners like Mesbah Yazdi, reflects a mystique of the decision, elevated to the status of a metaphysical movement.

What singles out NRPM from the European Counter-revolutionaries is their position in the dialectic between modernity and tradition. The Counter-Revolution emerged, at least originally, from the ranks of the defenders of the tradition and the Ancient Regime and only later sough accommodation with modernity. By contrast, NRPM have modernist roots that contributed to unleash among them gnostic forces on an unprecedented scale.

Colonial empires, like the empires of the Ecumenic Age, have accelerated the process of the dedivinization or disenchantment of the world (although enchanted and disenchanted versions of Islam and Hinduism continue to coexist side by side even today). Coupled with the collapse of traditional landmarks, they created a *vacuum*, rapidly filled by neognostic political theologies. An important step was the reformist critic of autochthonous religion, which gave birth to neo-Hinduism and Salafist Islam. Unlike the counter-revolutionaries, these reformists came from modernist circles, influenced by Enlightenment ideas and inspired by a utopian imaginary about progress and science.

Although, it is Vivekananda who introduced the topic of a practical oriented Vedanta, it is Aurobindo (1971) who accomplished the radical turn in the direction of an "immanentisation of the eschaton" in the Hindu context. Under the influence of Darwinism, Hegelianism, and the philosophy of Life (Bergson, Nietzsche), he secularized the idea of individual release (*mokṣa*) from the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsarā*), replacing it with the prospect of an intra-mundane progress of consciousness culminating with a collective enlightenment. In Islam, Muhammad Iqbal (1999) initiated a similar turn in the favor of the *vita activa* and at the expense of the *vita contemplativa*. For him, the spell of fatalistic contemplation could be broken only with a change of paradigm, the replacement of the static conception of Being of Greek origin by a conception of God as a "Creative Ego" operating within the world. The immanentisation of the eschaton was however accomplished by the theoreticians of the Islamic revolution (Seyyed Qutb and Ali Shariati). The common denominator of

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these reformist and revivalist thinkers seem to have been a very conscious break with the tradition, the idea that tradition was not the channel through which contact with the Ground could be renewed but human veils to be discarded so that religion could shine again.

In the Islamic Middle-East and India, traditional hierocrats (such as Swami Karpatri in India or Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei in Iraq) were aware of the threat represented by the NRPM but they often lacked the adequate resources to compete. The audience of the reformists was limited to westernized elites but NRPM reached the level of mass movement under the influence of the "political religions" of the West. Although ambivalence toward their secular ideologies and their cult of the leader, the Muslim brothers and the RSS did not hesitate to emulate the techniques of mobilization and organization of European Fascists (Gershoni 2009; Jaffrelot 1998). Shariati reinterpreted Molla Sadra's ontology in the light of western existentialism and Shiite eschatology in the light of Marxism, paving the way for the Islamic Revolution.

The non-traditional character of the NRPM is also reflected in their selective use of the post-modernist critique of the Enlightenment. Islamists and Hindu nationalists have repeatedly played the card of "cultural relativism" to challenge the hegemony of western science or liberal feminism and promote Vedic Science (Nanda 2003) and Islamo-feminism.

The genealogy of the NRPM shows that they were driven from the beginning by a project of conservative, if not reactionary, modernization, and not a restorationist project as the earliest forms of the Counter-revolution. They did embrace scientific and economic modernism but sought to control its social and political consequences. Religion tends to be reduced to morality, if not sexual norms. All that is asked is obedience to the arbitrary decree of a God of pure Transcendence, at the extreme limit indistinguishable from a non-existing God. Religion becomes a mask for the nihilistic "will to power" of a collective Self that can sustain itself only in the conflict with a diabolized Other.

This project of reactionary modernization is premised on the idea that "imported modernity" can be unsecularized (either islamized or hinduized). Building upon Monod's triple definition of secularization, we should distinguish between three variants of this process of counter-secularization: (1) *Counter-secularization as the liquidation of modernity*; (2) *Counter-Secularization as the fulfillment of modernity*, and (3) *Counter-Secularization as transfer*.

Virtually none of the NRPM is seriously contemplating the possibility of breaking all ties with modernity, as they are too fascinated by the means

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of control and domination that it has to offer. What is more common in these movements is a discourse of counter-secularization that presents religion as capable of fulfilling the promises of modernity, to succeed where westernized elites (Arab nationalists and Nehruian socialists) have failed. More than anything, it is the discrepancy between the expectations with Western modernization and the outcome (political authoritarianism, social, and economic inequalities) that have filled the ranks of these movements. But for religion to meet these expectations, elements from the "imported" modernity need to be borrowed, transferred from the secular sphere to the religious sphere, producing hybrid institutions and practices. The NRPM are therefore inversing the direction of the transfers that historically contributed to the rise of the Weberian State and capitalism in early modern Europe. The result of this process has been hybrid notions such religious militancy, religious State, or more recently religious democracy.

In what follow, we will focus on the case of the NRPM in the Islamic Middle-East, which is maybe more significant than in India, where democracy has been established since independence. Contemporary Islamists are torn between a mystique of the community (*ummah*) that seeks to minimize or even destroy the State (as in the case of jihadist movements) and a fascination of the imported *Leviathan*. Historically, at the time of the Renaissance (*Nahḍah)*, it was the model of the nation-state that dominated, among 19th/early 20th centuries Muslim reformists. After the collapse of the caliphate, two paths opened up. The first one entails a separation between religion and State and was defended by Ali Abdel Raziq, the author of *al-Islām wa Uṣūl al-ḥukm* (*Islam and the Foundations of Power*). The second path was inaugurated by Rashid Rida and looked in the direction of a more compact unity between religion and the State that had tended to erode over the centuries of Islamic history. Rida advocated a restoration of the caliphate and a sacred conception of power. His paradigm was an empire, not the territorial State. After him, mainstream Islamists have turned toward a more modest conception of the Islamic State, which is based on the western conception of the relationship between the State and the Law, but with secular Law being replaced by a (reconstructed) Islamic Law. We should not underestimate the break up that the Islamic State introduced in the Muslim tradition. Its theoreticians (Hasan al-Banna in Egypt and Mawdudi in Pakistan) revolutionized the traditional Sunni *fiqh* by making the instauration of an Islamic State one of the goals of religion, a duty for all Muslims and the prerequisite for the implementation of the *sharia*.

An Islamic State like the Republic of Iran is a hybrid State in which western-style institutions are controlled by a theocratic super-structure. The Oriental *Leviathan* combines the extreme compactness of a pre-Axial unity of the political and the religious with an extreme rationalization of its religious content, transformed into a system of "Islamic values" to be opposed to "Western values." The Islamic State like the Schmittian State does not restore but distorts the symbols of religion.

The growing awareness of the impossibility to restore a political order based on the "transcendental representation" in modern times, accelerated in the Islamic context by the disillusions with the authoritarian theories of the "Divine Sovereignty" (*hākimīyah'*) and the horrors caused by Islamic insurgencies in countries like Algeria, have nevertheless translated into an evolution in the opposite direction — politically toward democracy and epistemologically and cognitively toward a more differentiated understanding of religion — that closely mirrors the one of the Christian democrats.

As a mass movement, the Moslem Brothers contribute *in the long-term* to the equalization of social conditions that Tocqueville had identified as a necessary, though not sufficient condition for democracy. But since the 1980s, they have also changed their ideological attitude toward democracy (without necessarily embracing democratic norms *per se*). For the contemporary Islamist Qaradawi, democracy is not opposed to "Divine Sovereignty" but to autocracy (*al-istibdad)*, the rule of a single man over the others. He argues that Islamist movements should seek to be integrated into secular institutions and compete in democratic elections to overthrow secularist and westernized elites, the ultimate goal being the re-islamization of society. So far, since the Arab Spring, it is this reformist line that has prevailed.

The evolution was probably more radical in the case of Iran where the Islamic State was established but has only worsened the spiritual crisis. Whereas in early modern Europe, secularism wanted to protect the political from the power of the Church, in Iran, neo-conservatives and reformists like Moshen Kadivar have come to the conclusion that the greatest threat to religion was the Islamic government itself. In the interest of both individual freedom and religion, the State should be secularized and democratized.

However, it is not obvious how the different formulas for an Islamo-compatible democracy can resolve the contradiction between the authority of the *sharia* and the idea of popular sovereignty without having to make the costly hypothesis of a natural and enduring religiosity among the

Muslim masses or to reduce the *sharia* to a vague natural or moral law. What is maybe more significant in the long-run are the discourses about Islamic reformation advocating cognitive adjustments to modernity in the fields of Islamic legislation and epistemology.

Tariq Ramadan's project of "transformative" reform is based on a new theological appraisal of the balance between the Book of the Revelation and the Book of Nature, the sciences of the text (*an-nusūs*), and the sciences of the context (*al-wāqi'*). Building on the legacy of the Maqasid school, the school of the "Higher Objectives" (*maqāsid ash-sharī'ah*), he proposes "a new geography of the *usūl al-fiqh*" (Ramadan 2008). Ramadan does not explicitly break however with the totalizing agenda of the Islamists. It is rather in the writings of Abdelkarim Soroush (2002) that we find a "des-absolutization" of religion itself. His theory of religious knowledge fights two battles. First against the claims of the conservative *ulema*, he insists on the limit of any human understanding of the revelation, drawing from the philosophy of science and from hermeneutical philosophy. Second against the totalitarianism of the *wilāyat al-faqīh'*, he points out the limits of *religious knowledge itself*. The establishment of democracy requires for instance the recognition of the *extra*-religious character of certain principles like human rights (regardless of the question of their genealogy).

Post-Islamist thinkers have realized that the Gnostic compactness of the Islamist discourse threatens the openness of the soul toward the Ground, which could be preserved only through a more differentiated understanding of religion and of the relationship of religion with science and politics. Their new attitude has also contributed to a phenomenon that has not received enough attention: the erosion of the rigid distinction between esoteric and exoteric knowledge that for Leo Strauss structured the premodern economy of knowledge. Faced with the unprecedented challenge of modernity for religious consciousness, post-Islamist reformists, who are most often public intellectuals (although of a very different type than a Sartre or a Foucault), no longer hesitate to draw from resources outside of the legal and theological tradition, certain noetic insights about religious symbols found in their philosophical and mystical tradition. The evolution is perhaps less significant among reformists from Iran, where the boundaries between esoterism and exoterism were always porous and problematic than in the case of Ramadan, whose reflection about a "global Islamic ethics" seems to lead him more and more to welcome insights from Sufism.

CONCLUSION

In the history of the West, secularization and the spiritual crisis that it has caused were experienced as a "fate" by the early theoreticians of the process of modernization. It was fate, wrote Weber that "decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage." Heidegger's mytho-history of Being pushed probably to the extreme this impression that modernization had put into motion mysterious forces totally beyond our control. Colonization, globalization, and the emergence of other programs of autochthonous modernization have created however the conditions for a reappraisal of the meaning of the western path of secular modernization, that first and foremost allows to distinguish between the global process of rationalization/disenchantment since the Axial Age and secularization *per se*.

The hypothesis of a post-secular world society is based on the assumptions that the logic of peaceful interactions between religious and secular actors may ultimately prevail. Nothing is less certain though and we cannot rule out the possibility that we are heading toward some variation of Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations." If there is little likelihood that we will see an Islamo-Confucian alliance against the West taking shape any time soon, we may imagine a descent into global "civil war." Religious hatred nourished by resentment against former colonialist powers in decline may engulf and destroy the world as we know it.

Still, the prehistory of the post-secular society that we have outlined and the examination of the religious forces in the contemporary world leave us some reason for hope. First, we have identified a common root of the great contemporary civilizations in the Axial Age. The symbol of the Axial Age breaks with the Euro-centric narrative that has been used to justify colonization and Western imperialism. It points out to a common ethical and religious heritage that could lay out the foundation for a truly shared global ethics. Second, the analysis of the complex processes of secularization and counter-secularization, importation and hybridization, shows what any historian already knows, namely that Huntington's essentialist and monolithic conception of civilizations is naïve and misleading. Collective identifies are shaped in the long-term by intercultural interactions, the possibility of transfers extending beyond the empirical level to include the symbols of the divine ground. Finally, the trajectory of the Counter-Revolutionary tradition and the NRPM suggests that religious actors can actually make the epistemic and cognitive adjustments that, according to Habermas, are a prerequisite for the mutual learning

process to take place in a post-secular environment. The choice between a Schmitto-Huntingtonian and a Habermassian future is not decided yet.

NOTES

1. The notion of Axial Age goes back to Karl Jaspers (1948), although the idea is already implicit in Weber's sociology of religions. In more recent years, the Axial Age has been explored by religious scholars, philosophers or sociologists like Eisenstadt, Marcel Gauchet, Charles Taylor or Karen Armstrong. Voegelin prefers to speak about the *Ecumenic Age* that encompasses the rise of Christianity.
2. Weber's "polytheism of values" is located at the point of junction between disenchantment and Voegelin's differentiation. But the analysis of Weber is limited to the level of social *praxis* and does not rise to the problem of consciousness.
3. The expression is borrowed from Nikki R. Keddie (1998).
4. This umbrella includes the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) and the *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (VHP).

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