

The Dictatorship of Relativism and the Right to a Non-Oppressive Public Religious Culture

Benedict Thomas Viviano, O.P., University of Fribourg

Ner Adonai nishmat adam. “The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord” (Prov 20:27 AV). Text beloved of the Cambridge Platonists.

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6 AV). Text beloved of Christian Evangelicals. Dialectical relationship with Prov 20:27. Cp. Luke 12:57; 1 Cor 6:5.

In the spring of 2005 a film was released about the Crusades bearing the significant title, *The Kingdom of Heaven*. The idea of such a film project is surprising because, in the present interfaith context, with such violence in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine, and with wise religious leaders doing everything possible to reduce the tensions between the three Western religions, the subject of the Crusades is too sensitive to be treated as it has been in the past. It is politically incorrect because it opens old wounds instead of healing them. The script had to be laundered and scrubbed until all offensive content was removed. The film was a critical failure because it was not historical enough. But what could remain once the self-censorship and self-castration of the script writer had done their work? Oddly enough, what was left was the ethics of Immanuel Kant (1788). In the words sung by Jimminey Cricket in Walt Disney’s version of Collodi’s *Pinocchio*, “Let your conscience be your guide.” That is, the autonomous self legislates for itself, isolated from God, history, community and divine revelation. By the end of

the Crusades film, Jerusalem is reduced to a purely mystical, interior concept; it is in our hearts, not in the world.

Our topic today is the dictatorship of relativism and the right to a non-oppressive public religious culture. This topic comes from several recent publications and lectures by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, who has since been elected Pope Benedict XVI. The Kantian reductionism presented in the film *Kingdom of Heaven* is echoed in these recent statements.¹ In a Eurocentric way, the cardinal accepts the Kantian way of posing the question as a starting point to describe the present crisis of culture, while criticizing its inadequacy and recognizing its inapplicability elsewhere, i.e., outside of Europe. Already here there are difficulties, since some would say that the problem is not primarily relativism; rather it is nihilism, associated with Nietzsche and Heidegger, since this, combined with social Darwinism, the pseudo-sciences of eugenics and anthropometrics founded by Sir Francis Galton, is what led to Nazi genocide, biological racism, and the despairing embrace of a twilight of the gods. That is why the new star in the theological firmament, David Bentley Hart, in his mini-Summa, *The Beauty of the Infinite* (2003)², fights so hard against nihilism. Others would argue that the cardinal needs a greater appreciation of the specifically Anglo-Saxon form of gentle, non-violent liberalism, in the form of John Stuart Mill's *Essay on Liberty* (1859)³, primarily the right to be eccentric.

In addressing the question of dictatorship of any sort, we should begin with antiquity and acknowledge the pre-Christian quest for freedom, the Greek quest for fearless freedom of thought and for freedom from domination by Asiatic Persia.⁴ We recall the struggles of the partly democratic Greek city states against Persian tyranny, with its servile style of prostration (*proskynesis*) to the king; we also recall the battles of the Greeks at Marathon, Salamis, Thermopylae, and Plataea.⁵ We can see a partial analogy

¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "On Europe's Crisis of Culture," lecture, Subiaco, Italy, 1 April 2005 (Rome: Zenit, 2005); Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004); John Allen, *The Rise of Benedict XVI* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), chap. 6, pp. 165-198.

² D.B. Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

³ J.S. Mill, *Essay on Liberty* (London: Murray, 1859).

⁴ J.B. Bury, *A History of Greece* (New York: Random House, 1924).

⁵ Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960).

in exiled Israel's longing to return to its homeland, led by Ezra and Nehemiah, amazingly, with Persian permission (see Neh 2:1-10). Then came Alexander the Great with his dream of *homonoia*, a cultural concord or harmony, which respected local religions (at first) while integrating them into a common language (Greek) and superior culture. This vision carried him to Egypt, Iran, southern Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan and to the very gates of India.⁶ Biblically Alexander is memorialized in 1 Macc 1:1-8. Three cultures were able to resist in some measure, but they had to integrate the best of Greek culture in order to do so: the Romans, the Persians, and the Jews. The Jews revolted when their religion was no longer respected by one of the successors of Alexander's generals, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The Maccabees won a brief respite of independence before they were overrun by the Romans. The translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, the Septuagint, over time, represents a crucial adaptation of the prophetic faith to a broader world.⁷

Already earlier there were interactions between Greek and biblical cultures, as wisdom literature moved alongside biblical prophecy. This only intensified with Philo in Alexandria and the whole New Testament. Nietzsche was right to see Plato received and popularized in the gospel according to John. Aristotle began to be received in the book of Wisdom, both the list of four virtues (8:7) and the analogical knowledge of God through creation (13:5). Zeno, the founder of the Stoic school, was from Cyprus, where the Greeks met Semitic, eastern, ethical wisdom, and adapted it to their own culture. Their developments were then discriminately received by Matthew, Paul and the church fathers. This ethical turn led to an understanding of philosophy as a way of life, as a school of holiness and spirituality, and not just a study of nature.⁸

This synthesis between Hellenism and biblical, especially historical, revelation also gave rise to what can be called philosophical or metaphysical theology, and this enabled the three great religions of the Western world to adjust to the crises arising from new

⁶ Arrian, *Alexander the Great* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958).

⁷ Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1975); E.J. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988); *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. W.D. Davies and Louis Finkelstein (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1989); Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002).

⁸ Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2003); Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (London: SCM, 1974).

scientific developments. I am thinking of authors like Maimonides, Averroes, and Thomas Aquinas. To be sure, in each of the three traditions, there are those who resist this effort at integration. But it is a precious blessing, and where it has been banished, the religion suffers. (I am thinking especially of the case of al-Ghazzali.⁹ If I am rightly informed, his rejection of Islamic philosophy and his flight to a predominantly mystical approach brought the glories of Islamic civilization to an end, despite his good intentions. He prepared the way, so to speak, for the Ottomans' later rejection of the printing press.¹⁰)

Cardinal Ratzinger reminds us that early Christianity, as the religion of the Logos, that is, the divine reason and word in things, aligned itself with the best of ancient pagan philosophy against pagan religions. This is true up to a point, but this solution is a little quick and easy.¹¹ First, it suggests that early Christianity was identical with the Johannine voice, but this is not the case; Matthew and apocalyptic also have a place. Second, it leaves out much of the Old Testament, the exception being wisdom literature. Third, it omits how both John and Clement of Alexandria tried to integrate the legitimate religious aspirations of classical *pagan religiosity* (not just pagan philosophy), giving their due to both Apollo and Dionysus, to both the mysteries and the Hermetica, and presenting Christianity as the true Gnosis.¹²

Like any responsible theologian today, Cardinal Ratzinger was trying to face the challenge presented by Enlightenment rationalism in its most aggressively relativistic, postmodern form. This is, or should be, a task for thinkers of all three Western religions. It is a big and complex hydra and comes in many forms.¹³ We can distinguish political, scientific, and historical aspects of Enlightenment rationalism.

⁹ *The Legacy of Islam*, ed. Joseph Schacht with C.E. Bosworth (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), esp. chap. 8, "Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism," by Georges C. Anawati, O.P., pp. 350-391.

¹⁰ J.P.D. Balfour, Lord Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries* (New York: Marrow Quill, 1977), pp. 381-2, 420.

¹¹ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, and "On Europe's Crisis of Culture," part 4.

¹² C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1953); Clement of Alexandria, *The Exhortation to the Greeks (Protrepticus)*, PG 8; GCS; LCL ed. and transl. by G.W. Butterworth (London: Heinemann, 1919), chap. 12, pp. 256-263.

¹³ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1951), German orig. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1932); Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, 1966; 1969); Daniel Roche, *France in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999); Roy Porter, *The Creation*

A. Political. Here I base myself on Hannah Arendt's *On Revolution*, Henry May's *The Enlightenment in America*, and David McCullough's *John Adams*.¹⁴ It is obvious that the political form of the Enlightenment expressed itself in three great revolutions, the American, the French, and the Russian. For Arendt, of these three, only the first was successful and it was so because the leaders respected the results of the decisions taken in the local popular assemblies, where everyone who wanted had a chance to express himself. The other two failed because a single party quickly seized all power and imposed a dictatorship of that party, the Jacobins in France, the Bolsheviks in Russia. The damage done then is still in the process of being undone. In the American revolution, the role of the Congregationalist form of religious governance which prevailed in New England is not to be underestimated. Here the Enlightenment was not hostile to religious belief, but rather the fuller expression of some of its purest ideals. When one criticizes the Enlightenment, one must not forget this positive side of it.¹⁵

B. The scientific form of Enlightenment rationalism. If one looks up the word rationalism in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* with which I grew up, it will soon be clear that what is meant is the mathematically based physics of Newton, Descartes, Spinoza (a geometrical model of understanding), Leibniz, Wolff.¹⁶ This quantity-based approach to reality ("Whenever possible, count." Galton) is absolutely essential, indispensable and thus legitimate in the areas of engineering and computer science. We want our planes to land safely, our bridges to hold, our Emails to be sent. But to understand human beings, as individuals and as social groups, we need something more than mathematics. We need history.

C. The historical form of Enlightenment reason. Historical understanding, learning how human institutions arose through a study of their origins and development, is as

¹⁴ of the Modern World (New York: Norton, 2000); Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich, eds., *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1981); Henry May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976); H.C. Haydn, *The Counter-Renaissance* New York: Scribners, 1950); Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder* (Princeton NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000).

¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1963; rev. 1965); H. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (see previous note); David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

¹⁶ Nicolas Sarkozy, *La République, les religions, l'espérance*, entretiens avec Thibaud Collin et Philippe Verdin (Paris: Cerf, 2004).

¹⁷ Martha Kneale, s.v., "Rationalism," *Encyclopedia Britannica* vol. 18 (Chicago: Encyc. Brit. Ltd, 1963), pp. 991-993, and earlier editions.

legitimate a way of understanding parts of reality as the mathematical. Lessing rejected it as illegitimate; for him the “dirty ditch” between historical particularity and the truths of scientific reason was unbridgeable, because he took as his starting point that all scientifically valid truths must participate in the three qualities of being eternally, necessarily and universally valid, like propositions of mathematics.¹⁷ This dogmatism blocks all understanding not only of biological evolution of species but of human beings today. That is why there arose, in the providence of God, a so called Counter-Enlightenment, but which it might be better to call the historical form of Enlightenment reason. Its heroes are Hegel and Schlegel, its forerunners are Vico and Herder and Hamann.¹⁸ Inspired in part by biblical salvation history, but also by Tacitus and Augustine’s *City of God*, these thinkers tried to understand the laws and the meaning of the human historical process. Their successors have been Spengler, Toynbee, Fukuyama and Huntington,¹⁹ among many others. We can learn much from these authors too, but we must also discriminate. For example, Hegel says that *das Wahre ist das Ganze*, the true is the whole, that is, the only thing which enjoys full existence is the totality of social relationships. And that includes the end of the story, the end of history. Yet no one knows that end except God. For humans to talk or act as though they know that end is Promethean pretension. God’s total grasp of the whole can be twisted in human hands into totalitarian systems of police control. Until God reveals the final page, human societies must be open societies (Karl Popper)²⁰, prepared to be surprised. Another example: the Pentagon saw that Fukuyama’s triumph would lead to drastic cuts in its budget, so Huntington had to be encouraged to publish *The Clash of Civilizations* to save the budget. This in turn has given us the present unstable situation in Iraq.

¹⁷ G.E. Lessing, *Theological Writings*, ed. and transl. by Henry Chadwick (Stanford: Univ. Press, 1956), esp. p. 55; Toshimasa Yasukata, *Lessing’s Philosophy of Religion and the German Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002); G.A. Kaplan, *Answering the Enlightenment* (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America, 2006).

¹⁸ Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment* (see note 13 above).

¹⁹ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (New York: Oxford, 1991; orig. ed. Munich: Beck, 1918); Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, abridgement of vols. I-VI by D.C. Somervell (New York: Oxford, 1946); abridgement of vols VII-X (New York: Oxford, 1957); Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992); S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

²⁰ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Univ. Press, 1971; orig. 1945); Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (New York: Routledge, 1957).

So we see that there are three types of Enlightenment rationalism, the political, the mathematical-scientific, and the historical. It is important to maintain an awareness of this diversity, precisely because there is a tendency to reduce the Enlightenment to its mathematical-scientific expression alone. To be sure, scientific Enlightenment has been the most successful, has arrived at the most indisputable results. Yet it does not suffice to understand human historical and political life. We need to continue to wrestle to understand our life together, even if the pessimistic conclusions of some of its representative figures gives it a bad reputation. I am thinking of Edward Gibbons, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1788), and Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1918). People do not like to hear about decline. But this is not the only historical option.

In the last part of the eighteenth century Immanuel Kant tried to master the Enlightenment crisis in his three Critiques. In the Preface to the Second Edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant writes the famous sentence: "I have found it necessary to deny *knowledge*, in order to make room for *faith*.²¹" In some respects, this is one of the unwise statements ever made. Even if one grants that human reason is capable of great and good things (and who does not?), reason is still limited and even in some areas weak and inadequate. We need all the reason and knowledge we can get. This good reason does not eliminate the need for divine help, for divine revelation, and thus the need for human faith in this revelation. This implies no disrespect for reason, only an awareness of its limits, because reason alone does not solve all problems; it often arrives at ambivalent or inconclusive results. So there remain real problems for reason, such as the unceasing need to distinguish between real science and pseudo-science, the need to distinguish between sober and exaggerated claims (e.g., for medical cures). Note the recent Nobel Prize for medicine, which rewarded two Australians for giving a bacteriological explanation and cure for stomach ulcers, after sixty years of mythological misdiagnosis, from which my own grandfather suffered. Reason must continually struggle to distinguish between healthy theories and sick, destructive, hate-filled theories or systems of thought, e.g., certain theories about race, or the glorification

²¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. N.K. Smith (New York: St Martin's, 1965), Preface to Second Edition, Bxxx, p. 29.

of war and violence. Real problems exist for reason also in the realm of religious faith, e.g., conflicting claims about revelation, the Bible or the Koran.

Kant's statement is as wrongheaded as saying that if some plan of life will probably make you happy, e.g., becoming a Dominican, it cannot be God's will for you; you must choose something that will likely make you unhappy, e.g., becoming a Carthusian monk. This way of thinking is wrongheaded because, although we must indeed be prepared to carry our cross in life, even, if need be, daily (Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23), we do not need to go looking for it or to create it artificially ourselves. Our cross will come to us unbidden, and it will find us. Our task is rather to bear it well when it does come.

In Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1782), the most famous part is where he treats the three antinomies of reason (Smith transl., pp. 369-421). Here he provides an agnostic conclusion to the question whether human reason can attain to certain rational knowledge about the three great issues: the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and moral freedom of the will. To be sure, these questions are not all on the same level of clarity. In the view of classic, ancient philosophy, one was certain of the existence of God (though not about God's nature) and of a certain degree of moral responsibility and thus freedom, whereas the immortality of the soul was less certain. In these matters Kant tried to position himself as a sober moderate. In reality however, both in his own day and in recent research, Kant was, in metaphysics, probably a pure skeptic, and thus not without reason was known as the German Hume, the *Allzermalmer*.²² What Kant took away on the level of pure reason, understood as mathematical reason, he gave back as necessary postulates of practical reason. So there was to be no more metaphysics, but an ethics of the categorical imperative, purely formal and individual. This solution was weak on the objective, social, political, ecclesial, specific side of things; it was especially weak on nature, including human nature's need for truth on the most important issues concerning the meaning and framework of human life. Its ethics for example left itself open to the charge of empty formalism, a charge laid by Max Scheler who so influenced Pope John Paul II. For an Aristotelian Thomist with a Hegelian supplement, as is the present writer, the Kantian

²² Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 2001).

solution is a form of suspended animation, a constipation of the mind, a perpetual kissing of your sister, and it is in the long run unsustainable. People need a minimum of metaphysics concerning the truth about God and their real but limited moral responsibility. Because Thomas Aquinas was sound on these points, he was embraced by a school of medieval Jewish Thomists who regarded Thomas as the Maimonides of their dreams.

To be sure, there is another side to the Kantian antinomies. A benign interpretation of their role would argue that Kant put them in his *Critique* to protect the human freedom of faith, freedom to be contrary, to say no, to be different. He put them there above all to prevent wars of religion and religious persecutions. On this view, the antinomies are legitimately motivated by bitter experiences like the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), the Huguenots coming to Kant's Prussia, and the expulsion of the Protestants from Salzburg when Kant was a boy, in 1731. On this view, the antinomies are not to be taken as real descriptions of the state of reason or of the non-knowability of the existence of God. They are rather to be understood as tactics for tolerance, as pleas for religious peace and for non-coercion in religion. In this sense their deeper intention can be gratefully received.

Kant's philosophy is an almost pure expression of the time and thought of Frederick II of Prussia: skeptical, cold, rationalist in a mechanical sense, unhappily celibate, anti-Pietist. It can serve as an Immodium of the mind, as an anti-diarrhetic, as a lesson in humility and finitude, an essay in restraint for those given to too wild speculation, to free association taken as real science. But it is not an adequate description of the real capacities of the human mind. Paul Tillich once said that Kant built a prison for the human mind.²³ Those who took him seriously but wanted to break out of the prison appealed to his third Critique, of Judgment, as opening windows in the prison. Tillich said that this was not true, but that Kant only painted pictures of windows on the walls of the airless prison. The dictatorship of relativism begins in this metaphysical prison.

So then, one should be a "rationalist" in matters of mathematics, physics, and especially engineering, but not in other matters, especially not in human affairs, or in matters of

²³ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1951), p. 82, n. 7; Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), pp. 362, 365.

historical interpretation. Biology, music and ethics are curious mixtures of mathematics and other elements, whether evolution, or feeling, or historicity. Rationalism, in the classical sense of a mathematical-physical approach to the world, has a narrower range than human *reason*, which can also be applied to other areas of life, but not mathematically applied. A hundred years ago one could still appeal to “incontrovertible historical facts” and distinguish these facts from historical interpretation. For example, one thought it was a *fact* that Napoleon was defeated at the battle of Waterloo. But advanced thinkers no longer feel that there is any context-independent history. At Harvard, H.V. White has defended the radical view that history is a narrative construct, a verbal artifact, and thus hardly distinct from fiction. Without a dose of common sense, we really are in the coils of relativism.²⁴

At this point it may be helpful to distinguish different concepts of reason. We can begin with Paul Tillich’s fourfold analysis of reason into universal, critical, intuitive and technical.²⁵ 1. Universal reason is the *logos* of early Greek philosophy and the prologue of St John’s gospel. The Greeks asked the question: how is the human mind able to grasp nature? Their answer was that the *logos*, the universal form and principle of everything created, is both in nature as a whole and in the human mind. The word is meaningful when we use it because it can grasp nature or reality. The opposite is also true. Nature/reality grasps the human mind, so that we can speak to and about nature. This logos concept of reason appears in Christian theology as a first principle. It is a principle of order and structure in all realities. As John says, “All things were made through him (i.e., the Logos), and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3 RSV). The Logos is the principle through which God created the world. This is a fundamental insight of classical theology. Reality and mind both have a logos structure. As a structure of reality and mind, logos includes our power of knowledge, our ethical awareness or conscience, and our aesthetic intuition. These are all expressions of the logos in us. Reason or logos is thus in the tree, as well as in the person who names the tree and perceives the essence of treeness which reappears in

²⁴ Martha Kneale, s.v. “Rationalism,” *Encyc. Brit.* 18, 991-993; H.V. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ., 1973); discussion of White in Roland Deines, *Die Gerechtigkeit der Tora im Reich des Messias* (WUNT 177; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), pp. 70-72.

²⁵ Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*, pp. 325-330; Martin Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking* (New York: Harper, 1984), pp. 59-78. I am summarizing Tillich here.

every individual tree. This is possible because there is a structure in the tree which we are able to grasp with our minds, and since this is mutual, our minds are grasped by the structure.

The universe has been created by an intelligent power, the divine ground, and since the world has been intelligently built, intelligence can grasp it. The world has a structure. This is equally valid in philosophy as well as in theology. There is no conflict here in regard to the theological or philosophical use of this concept of reason. There is a necessary logos element in all theology. This logos structure helps the church to hold together the doctrines of creation and redemption, and to avoid the Gnostic heresy of Marcion who opposed the Gods of the two Testaments, and doubted the fundamental goodness of creation, despite the ravages of sin. This remains a permanent temptation, under different guises.

2. Critical reason. In its name the French revolution suppressed the free expression of religious life and beheaded the king and queen and even the best scientist of France, Antoine Lavoisier. Here was a revolutionary reason that was getting out of hand, very passionate to the point of unreason in its fight against the social control of the hereditary nobility and their brothers, the bench of bishops. Yet the leaders of the revolution and its chief beneficiaries were the upper middle class, the men of wealth and business. They applied to their affairs the calculating reason of the bookkeeper, the bottom line, pioneered by Pierre de la Ramée (1515-1572), Ramus.

3. Intuitive reason. We can relate this first to the Platonic perception of the essences in things, as well as the higher essences or values, the Good, the True, the One, Being, and for some, the Beautiful. In the twentieth century this approach is associated with Husserl's phenomenology. One begins with as precise a description as possible of the object of study, whether Agassiz's fish or a passage from the gospels (J. Murphy-O'Connor).²⁶ Eventually one sees the universal in the particular, and sees the novelist's truth, expressed by Hegel thus: Neither the universal is worth anything nor the

²⁶ Gilbert Highet, *The Art of Teaching* (New York: Knopf, 1950).

particular, but only the concrete universal.²⁷ The study of examples leads to broader concepts and to common meanings.

4. Technical reason. The predominant meaning of reason today is technical. It analyzes reality into its smallest elements, and then construes out of them other, larger things. In this process of construction it uses precise mathematical measurements and calculations based on them. The result is the manufacture of tools. The success of technology, especially in the last decade or two, of information technology, is so great that it runs the risk of overwhelming all other forms of reason, not to mention the elimination of emotion and of religious authority. We all want good science and we rejoice in its progress, especially in medicine, communications and the ease of travel, while we worry about the longterm ecological effects of nuclear power and arms. We are fascinated by the bacteriological solutions to stomach ulcers and the chemical solutions to psychological problems like depression, while we worry about the reduction of everything to chemistry (Peter Kramer on depression;²⁸ the 2005 Nobel Prize in Medicine). In our quandaries, we can be inspired by the religious piety and reverence of such great men of science as Newton, Priestly, Faraday, Pasteur and Einstein. They were often motivated by the desire to understand the plan of God.

Tillich's list of four senses of reason is loosely structured in a chronological order. If we ignore that dimension we can reduce his list to two: 1. Universal-intuitive or Logos-historical reason, and 2. Critical-technical or mathematical-physical reason. So long as we accept that both senses really belong to human reason, there is no necessary conflict between religious faith and reason, no necessary dictatorship of relativism. An example to the contrary is the movement from reason to thinking to a form of prayer or meditation, present in all religions. John Macquarrie has well written that prayer as thinking should be characterized by four qualities: it should be *passionate* thinking, which integrates emotions with reason and searches for values and ideals beyond the bare facts. It should be *compassionate* thinking, which makes us sensitive to the needs and sufferings of others. It should be *responsible* thinking in which we are willing to

²⁷ G.F.W. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991); see also Eric Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, vol. 4 of *Order and History* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1974).

²⁸ P.D. Kramer, *Against Depression* (New York: Viking, 2005).

answer to God for our actions. Finally prayer should be thankful thinking, “the lifting up of our hearts in thanksgiving for whatever is good in the creation and for whatever promises of something still better are held out to us.”²⁹

The Kantian fear of religiously motivated violence and wars of religion has led many modern societies to remove religious expression as far as possible from public life and visibility. This leads to what Richard J. Neuhaus has called *The Naked Public Square*.³⁰ The prohibition of the kipa or Sikh turban or Muslim veil (hijab) or monastic habit or showy cross is a trivial matter in comparison with the hesitation to acknowledge religious foundations and values in constitutions and legislation. This is the deeper source of anguish of Neuhaus and the Pope.

Concluding this first part, I would like to make just two points. The first is that we should try to see an analogy between religious conflicts and ethnic or nationalist conflicts. Many modern wars are due to overheated, hatefilled appeals to national distinctiveness. Yet ethnic teasing has been a part of human nature since the dawn of time. I regard it as something as natural as children whining against their parents. No law could or should try to forbid it so long as it takes a gentle or humorous form, e.g., what the Greeks and Romans said against one another in antiquity, or the Swedes and the Finns today, or the French and the Belgians. But the teasing must not turn violent. So too it is normal for each religion to think itself best or truest, and this is fine, so long as these claims to superiority do not turn violent.

My second point is that we can learn a lot from the difference between an abstract universal rationalism which seeks to impose itself by revolutionary force, and the biblical way of arriving at a universal perspective, message and impact that begins with an individual (Adam), a clan chief (Abraham), a people (Moses), a nation (David and Solomon), a little kingdom of Israel, and then with the prophets Deutero-Isaiah and Daniel in vision, and Jesus and Paul in mission, moves towards the kingdom of *God*, which embraces all peoples, nations and languages, on planet earth and in heaven. The biblical pattern respects organic development through the education of the human race (Lessing) by means of salvation history.

²⁹ John Macquarrie, *Paths in Spirituality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 25-39 (chap. 3, Prayer as Thinking)

³⁰ R.J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984).

II

Now a few words on the toughest nut of the three great Western religions to crack and to digest, Islam. The first major Western thinker to face the challenge of Islam was St. John Damascene. He thought of the Muslims as Ishmaelites, descendants of Ishmael, and their religion was for him a Christian heresy. Voltaire, in his play *Mahomet*, had another view: Islam was the primordial religion, a return to prehistoric simplicity. It was what all religions had in common, only more so. Thus Islam can strike some as arid and rationalist.³¹ A third view, to which I subscribe, is held by Adolf von Harnack, Adolf Schlatter, Hans Joachim Schoeps, Claus Schedl, and Hans Küng.³² Schoeps thinks that Mohammed received a form of Christianity that was heavily influenced by Jewish Christianity. This is so on the points of the True Prophet, of strict monotheism (though Jesus is the Messiah born of the virgin Mary), of certain practices: ritual washings, circumcision, prayer in a certain direction, food laws. Schoeps says: "Though it may not be possible to establish exact proof of the connection, the indirect dependence of Mohammed on sectarian Jewish Christianity is beyond any doubt. This leaves us with a paradox of truly world-historical dimensions: the fact that while Jewish Christianity in the Church came to grief, it was preserved in Islam and, with regard to some of its driving impulses at least, it has lasted till our own time."³³ To this I would add that, if this be true, the Muslims are our long lost brothers, who represent the other side of the New Testament, Matthew and James. The struggle described in Galatians between the pro-circumcision and non-circumcision parties remains a living issue. Further, if we could come to terms with them, it would be indeed the squaring of the circle, the times of universal restoration, the *apokatastasis pantom*, mentioned in Acts 3:21.

We are far from that point. Islam's initial thrust into Western Europe was halted by Charles Martel at the battle of Tours/Poitiers in 732. Then it was the turn of the Franks

³¹ Hans Küng, Josef van Ess, Heinrich von Stietencron, Heinz Bechert, *Christianity and the World Religions* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986); orig. Munich: Piper, 1985), pp. 3-132 (A. Islam and Christianity, Van Ess and Küng); *Islam* (Munich: Piper, 2004).

³² A. von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (Freiburg i.Br./Leipzig: Mohr Siebeck, 1909), p. 537, 4th ed.; Adolf Schlatter, *Die Geschichte der ersten Christenheit* (BFCT.M 11; Gütersloh/Stuttgart: Calwer, 1926), p. 367; Hans Joachim Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), pp. 136-140; Claus Schedl, *Muhammad und Jesus* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1978), pp. 565f; Hans Küng et al., *Christianity and the World Religions*, pp. 123-4.

³³ H.J. Schoeps, cited in Küng et al., *Christianity and the World Religions*, p. 124.

to disturb the Muslims in that long episode known as the Crusades, 1096-1290. The Muslims were gradually pushed out of Europe in a series of struggles, marked by the expulsion from Spain completed in 1492, the naval battle of Lepanto 1571, the lifting of the sieges of Vienna in 1531 and 1683, and the great push down the Balkans begun by Prince Eugene of Savoy in 1697, the battle of Zenta. This long history has left lingering reserves in the populations of Europe, particularly in Croatia and Austria, about the eventual admission of Turkey into the European Union, and about the possibilities of a deeper reconciliation. In my own limited experience it is difficult to engage in dialogue with traditional Muslims because there is so little sense of the historicity of truth in the Koran or in the subsequent theological development. The Koran is dominated by non-narrative literary genres, sapiential poetry, law, prophecy of a sort, and praise, but not history. There are timid starting points of historical criticism of the Koran³⁴, but these remain marginal to the main leaders and to the people. In addition, there are the four difficult traditions of Islam. 1. Dhimmitude. In a Muslim land non-Muslims are tolerated as second class citizens; *dhimmi* means “tolerated guest”. They must pay a special headtax and wear identifying insignia. 2. The idea of the West as the *dar el-harb*, the land of war, the Westerner as the *harbi*, the enemy alien. 3. The theme of *jihad*, which is traditionally interpreted as holy war, but is now being interpreted in the Sufi spirit as spiritual training and ascetical exercises. Scoffers say, this only shows you can do anything with exegesis. But exegesis plays a valuable role in each of our traditions.³⁵ 4. *Waqf*. This is a feature of Islamic law which regulates endowments, pious bequests and charitable foundations. Thus a devout Muslim could leave a piece of property to the mosque at his death. Once bequeathed, these properties are inalienably dedicated. These *evkaf* (Turkish) or *wakavia* (Greek) involved substantial revenues. They financed some of the masterpieces of Muslim architecture. But the property was often badly managed by the *ulema* (religious authorities). *Waqf* estates covered about a fifth of the arable land of the Ottoman empire. The temporal sovereigns coveted this land. Sultan Mahmud II, the Reformer, brought the *waqf* land under state control in the 1820s. But when the Shah of Iran, Reza Pahlavi, tried to do the same in his country in the 1960s and ‘70s, it led to his overthrow. In Jerusalem, the esplanade in front of the

³⁴ Felix Körner, S.J., “Können Muslime den Koran historisch erforschen? Türkische Neuansätze,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 61 (2005) 226-238.

³⁵ Küng, *Christianity and the World Religions*, p. 103.

Western Wall is *waqf* property, so its use for other purposes is an offence. These four themes of Islamic law deserve further study during this coming year. In connection with the idea of *waqf* is Osama bin Ladin's objection to the stationing of American troops on sacred Saudi soil. The Koran says: "Whoever kills a human being, except as punishment for murder or other villainy in the land, shall be regarded as having killed all mankind." This verse forbids violent aggression, but the exceptive clause is easily used by militants as a loophole.³⁶

Other difficulties include the situation of women, as well as a long history of Muslim refutations of Christian "heresy", especially the doctrine of the Trinity and the gospel according to John. This history of polemics does not help. Another problem is the small number of translations of modern books into Arabic. Beyond the image of an Islamic monolith, there are debates *within* Islam. And practice can vary from place to place. There are countries in West Africa which have developed a serene modus vivendi between Muslims and Christians. In Saudi Arabia the educated young people chaff under the restrictions imposed by the religious police and are said to be ripe for revolt, even though they have Dubai as a safety valve.

The failure of Christian mission to Islam over so many centuries tells me that this is not God's will. We should, I think, strive for a situation of "separate but equal" treatment before the civil law, for an end to proselytism on both sides, and for structures of mutual respect and confidence building: if there are mosques in Rome, there should be churches in Riyad and seminaries in Turkey (Khalki). Western aggression does not help, nor does Twin Towers style terrorism. John Hick's inclusivism is unlikely to prevail. Rather, the religions must be allowed to express themselves fully, in public, but without violence. This may seem merely a naïve and pious wish, but we should at least try to be clear about the kind of solution we are looking for: not proselytism, but witness.

³⁶ Kinross, *Ottoman Centuries*, p. 460; Anawati, in *The Legacy of Islam*, pp. 350-399.

III

On Judaism I have only one or two brief points to make. The main one is that it will be helpful if Christians get used to thinking of the post-A.D. 70 synagogue as the “little sister” of the Church. This idea was developed by Origen in his commentary on the Song of Songs, esp. chap. 8:8 “we have a little sister, and she has no breasts”. This idea has been taken up in modern times by Erik Peterson and Arnold Ehrhardt.³⁷ To be sure, there was a pre-Christian Judaism that dates back to the Persian period, the return of the exiles from Persia/Babylonia to Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehemiah, permitted by the good king Cyrus. To this extent, Pope John Paul II was right when he visited the synagogue of Rome and greeted the assembled Jews as the “elder brothers” of the Church. The truth in Ehrhardt’s position is however this. After the burning of the Temple A.D. 70, Jews lost their institutional center and had to find another. The Jewish Christians found theirs around James in Caesarea maritima and Pella, the Gentile Christians eventually in Ephesus and Rome and much later in Constantinople. The heirs of the Pharisees, the rabbis, found theirs in the study of the Law, and in deeds of loving-kindness, in Jamnia/Jabneh, Tiberias, Usha, and in the Babylonian academies of Sura, Pumbeditha, Nehardea. The man who made the difference was, on this view, Akiba. He shaped rabbinic Judaism in a consciously text-bound, Hebrew-studying, anti-Septuagintal way, as a construct that was essentially contrary to Christianity, and he did this before his death as a martyr in A.D. 135, that is, well after Christianity had been launched. In this sense and in this chronology, the Akiban synagogue is the little sister of the Church. And one does not beat up on or persecute one’s little sister, even if one disagrees with her. Rather, one tries to protect her from bullies. This is the interfaith, tactical advantage in the Ehrhardt view.

Today, in the view of the Jewish scholar Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, the Roman Catholic church, since Vatican II, with its *Nostra Aetate* (1965) and subsequent documents, has said and done everything that Jewish religious leaders could reasonably ask to provide a good basis for dialogue and friendly relations. The remaining concerns are that these

³⁷ Erik Peterson, “Die Kirche aus Juden und Heiden,” in his *Theologische Traktate* (Munich: Kösel, 1951), p. 241f; Arnold Ehrhardt, “Rabbi Aqiba and the Birth of the Synagogue,” *Studia Theologica* 9 (1955) 86-111, repr. in his *The Framework of the New Testament Stories* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1964; Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964); Origen, *Homil. Cant. 2.3* (GCS 8, 45.24).

policies be made more widely known, so that they can trickle down to all relevant members of the Church and be put into practice. On the other hand, Jewish leaders are dismayed by the rise of new forms of anti-Semitism. They are particularly concerned by policies of the World Council of Churches (Geneva) and of some Protestant denominations to disinvest in Jewish companies.

IV

Turning to Christianity, we can understand it as the divinely guided expansion of the one God of Israel to all the nations, announced by Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah, with the extension of the kingdom of David in a new way to the kingdom of God for all peoples, nations and tongues (Daniel 7:13-14). This was the center of Jesus' preaching and hope, and this hopeful message was then spread beyond the borders of historic Israel through Paul and his many collaborators. The mission was universal, for the Jesus of the four gospels and for Paul, open to all.³⁸ But today I think we have learned that it is not part of God's plan that there should be a direct proselytizing of Jews or Muslims, a direct targeting of them, as in the *Judenmissionen* of the nineteenth century. The Jews and Muslims already share with us faith in the same God, and they venerate the same patriarch, Abraham. The religion of Christianity in its lawfree form, as found in the letter to the Galatians, is full of the leading of the Holy Spirit; it is light and airy, a refreshment to burdened consciences, open to the ever new and to changing circumstances. But there is a danger of a mere empty formalism in ethics. It is not true, I think, that all you need is love. At least males need more specifics, something like the Sermon on the Mount, which includes the Decalogue, the love commands and the Golden Rule. Liberal Christianity is often criticized by Evangelicals for its normlessness, its *Uferlosigkeit* (banklessness), a concern I share. We need a sense of structure, of balance and limits, an awareness that there are things/actions which are intrinsically evil. We also need to recover a sense of modesty, such as was well

³⁸ B.T. Viviano, *The Kingdom of God in History* (Wilmington De: M. Glazier, 1988; repr. Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002); Viviano, *Trinity-Kingdom-Church* (NTOA 48; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2001), pp. 137-184; Norbert Lohfink, *Das Jüdische am Christentum* (Freiburg: Herder, 1987), pp. 71-102; 103-121.

expressed by Saint Gregory Nazianzen: “We shall share in the pasch, for the present certainly in what is still a figure, though a plainer one than the ancient pasch. (This pasch of the old law was, I venture to say, a more obscure figure, a figure of a figure.) In a short time, however, our sharing will be more perfect and less obscure, when the Word will drink the pasch with us new in the kingdom of his Father, revealing and teaching what he has now shown in a limited way. For what is now being made known is ever new.”³⁹

V

Let me conclude with a few more tangled thoughts. The Bible and our traditions have long wrestled with the tensions of universalism and particularity.⁴⁰ An example is the sweeping vision of a pilgrimage of all the nations to Zion, described in Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-3, and the more chastened, resigned realism of Micah 4:5: “though all the peoples walk each in the names of its gods, we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.” Another set of tensions concerns what is the greatest sin. It is usually said that in Judaism, as in the Reformed tradition within Christianity, the greatest sin is idolatry. For most Christians it would consist in the lack of charity (Matt 25:31-46; 1 Peter 4:8; 1 Cor 13:1-13). But for Jesus the unforgivable sin is the sin against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:29), traditionally interpreted as final despair or impenitence⁴¹ (St Augustine, Sermon 72), but probably based on the Decalogue (Exodus 20:7), “you shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God; for the Lord will not pardon one who swears falsely by his name.” So a certain truthfulness in relation to God, the highest principle of life and conscience, becomes the decisive matter. Yet in 2 Kings 5:18-19, Rimmon asks pardon of the prophet Elisha for bowing in the temple of the Syrian god Rimmon, and Elisha says to him mildly and tolerantly, “Go in peace.”

³⁹ St Gregory Nazianzen, Oration 45.23; Migne, PG 36, 654-655.

⁴⁰ Raphael Loewe, “Potentialities and Limitations of Universalism in the Halakhah,” in *Studies in Rationalism, Judaism and Universalism in Memory of Leon Roth* (London: Routledge, 1969), pp. 115-150; A.J. Heschel, “No Religion Is an Island,” in his *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, ed. Susanna Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1997).

⁴¹ St. Augustine, Sermon 71 on Matt 12:32, in *Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. 6 (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1999), pp. 318-332.

So we are back with the central issue of relativism and the rights of truth and, I would add, the fear of history. On the one hand, I do not believe we can attain a truthful understanding of human reality without the study of history. On the other hand, we cannot live humanly and calmly if our religious rules and practices can be lightly changed from day to day. I find some consolation in the three-speed scheme of Edward Schillebeeckx. He tracks the speeds (as in phonograph records at the three speeds: 78 revolutions per minute, 45 revolutions, 33 1/3 revolutions). There is ephemeral history as we find it in newspapers and fashion magazines; there is conjunctural history which works over several centuries; lastly there is structural history which moves across millennia at a glacial pace.⁴² “Even after a successful political and social revolution, eighty percent of the old, rejected structures ‘recur’ in one way or another... basic structures survive even the most radical of revolutions.”

The second part of my title runs: “the right to a non-oppressive *public* religious culture.” This right is already acquired in most countries of the West, on the level of liturgical worship, religious holy days, even street processions. But this is not so clear in education. The United States of America began a process of public secularization in 1971 with the Supreme Court decision of *Lemon v. Kurtzman* which halted Bible reading and prayer in public schools. Religious parents have sought for tax vouchers, for their educational taxes to go to their own religious schools. The latest book on church-state relations in America, by Noah Feldman, is prepared to revise *Lemon v. Kurtzman* in many ways, but remains adamant against school vouchers, perhaps because of his family connections with public school teachers’ unions.⁴³ In France the injustice to religious schools remains great. Within the European Union France, because of its tradition inherited from its deeply flawed revolution, remains the great obstacle to a public historical recognition of the role of religion in the European Constitution. This bad tradition goes back, I think, to King Francis I, who supported the Lutheran reformation in Germany to keep Germany weak and divided, while fiercely persecuting Protestants in France to keep France strong and united. He sowed the wind and France

⁴² Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus* (New York: Seabury, 1979), pp. 576-582.

⁴³ Noah Feldman, *Divided by God* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2005); R.F. Drinan, S.J., *Can God and Caesar Coexist?* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2005); *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, *Supreme Court Reporter* (91 S. Ct. 2105 (1971), 2108-2125; *Aguilar v. Felton*, *Supreme Court Reporter* (105 S. Ct. 3232-3248 (1985)).

(and Europe with it) has reaped the whirlwind. Cf. Gal 6:7. In other parts of Europe there is a move to transform university faculties of theology into faculties of religious studies or of the history of religions.

I would like to end on a note of hope based on the only opera Beethoven ever wrote. He has become a kind of patron saint of Europe, providing, with Schiller, its Union hymn, The Ode to Joy, originally the Ode to Freedom. A great friend of Jerusalem, the late Sir Peter Ustinov, wrote a play about him, *Beethoven's Tenth*, which presents him as a deeply religious, God-fearing, Christian man, whose spiritual guides were Johann Michael Sailer and Saint Clement Maria Hofbauer. In his opera *Fidelio*, just after finding her husband in chains in a dark dungeon and crying out against the tyrant *Abscheulicher! Monster!*, she sings a beautiful aria, asking hope to come ("Komm, Hoffnung, komm") and then gives a ringing affirmation of the power of love to overcome injustice and cruelty.⁴⁴

Our hope as believers is that both the love of God for us, our love for God, and our love for one another and for all human beings, when supported by a metaphysical minimum of truth about God and our moral responsibility and by a notion of the good, can provide a sound basis for peace and justice.

9-19 October 2005

⁴⁴ Komm, Hoffnung, lass den letzten Stern der Müden nicht erbleichen! Erhelle mein Ziel, sei's noch so fern, die Liebe wird's erreichen. Come, Hope, let the last star not forsake the weary! Brighten my goal; be it ever so far, Love will reach it. Words by Joseph Sonnleithner and Friedrich Treitschke, after Jean-Nicolas Bouilly.