

Secularism's Crisis of Faith

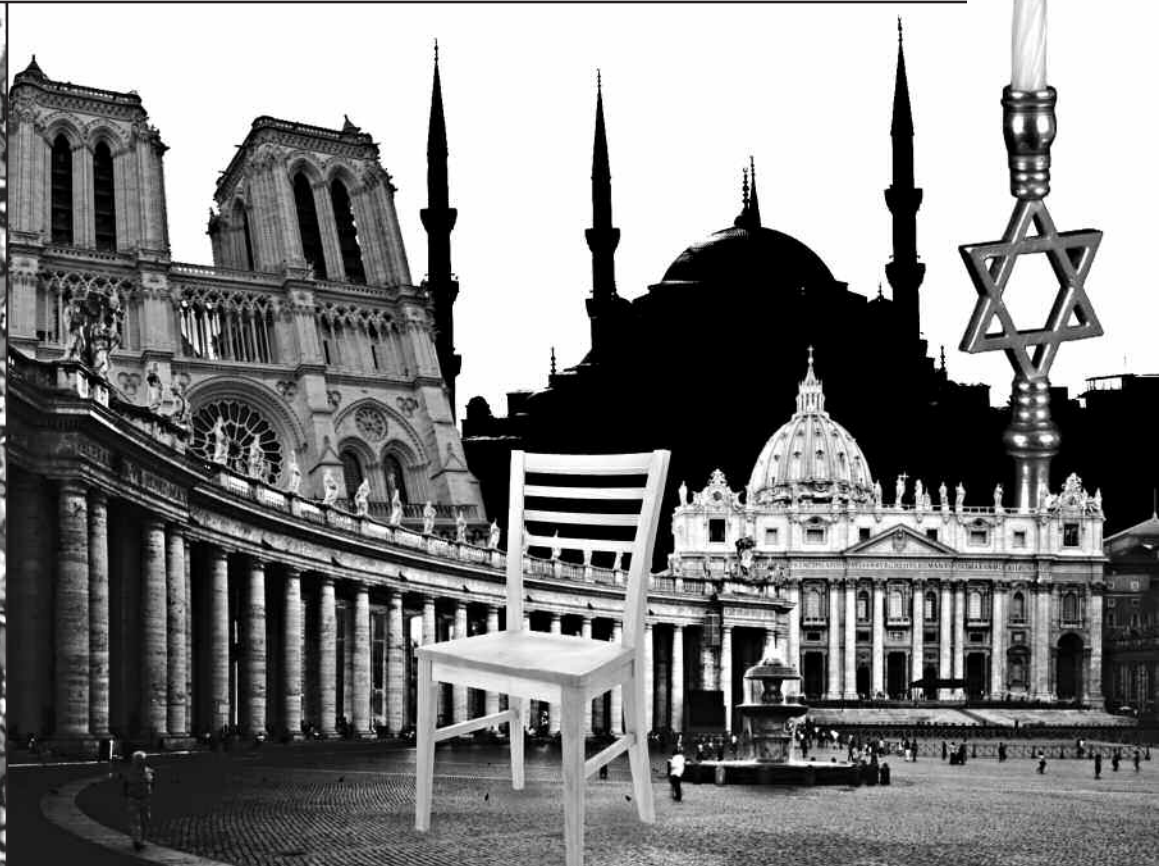
JÜRGEN HABERMAS ■ TONY BLAIR ■ RÉGIS DEBRAY

The resurgence of political Islam and the endurance of broad religious belief in the most modern of societies—America—has created a crisis of faith among secularists. If modernity no longer implies a secular outlook, and secularism, by definition, cannot generate any values beyond an indifferent tolerance of all belief, what role will religion play in the 21st century?

In an interesting confluence of reflection, Jürgen Habermas, one of Europe's leading secular liberal thinkers, argues that secular citizens must be open to religious influence, especially since the very identity of Western culture is rooted in Judeo-Christian values. In his political afterlife, Tony Blair has converted to Catholicism and established a Faith Foundation to press for religious literacy because "you can't understand the modern world unless you understand the importance of religious faith."

Similarly, when Pope Benedict XVI visited secular France in September, President Nicholas Sarkozy scandalized the lay establishment by saying, like Habermas, that "rejecting a dialogue with religion would be a cultural and intellectual error." He called for "a positive secularism that debates, respects and includes, not a secularism that rejects."

Despite the flurry of controversy over a recent spate of books extolling the virtues of atheism in the wake of Islamist terrorism, the more interesting issue by far is the emergence of post-secular modernity.



Notes on Post-Secular Society

JÜRGEN HABERMAS, one of Europe's leading intellectuals, is noted for such seminal works as *Legitimation Crisis*. He has long explored how "constitutional patriotism" might bind people together in community rather than the religious or national sentiments of the past. Of late, however, he has become concerned about the inability of post-modern societies in the West to generate their own values, drawing instead on the heritage of Judeo-Christian values as the source of morality and ethics. In this article, based on a lecture at the Nexus Institute at Tilberg University in the Netherlands last March, Habermas argues that modernity no longer implies the march toward secularism. In a democracy, the secular mentality must be open to the religious influence of believing citizens.

The controversial term "post-secular society" can only be applied to the affluent societies of Europe or countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, where people's religious ties have steadily or rather quite dramatically lapsed in the post-World War II period.

These regions have witnessed a spreading awareness that their citizens are living in a secularized society. In terms of sociological indicators, however, the religious behavior and convictions of the local populations have by no means changed to such an extent as to justify labeling these societies "post-secular" even though trends in these societies towards de-institutionalized and new spiritual forms of religiosity have not offset the tangible losses by the major religious communities.

Reconsidering the Sociological Debate on Secularization

Nevertheless, global changes and the visible conflicts that flare up in connection with religious issues give us reason to doubt whether the relevance of religion has waned. An ever smaller number of sociologists now support the hypothesis, and it went unopposed for a long time, that there is close linkage between the modernization of society and the secularization of the population. The hypothesis rests on three initially plausible considerations.

First, progress in science and technology promotes an *anthropocentric understanding* of the "disenchanted" world because the totality of empirical states and events can be causally explained; and a scientifically enlightened mind cannot be easily reconciled with theocentric and metaphysical worldviews. Second, with the *functional differentiation of social subsystems*, the churches and other religious organizations lose their control over law, politics, public welfare, education and science; they restrict themselves to their proper function of administering the means of salvation, turn exercising religion into a private matter and in general lose public influence and relevance. Finally,

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the development from agrarian through industrial to post-industrial societies leads to average-to-higher levels of welfare and greater social security; and with a reduction of risks in life, and the ensuing increase in existential security, there is a drop in the personal need for a practice that promises to cope with uncontrolled contingencies through faith in a “higher” or cosmic power.

These were the main reasons for the secularization thesis. Among the expert community of sociologists, the thesis has been a subject of controversy for more than two decades. Lately, in the wake of the not unfounded criticism of a narrow Eurocentric perspective, there is even talk of the “end of the secularization theory.” The United States, with the undiminished vibrancy of its religious communities and the unchanging proportion of religiously committed and active citizens, nevertheless remains the spearhead of modernization. It was long regarded as the great exception to the secularising trend, yet informed by the *globally extended* perspective on other cultures and world religions, the US now seems to exemplify the norm.

From this revisionist view, the European development, whose Occidental rationalism was once supposed to serve as a model for the rest of the world, is actually the exception rather than the norm—treading a deviant path. We and not they are pursuing a *sonderweg*. Above all, three overlapping phenomena converge to create the impression of a worldwide “resurgence of religion”: the missionary expansion; a fundamentalist radicalization; and the political instrumentalization of the potential for violence innate in many of the world religions.

A first sign of their vibrancy is the fact that orthodox, or at least conservative, groups within the established religious organizations and churches are on the advance everywhere. This holds for Hinduism and Buddhism just as much as it does for the three monotheistic religions. Most striking of all is the regional spread of these established religions in Africa and in the countries of East and Southeast Asia. The missionary successes apparently depend, among other things, on the flexibility of the corresponding forms of organization. The transnational and multicultural Roman Catholic Church is adapting better to the globalizing trend than are the Protestant churches, which are nationally organized and the principal losers. Most dynamic of all are the decentralized networks of Islam (particularly in sub-Saharan Africa) and the Evangelicals (particularly in Latin America). They stand out for an ecstatic form of religiosity inspired by charismatic leaders.

As to fundamentalism, the fastest-growing religious movements, such as the Pentecostals and the radical Muslims, can be most readily described as “fundamentalist.” They either combat the modern world or withdraw from it into isolation. Their forms of worship combine spiritualism and adventism with rigid moral conceptions

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and literal adherence to the holy scriptures. By contrast, the “new age movements” which have mushroomed since the 1970s exhibit a “Californian” syncretism; they share with the Evangelicals a de-institutionalized form of religious observance. In Japan, approximately 400 such sects have arisen, which combine elements of Buddhism and popular religions with pseudoscientific and esoteric doctrines. In the People’s Republic of China, the political repression of the Falun Gong sect has highlighted the large number of “new religions” whose followers are thought to number some 80 million.

Finally, the mullah regime in Iran and Islamic terrorism are merely the most spectacular examples of a political unleashing of the potential for violence innate in religion. Often smouldering conflicts that are profane in origin are first ignited once coded in religious terms. This is true of the “desecularization” of the Middle East conflict, of the politics of Hindu nationalism and the enduring conflict between India and Pakistan and of the mobilization of the religious right in the US before and during the invasion of Iraq.

The Descriptive Account of a “Post-Secular Society”—and the Normative Issue of How Citizens of Such a Society Should Understand Themselves

I cannot discuss in detail the controversy among sociologists concerning the supposed *sonderweg* of the secularized societies of Europe in the midst of a religiously mobilized world society. My impression is that the data collected globally still provide surprisingly robust support for the defenders of the secularization thesis. In my view the weakness of the theory of secularization is due rather to rash inferences that betray an imprecise use of the concepts of “secularization” and “modernization.” What is true is that in the course of the differentiation of functional social systems, churches and religious communities increasingly confined themselves to their core function of pastoral care and had to renounce their competencies in other areas of society. At the same time, the practice of faith also withdrew into more a personal or subjective domain. There is a correlation between the functional specification of the religious system and the individualization of religious practice.

However, as Jose Casanova correctly points out, the loss of function and the trend toward individualization do not necessarily imply that religion *loses influence and relevance* either in the political arena and the culture of a society or in the personal conduct of life. Quite apart from their numerical weight, religious communities can obviously still claim a “seat” in the life of societies that are largely secularized. Today, public consciousness in Europe can be described in terms of a “post-secular society” to the extent that at present it still has to “adjust itself to the continued existence of religious communities in an increasingly secularized environment.” The revised reading

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of the secularization hypothesis relates less to its substance and more to the predictions concerning the future role of “religion.” The description of modern societies as “post-secular” refers to a *change in consciousness* that I attribute primarily to three phenomena.

First, the broad perception of those global conflicts that are often presented as hinging on religious strife changes public consciousness. The majority of European citizens do not even need the presence of intrusive fundamentalist movements and the fear of terrorism, defined in religious terms, to make them aware of their own relativity within the global horizon. This undermines the secularistic belief in the *foreseeable disappearance* of religion and robs the secular understanding of the world of any triumphal zest. The awareness of living in a secular society is no longer bound up with the *certainty* that cultural and social modernization can advance only at the cost of the public influence and personal relevance of religion.

Second, religion is gaining influence not only worldwide but also within national public spheres. I am thinking here of the fact that churches and religious organizations are increasingly assuming the role of “communities of interpretation” in the public arena of secular societies. They can attain influence on public opinion and will formation by making relevant contributions to key issues, irrespective of whether their arguments are convincing or objectionable. Our pluralist societies constitute a responsive sounding board for such interventions because they are increasingly split on value conflicts requiring political regulation. Be it the dispute over the legalization of abortion or voluntary euthanasia, on the bioethical issues of reproductive medicine, questions of animal protection or climate change—on these and similar questions the divisive premises are so opaque that it is by no means settled from the outset which party can draw on the more convincing moral intuitions.

Pushing the issue closer home, let me remind you that the visibility and vibrancy of foreign religious communities also spur the attention to the familiar churches and congregations. The Muslims next door force the Christian citizens to face up to the practice of a rival faith. And they also give the secular citizens a keener consciousness of the phenomenon of the public presence of religion.

The third stimulus for a change of consciousness among the population is the immigration of “guest-workers” and refugees, specifically from countries with traditional cultural backgrounds. Since the 16th century, Europe has had to contend with *confessional schisms* within its own culture and society. In the wake of the present immigration, the more blatant dissonances between different religions link up with the challenge of a *pluralism of ways of life* typical of immigrant societies. This extends beyond the challenge of a *pluralism of denominations*. In societies like ours which are still caught in the painful process of transformation into postcolonial immigrant societies,

the issue of tolerant coexistence between different religious communities is made harder by the difficult problem of how to integrate immigrant cultures socially. While coping with the pressure of globalized labor markets, social integration must succeed even under the humiliating conditions of growing social inequality. But that is a different story.

I have thus far taken the position of a sociological observer in trying to answer the question of why we can term secularized societies “post-secular.” In these societies, religion maintains a public influence and relevance, while the secularistic certainty that religion will disappear worldwide in the course of modernization is losing ground. If we henceforth adopt the perspective of participants, however, we face a quite different, namely normative question: How should we see ourselves as members of a post-secular society and what must we reciprocally expect from one another in order to ensure that in firmly entrenched nation states, social relations remain civil despite the growth of a plurality of cultures and religious worldviews?

All European societies today face this question. While preparing this lecture last February, a single weekend offered me three different news items. President Sarkozy dispatched an additional 4,000 policemen to the infamous Parisian banlieus, so sorely afflicted by rioting Maghreb youths; the Archbishop of Canterbury recommended that the British legislature adopt parts of Sharia family law for its local Muslim population; and a fire broke out in a tenement block in Ludwigshafen in which nine Turks, four of them children, met their deaths—something that despite the lack of evidence of arson prompted deep suspicion among the Turkish media, not to say true dismay; this then persuaded the Turkish prime minister to make a visit to Germany during which his ambivalent campaign speech in an arena in Cologne in turn triggered a strident response in the German press.

These debates have assumed a sharper tone since the terrorist attacks of 9/11. In the Netherlands the murder of Theo van Gogh kindled a passionate public discourse, as did the affair with the Mohammad cartoons in Denmark. These debates assumed a quality of their own; their ripples have spread beyond national borders to unleash a European-wide debate. I am interested in the background assumptions that render this discussion on “Islam in Europe” so explosive. But before I can address the philosophical core of the reciprocal accusations, let me outline more clearly the shared starting point of the opposing parties—a proper interpretation of what we used to call “the separation of church and state.”

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From an Uneasy *Modus Vivendi* to a Balance Between Shared Citizenship and Cultural Difference

The secularization of the state was the appropriate response to the confessional wars of early modernity. The principle of “separating church and state” was only gradually realized and took a different form in each national body of law. To the extent that the government assumed a secular character, step by step the religious minorities (initially only tolerated) received further rights—first the freedom to practice their own religion at home, then the right of religious expression and finally equal rights to exercise their religion in public. An historical glance at this tortuous process, and it reached into the 20th century, can tell us something about the *preconditions* for this precious achievement, the inclusive religious freedom that is extended to all citizens alike.

After the Reformation, the state initially faced the elementary task of having to pacify a society divided along confessional lines, in other words, to achieve peace and order. In the context of the present debate, Dutch writer Margriet de Moor reminds her fellow citizens of these beginnings: “Tolerance is often mentioned in the same breath as respect, yet our tolerance, and its roots date back to the 16th and 17th centuries, is not based on respect—on the contrary. We hated the religion of the respective other, Catholics and Calvinists had not one iota of respect for the views of the other side, and our 80 Years’ War was not just a rebellion against Spain, but also a bloody jihad by the orthodox Calvinists against Catholicism.” We will soon see what kind of respect Margriet de Moor has in mind.

As regards peace and order, governments had to assume a neutral stand even where they remained bound up with the religion prevailing in the country. In countries with confessional strife the state had to disarm the quarreling parties, invent arrangements for a peaceful coexistence of the inimical confessions and monitor their precarious existence alongside each other. In confessionally split countries such as Germany or the Netherlands, the opposing subcultures then each nested in niches of their own and subsequently *remained foreign* to one another in society. Precisely this *modus vivendi* (and this is what I would like to stress) proved to be insufficient when the constitutional revolutions of the late 18th century spawned a new political order that subjected the completely secularized powers of the state to both the rule of law and the democratic will of the people.

This constitutional state is only able to guarantee its citizens equal freedom of religion under the proviso that they no longer barricade themselves within their religious communities and seal themselves off from one another. All subcultures, whether religious or not, are expected to free their individual members from their embrace so that these citizens can *mutually recognize* one another in civil society as members of *one and*

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the same political community. As democratic citizens they give themselves laws which grant them the right, as private citizens, to preserve their identity in the context of their own particular culture and worldview. This new relationship of democratic government, civil society and subcultural self-maintenance is the key to correctly understanding the two motives that today struggle with each other although they are meant to be mutually complementary. For the universalist project of the political Enlightenment by no means contradicts the particularist sensibilities of a correctly conceived multiculturalism.

The *liberal rule of law* already guarantees religious freedom as a basic right, meaning that the fate of religious minorities no longer depends on the benevolence of a more or less tolerant state authority. Yet it is the democratic state that first enables the impartial application of this principled religious freedom. When Turkish communities in Berlin, Cologne or Frankfurt seek to get their prayer houses out of the backyards in order to build mosques visible from afar, the issue is no longer the principle per se, but its fair application. However, evident reasons for defining what should or should not be tolerated can only be ascertained by means of the deliberative and inclusive procedures of democratic will formation. The principle of tolerance is first freed of the suspicion of expressing mere condescension, when the conflicting parties *meet as equals* in the process of reaching an agreement with one another. How the lines between positive freedom of religion (i.e., the right to exercise your own faith) and the negative freedom (i.e., the right to be spared the religious practices of people of other faiths) should be drawn in an actual case is always a matter of controversy. But in a democracy those affected, however indirectly, are themselves involved in the decision-making process.

“Tolerance” is, of course, not only a question of enacting and applying laws; it must be practiced in everyday life. Tolerance means that believers of one faith, of a different faith and non-believers must mutually concede to one another the right to those convictions, practices and ways of living that they themselves reject. This concession must be supported by a shared basis of mutual recognition from which repugnant dissonances can be overcome. This recognition should not be confused with an *appreciation* of an alien culture and way of living, or of rejected convictions and practices. We need tolerance only *vis-a-vis* worldviews that we consider wrong and *vis-a-vis* habits that we do not like. Therefore, the basis of recognition is not the esteem for this or that characteristic or achievement, but the awareness of the fact that the other is a member of an inclusive community of citizens with equal rights, in which each individual is accountable to the others for his political contributions.

Now that is easier said than done. The equal inclusion of *all citizens* in civil society

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requires not only a political culture that preserves liberal attitudes from being confused with indifference; inclusion can only be achieved if certain material conditions are met. These include full integration and compensatory education in kindergartens, schools and universities, and equal opportunities in access to the labor market. However, in the present context what is most important to me is the image of an inclusive civil society in which equal citizenship and cultural difference complement each other in the right way.

For example, as long as a considerable portion of German citizens of Turkish origin and of Muslim faith have stronger political ties to their old homeland than their new one, those corrective votes will be lacking in the public sphere and at the ballot boxes which are necessary to expand the range of values of the dominant political culture. Without the inclusion of minorities in civil society, the two complementary processes will not be able to develop hand in hand, namely, the opening of the political community to a difference-sensitive inclusion of foreign minority cultures, on the one hand, and, on the other, the reciprocal opening of these subcultures to a state which encourages its individual members participate in the political life at large.

Kulturkampf Between Radical Multiculturalism and Militant Secularism: Philosophical Background Assumptions

In order to answer the question of how we should understand ourselves as members of a post-secular society, we can take our cue from these two interlocking processes. The ideological parties that confront each other in public debates today seldom take any notice of how both processes fit each other. The party of the multiculturalists appeals to the protection of collective identities and accuses the other side of representing a “fundamentalism of the Enlightenment,” whereas the secularists insist on the uncompromising inclusion of minorities in the existing political framework and accuse their opponents of a “multiculturalist betrayal” of the core values of the Enlightenment. In some European countries a third party plays a major role in these battles.

The so-called multiculturalists fight for an unprejudiced adjustment of the legal system to the cultural minorities’ claim to equal treatment. They warn against a policy of enforced assimilation with uprooting consequences. The secular state, they say, should not push through the incorporation of minorities into the egalitarian community of citizens in such a manner that it tears individuals out of their identity-forming contexts. From this communitarian view, a policy of abstract integration is under suspicion of subjecting minorities to the imperatives of the majority culture. Today, the wind is blowing in the multiculturalists’ faces: “Not only academics, but politicians and newspaper columnists likewise consider the Enlightenment a fortress to be

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defended against Islamic extremism.” This reaction, in turn, brings a critique of a “fundamentalism of the Enlightenment” into play. For example, Timothy Garton Ash argues in the *New York Review of Books* (Oct. 5, 2006) that “even Muslim women contradict the way in which Hirsi Ali attributes her oppression to Islam instead of the respective national, regional or tribal culture.” In fact, Muslim immigrants cannot be integrated into Western society in defiance of their religion but only with it.

On the other hand, the *secularists* fight for a colorblind inclusion of all citizens, irrespective of their cultural origin and religious belonging. This side warns against the consequences of a “politics of identity” that goes too far in adapting the legal system to the claims of preserving the intrinsic characteristics of minority cultures. From this “laicistic” viewpoint, religion must remain an exclusively private matter. Thus, Pascal Bruckner rejects cultural rights because these would give rise to parallel societies—to “small, self-isolated social groups, each of which adheres to a different norm.” Bruckner condemns multiculturalism roundly as an “anti-racist racism,” though his attack at best applies to those ultra-minded multiculturalists who advocate the introduction of collective cultural rights. Such protection for entire cultural groups would in fact curtail the right of their individual members to choose a way of life of their own.

Thus the conflicting parties both pretend to fight for the same purpose, a liberal society that allows autonomous citizens to coexist in a civilized manner. And yet they are at loggerheads in a *Kulturkampf* that resurfaces at every new political occasion. Although it is clear that both aspects are interlinked, they argue bitterly over whether the preservation of cultural identity has priority over the enforcement of shared citizenship or vice versa. The discussion gains its polemical acuity from contradictory philosophical premises which the opponents rightly or wrongly attribute to one other. Ian Buruma has made the interesting observation that following 9/11 an academic debate on the Enlightenment, on modernity and post-modernity, was taken out of the university and floated in the marketplace. The fiery debate was stoked by problematic background assumptions, namely a cultural relativism beefed up with a critique of reason on the one side, and a rigid secularism pushing for a critique of religion on the other.

The radical reading of multiculturalism often relies on the notion of the so-called “incommensurability” of worldviews, discourses or conceptual schemes. From this contextualist perspective, cultural ways of life appear as semantically closed universes, each of which keeps the lid on its own standards of rationality and truth claims. Therefore, each culture is supposed to exist for itself as a semantically sealed whole, cut off from dialogues with other cultures. With the exception of

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unsteady compromises, submission or conversion are the only alternatives for terminating conflicts between such cultures. Given this premise, radical multiculturalists cannot discern in any universalist validity claim, such as the claim for the universality of democracy and human rights, anything but the imperialist power claim of a dominant culture.

This relativistic reading inadvertently robs itself of the standards for a critique of the unequal treatment of cultural minorities. In our post-colonial immigrant societies, discrimination against minorities is usually rooted in prevailing cultural prejudices that lead to a selective application of established constitutional principles. If one then does not take seriously the universalist thrust of these principles in the first place, there is no vantage point from which to understand how the constitutional interpretation is bound up with the prejudices of the majority culture. I need not go into the philosophical issue of why cultural relativism, derived from a postmodern critique of reason, is an untenable position. However, the position itself is interesting for another reason; it lends itself to an opposite political conclusion and explains a peculiar political change of sides.

Ironically, the very same relativism is shared by those militant Christians who fight Islamic fundamentalism while proudly claiming the Enlightenment culture either as part and parcel of the tradition of Roman Catholicism or as the specific offshoot of Protestantism. On the other hand, these conservatives have strange bedfellows, since some of the former leftist “multiculturalists” turned into war-hungry liberal hawks. These converts even joined the ranks of neocon “Enlightenment fundamentalists.” In the battle against Islamic fundamentalists they were evidently able to adopt the culture of the Enlightenment, which they had once fought in the name of their own “Western culture” because they had always rejected its universalist intent: “The Enlightenment has become attractive specifically because its values are not just universal, but because they are ‘our,’ i.e., European, Western values.”

Needless to say, this reproach does not refer to those “laicistic” intellectuals of French origin for whom the pejorative term “Enlightenment fundamentalists” was originally coined. But it is again a philosophical background assumption which can explain a certain militancy on the part of these truly universalist guardians of the Enlightenment tradition. From their viewpoint, religion must withdraw from the political public sphere into the private domain because, cognitively speaking, it has been historically overridden as an “intellectual formation” (“Gestalt des Geistes,” as Hegel puts it). In the light of a liberal constitution, well, religion must be tolerated, but it cannot lay claim to provide a cultural resource for the self-understanding of any truly modern mind.

Complementary Learning Processes: Religious and Secular Mentalities

This secularistic position does not depend on how one judges the empirical suggestion that religious citizens and communities still make relevant contributions to political opinion and will formation even in largely secularized societies. Whether or not we consider the application of the predicate “post-secular” appropriate for a description of West European societies, one can be convinced, for philosophical reasons, that religious communities owe their persisting influence to an obstinate survival of pre-Modern modes of thought—a fact that begs an empirical explanation. From the viewpoint of secularism, the substance of faith is scientifically discredited either way. As such, discussions about religious traditions and with religious figures, who still lay claim to a significant public role, escalate into polemic.

In the use of terms I distinguish between “secular” and “secularist.” Unlike the indifferent stance of a secular or unbelieving person, who relates agnostically to religious validity claims, secularists tend to adopt a polemical stance toward religious doctrines that maintain a public influence despite the fact that their claims cannot be scientifically justified. Today, secularism is often based on “hard” naturalism, i.e., one based on scientific assumptions. Unlike the case of cultural relativism, here I need not comment on the philosophical background. For what interests me in the present context is the question of whether a secularist devaluation of religion, if it were one day to be shared by the vast majority of secular citizens, is at all compatible with that post-secular balance between shared citizenship and cultural difference I have outlined. Or would the secularistic mindset of a relevant portion of the citizenry be just as unappetizing for the normative self-understanding of a post-secular society as the fundamentalist leaning of a mass of religious citizens? This question touches on deeper roots of the present unease than the “multiculturalist drama.” Which kind of problem do we face?

It is to the credit of the secularists that they, too, insist on the indispensability of including all citizens as equals in civil society. Because a democratic order cannot simply be *imposed* on its authors, the constitutional state confronts its citizens with the demanding expectations of an ethics of citizenship that reaches beyond mere obedience to the law. Religious citizens and communities must not only superficially adjust to the constitutional order. They are expected to appropriate the secular legitimation of constitutional principles under the premises of their own faith. It is a well-known fact that the Catholic Church first pinned its colors to the mast of liberalism and democracy with the Second Vaticanum in 1965. And in Germany, the Protestant churches did not act differently. Many Muslim communities still have this painful learning process before them. Certainly, the insight is also growing in the Islamic

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world that today an historical-hermeneutic approach to the Koran's doctrine is required. But the discussion on a desired Euro-Islam makes us once more aware of the fact that it is the religious communities that will themselves decide whether they can recognize in a reformed faith their "true faith."

When we think of such a shift from the traditional to a more reflexive form of religious consciousness, what springs to mind is the model of the post-Reformation change in epistemic attitudes that took place in the Christian communities of the West. But a change in mentality cannot be prescribed, nor can it be politically manipulated or pushed through by law; it is at best the result of a learning process. And it only appears as a "learning process" from the viewpoint of a secular self-understanding of Modernity. In view of what an ethics of democratic citizenship requires in terms of mentalities, we come up against the very limits of a normative political theory that can justify only rights and duties. Learning processes can be fostered, but not morally or legally stipulated.

But shouldn't we turn the question around? Is a learning process only necessary on the side of religious traditionalism and not on that of secularism, too? Do the self-same normative expectations that rule an inclusive civil society not prohibit a secularistic devaluation of religion just as they prohibit, for example, the religious rejection of equal rights for men and women? A *complementary learning process* is certainly necessary on the secular side unless we confuse the neutrality of a secular state in view of competing religious worldviews with the purging of the political public sphere of all religious contributions.

Certainly, the domain of a state, which controls the means of legitimate coercion, should not be opened to the strife between various religious communities, otherwise the government could become the executive arm of a religious majority that imposes its will on the opposition. In a constitutional state, all norms that can be legally implemented must be formulated and *publicly justified* in a language that all the citizens understand. Yet the state's neutrality does not preclude the permissibility of religious utterances within the political public sphere, as long as the institutionalized decision-making process at the parliamentary, court, governmental and administrative levels remains clearly separated from the informal flows of political communication and opinion formation among the broader public of citizens. The "separation of church and state" calls for a filter between these two spheres—a filter through which only "translated," i.e., secular, contributions may pass from the confused din of voices in the public sphere into the formal agendas of state institutions.

Two reasons speak in favor of such liberal practice. First, the persons who are neither willing nor able to divide their moral convictions and their vocabulary into

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profane and religious strands must be permitted to take part in political will formation even if they use religious language. Second, the democratic state must not preemptively reduce the polyphonic complexity of the diverse public voices, because it cannot know whether it is not otherwise cutting society off from scarce resources for the generation of meanings and the shaping of identities. Particularly with regard to vulnerable social relations, religious traditions possess the power to convincingly articulate moral sensitivities and solidaristic intuitions. What puts pressure on secularism, then, is the expectation that secular citizens in civil society and the political public sphere must be able to meet their religious fellow citizens as equals.

Were secular citizens to encounter their fellow citizens with the reservation that the latter, because of their religious mindset, are not to be taken seriously as modern contemporaries, they would revert to the level of a mere *modus vivendi*—and would thus relinquish the very basis of mutual recognition which is constitutive for shared citizenship. Secular citizens are expected not to exclude *a fortiori* that they may discover, even in religious utterances, semantic contents and covert personal intuitions that can be translated and introduced into a secular discourse.

So, if all is to go well, both sides, each from its own viewpoint, must accept an interpretation of the relation between faith and knowledge that enables them to live together in a self-reflective manner.



This text originally appeared in German in *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, in April 2008.

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