

Debates within a Single Church: Secularism and IR Theory

»How does religion relate to International Relations Theory?« is a question circulating in International Relations. This essay considers the possibility that there is no universal definition of religion. This means that, in an important sense, the preceding question makes no sense. If the categories of religion and politics are the products of complex cultural, historical, religious and political negotiations, then what we need to ask is how do these categories become authoritative in particular times and places, and with what political consequences? To define the secular and the religious is a project with political implications. Religion participates with political authority in ever-changing formations that fail to align neatly with secular modernist assumptions. This essay takes a closer look at these assumptions.

»How does religion relate to International Relations Theory?« is a question circulating in International Relations (IR). Let us consider for a moment the possibility that there is no universal definition of religion. This means that, in an important sense, this question makes no sense. If the categories of religion and politics are the products of complex cultural, historical, religious and political negotiations, then what we need to ask is *how* do these categories become authoritative in particular times and places, and with what consequences? To define the secular and the religious is a project with political implications. As it turns out, religion participates with political authority in ever-changing formations that fail to align neatly with secular modernist assumptions. This essay takes a closer look at these assumptions. The most powerful among them, evidenced by how the question of religion and IR is framed, is that the Euro-American definition of religion and its separation from politics is a natural and neutral starting point for social scientific inquiry. When Christine Sylvester wrote more than a decade ago that IR »smacks of debates within the hierarchy of one church,« she was right in more ways than one (Sylvester 1994: 9). It is, so to speak, a secular church.

I argue for a different starting point. Secularism refers to a matrix of discourses and practices that involves defining, managing, and often remaking religion in public space. There are many forms of secularism. This essay discusses the international political consequences of two of them.¹ The first is laicism, from the French *laïcité*, in which religion is portrayed as an impediment to modernization. Laicism attempts to distil a particular understanding of religion and ban it from politics. The secular spheres are emancipated, as José Casanova argues, »at the expense of a much-diminished and confined religious sphere« (Casanova 2006: 23). The second is »Judeo-Christian« secularism (JCS), in which religion is portrayed as a source of unity and identity within societies and civilizations, and conflict between them. Variations upon

1 Parts of this essay draw on Hurd (2008) and are reprinted with the permission of Princeton University Press.

these two ideal-types of secularism have been influential within and between countries that inherited, borrowed, or had imposed upon them the secular and religious traditions of historical Latin Christendom, including Europe and its settler colonies (United States, Canada, Australia), Turkey, Iran, and India. These two »invented traditions« of secularism are neither mutually exclusive nor are they the only ones in existence.² There is no strong or necessary line between them; an individual may orient him or herself using resources from both traditions simultaneously. Like nationalism, secularisms are disciplined into individuals and collectivities, embedded in historical contexts and expressed through social, legal and political practice. Practitioners, theorists, and ordinary people organize their responses to religion and politics, including international politics, through these discourses. In the language of IR, they are productive modalities of power that work »through diffuse constitutive relations« to contribute to the »situated social capacities of actors« (Barnett/Duvall 2005: 48) and vehicles through which shared interests and identities involving religion and politics developed at the domestic, regional and transnational levels become influential at the global level. Secularisms are not reducible to material power but play a constitutive role in creating agents that respond to the world in particular ways and in contributing to the normative structures in which these agents interact. Reflecting shared interests, identities, and understandings about religion and politics, they constitute part of the cultural foundations of IR.

Charting different forms of secularism challenges the clash of civilizations narrative in which religion serves as a source of communal unity and identity within civilizations and a source of conflict between them. Tracing the history and politics of secularism reveals that identifying something called »religion« and assigning it a fixed role in politics is itself a political move. Elements of religion escape attempts to define and confine it to particular roles, spaces or moments in politics. It is impossible to stabilize the category and lock in its relationship to politics.

Second, secularisms contribute to inclusionary and exclusionary group boundaries locally, nationally, and globally. These boundaries assume political significance as certain religious actors are brought in as fit for political participation while others are demonized and excluded. As such secularisms may be understood as cultural-national projects of normalizing various religions and particular religious actors as either fit or unfit to participate in politics. This approach moves away from the »good religion« versus »bad religion« framework that emerged from within the old story of the »universal secular,« which ended up privileging particular Protestant or European forms of Christianity while denigrating other religious forms.³

Third, the historical particularities of various forms of secularism suggest that realist, liberal and constructivist theories of IR that consign religion to a fixed »private« sphere need to be reassessed. According to most accounts religion was privatized in 1648 at the Peace of Westphalia as a solution to sectarian violence. Yet Westphalia was an attempt to manage and moderate sectarianism in European history, and modern

2 On other forms of secularism see Cady/Hurd (2010).

3 Thanks to Courtney Bender for her input on this point.

forms of secular authority emerged out of a Christian-dominated Westphalian order. This makes it difficult to subsume the current international order into realist and liberal frameworks that assume that religion was privatized. Modern forms of secularism participate in a practice of sovereignty that claims to be universal in part by defining the limits of state-centered politics with religion on the outside. Yet to define religion as a private counterpart to politics is an ongoing political project. Different varieties of secularism, operating just below the threshold of public discourse, perpetuate this claim differently. This essay describes two such trajectories of secularism. There are many others.

1. *The International Politics of Laicism*

In *The Secular City*, Harvey Cox suggested that, »it will do no good to cling to our religions and metaphysical versions of Christianity in the hope that one day religion or metaphysics will once again be back. They are disappearing forever [...]« (Cox 1965: 4). In *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri observe that »every metaphysical tradition is now completely worn out« (Hardt/Negri 2000: 150). John L. Esposito notes that »the degree of one's intellectual sophistication and objectivity in academia was often equated with a secular liberalism and relativism that seemed antithetical to religion [...]. Neither development theory nor international relations considered religion a significant variable for political analysis« (Esposito 1992: 200). Laicism is a tradition of the secular city, world »empire,« and Western academy that presumes that metaphysical traditions have been transcended. It is one of the founding principles of modern politics and one of the pillars of the separation of church and state, influential in France, the former Soviet Union, Turkey, and China. Derived from the Jacobin tradition of *laïcisme*, it is associated with what Partha Chatterjee describes as

»a coercive process in which the legal powers of the state, the disciplinary powers of family and school, and the persuasive powers of government and media have been used to produce the secular citizen who agrees to keep religion in the private domain« (Chatterjee 2006: 60).

Most of the literature on religion, the Protestant reformation, and the Westphalian settlement charts the decline of religion in European public life. Quentin Skinner observes that after Luther »the idea of the Pope and Emperor as parallel and universal powers disappears, and the independent jurisdictions of the *sacerdotium* are handed over to the secular authorities« (Skinner 1978: 353, original emphasis). Alessandro Pizzorno refers to this transition as the »Gregorian moment,« describing it as the most emblematic episode of what he calls »absolute politics« in Western history, which

»lies at the root of the transfer, as it were, of the collective responsibility for ultimate ends from a collectivity having the boundaries of Christianity, and including all believers tied by this particular bond of faith, to separate collectivities defined by the territorial boundaries of one state and including all the individuals identified by their living within those boundaries« (Pizzorno 1987: 34).

Daniel Philpott emphasizes the significance of the Protestant Reformation and processes of secularization that emerged out of it to challenge the temporal powers and decrease the public role of the church, while contributing to the emergence of a proto-sovereign states system (Philpott 2001). Stephen D. Krasner suggests that, »the idea of sovereignty was used to legitimate the right of the sovereign to collect taxes, and thereby strengthen the position of the state, and to deny such right to the church, and thereby weaken the position of the papacy« (Krasner 2001: 238). For Krasner, Westphalia »delegitimized the already waning transnational role of the Catholic Church and validated the idea that international relations should be driven by balance-of-power considerations rather than the ideals of Christendom« (Krasner 2001: 21).

Westphalian republicanism was indeed organized on a modern conception of social and political order in which individual subjects assembled a society under a single sovereign authority. By challenging the arbitrary rights of kings in the name of the common good (Calhoun 1997: 70), the new republicanism transformed pre-existing hierarchic forms of order as conventional accounts have it. Yet the new republicanism also reinforced a particular distinction between natural and supernatural order that came out of, and remained indebted to, a broader Christian framework. To say this is not to ignore the deep divisions between Christians (and others) in Europe at the time, however. As Daniel Nexon argues, »when we view Europeanization as a long historical process, we inevitably confront the creation of Europe as a community through, the extrusion of religious difference and, second, the management of religious schism within a broader Latin Christian community« (Nexon 2006: 260). Yet early republican order was characterized by a strong idea of providence and a pervasive sense that men were enacting a master plan that was providentially preordained. The idea of moral order underlying this arrangement would in fact, according to Charles Taylor, be unrecognizable to non-Westerners due to its emphasis on a providential plan to be realized by humans (Taylor 2003; 2007). That early republicanism was situated within this broader Christian context fits with Krasner's argument that in the Treaty of Osnabrück (one of two treaties that made up the Peace of Westphalia alongside the Treaty of Münster) religious toleration was limited to Lutherans, Calvinists, and Catholics (Krasner 1999: 81, citing Treaty of Osnabrück 1648, 240, 241, Article VII). Westphalia led not to privatization but to the territorialization of religion – the »formation of polities in which territory, state, and confession were closely linked« (Nexon 2006: 277).

Laicism emerged gradually and fitfully, and not without rivals, out of this Christian-influenced Westphalian moral and political order. Though presenting itself as a universalizable discourse and a solution to the wars of religion, William Connolly's description of it as »a specific fashioning of spiritual life [...] carved out of Christendom« (Connolly 1999: 23) comes closer to the mark. Joshua Mitchell has argued that even »the idea of the sovereign self, the autonomous consenting self, emerged out of Christianity [...] paying attention to the religious roots of consent in the West alert us to the fact, that it is in fact a provincial development, not necessarily universalizable« (Mitchell 2003). The influence of Christianity upon the original Westphalian settlement makes it difficult to subsume modern international order into realist and liberal

frameworks that operate on the assumption that religion has been privatized. Particular – not universal – forms of secularism contributed to the constitution of modern forms of state sovereignty that claim their universality by defining the limits of state-centered politics with »religion« on the outside.

Most realist and liberal approaches to IR operate on the laicist assumption that religion has been confined to the private sphere or has disappeared. This assumption supports structuralist and materialist approaches to IR in which religion is seen as epiphenomenal. Neo-realism proceeds on the assumption that states have fixed interests and that state behavior is constrained by an international structure defined by factors such as the distribution of power, technology and geography. Historical materialism dismisses religion as »a mode of consciousness which is other than consciousness of reality, external to the relations of production, producing no knowledge, but expressing at once the anguish of the oppressed and a spurious consolation« (Asad 1993: 46). Materialist approaches neglect the productive role of norms and »tend to view rules and norms as being contingent upon, and thus reducible to, material configurations of power or resources« (Bukovansky 2002: 19). Yet secularism cannot be reduced to material power but is a complex collection of practices that plays a role in creating agents and contributing to the structures in which they interact.

The problem for IR of the attempt to expel religion from politics or assume that it has been privatized within the state is that it demands »not only the sharing of the (independent political) ethic but also of its foundation – in this case, one supposedly independent of religion« (Taylor 1998: 38). Laicism defines religion by designating that which is not religious: the secular. As Talal Asad (2003: 192) has argued, »in the discourse of modernity ›the secular‹ presents itself as the ground from which theological discourse was generated [...]« This is a form of politics that, as Pizzorno argues with reference to absolute politics, »set(s) the boundaries between itself and other activities. To define what is within or without the scope of politics, one needs laws, or abolition of laws, hence political decisions, political activities, and discourse« (Pizzorno 1987: 28). Laicism sets the terms for what constitutes legitimate politics and legitimate religion. In modern religiously diverse societies, attempts to manage the terms through which a particular understanding of »religion« is defined (and confined) lead to conflict between laicists, policing the boundary of what they define as the public sphere, and their rivals, who see this policing as an extension of religion in the name of a rival (laicist) set of metaphysical assumptions (Taylor 1998: 36). As Taylor points out:

»What to one side is a more strict and consistent application of the principles of neutrality is seen by the other side as partisanship. What this other side sees as legitimate public expressions of religious belonging will often be castigated by the first as the exaltation of some peoples' beliefs over others. This problem is compounded when society diversifies to contain substantial numbers of non-Judaeo-Christian religions. If even some Christians find the ›post-Christian‹ independent ethic partisan, how much harder will Muslims find it to swallow it« (Taylor 1998: 36-37).

By holding fast to a definition of religion and excluding it from politics, laicism marks out the domain of the secular and associates it with public authority, common

sense, rational argument, justice, tolerance and the public interest (Connolly 1999: 21). It reserves the religious as that which it is not, and associates religion with a personal God and beliefs about that God. Laicism, then, is not simply the absence of religious or theological discourse. More complex than an oppositional laicism-religion binary, it enacts a particular kind of theological discourse in its own right. It »theologizes« the religions that it oversees, by which I mean that it discourses and reasons theologically, it speculates in theology (Oxford English Dictionary 2009).

Laicism is most powerful when it is invisible or unseen, representing itself as the natural order that emerges when there is no ideology present (McAlister 2001: 232). Laicism posits itself as public, neutral and value-free, while positing religion, religious actors, and institutions as private, affective and value-laden. Religion is denominated as violent, irrational, undemocratic and »other«. This explains why according to William T. Cavanaugh, »liberal theorists [...] assume that public faith has a dangerous tendency to violence,« (Cavanaugh 1995: 409) and accounts for Scott R. Appleby's reference to the »conventional wisdom that religious fervor – unrestrained religious commitment – inevitably expresses itself in violence and intolerance« (Appleby 2000: 5). Laicism is the conventional wisdom adopted by Cavanaugh's liberal theorists. The secular public sphere is the domain of reason, objectivity, deliberation and justice, and the religious private sphere as the domain of subjectivity, transcendence, effeminacy and affect.

2. *The International Politics of Judeo-Christian Secularism*

Judeo-Christian secularism is a discursive tradition developed in the mid-20th century primarily though not exclusively in the United States. It is distinguished on the one hand by the partial displacement of the dominant narrative of Protestant hegemony, and, on the other, by the representation of certain moral and political values as held in common by Christianity and Judaism and connected to Western traditions of law and governance. While laicism seeks to confine religion to the private sphere, this second tradition of secularism connects contemporary Euro-American secular formations to a strong historical legacy of Western Christian, and beginning in the mid-20th century, and then only selectively, »Judeo-Christian« cultural and religious beliefs, historical practices, legal traditions, governing institutions and forms of identification. The common denominator of all varieties of JCS is that Western political order is grounded in a set of values with their origins in either Christian or Judeo-Christian tradition that cannot (should not?) be diluted or denied.

Let me be clear. In referring to »Judeo-Christian« tradition I am not suggesting that there is consensus between or within any variation of Jewish or Christian tradition about what this term means or even whether it should be used at all. There isn't. But the term has played a leading role in an extraordinarily powerful cultural production that relies upon the conviction that there is such a thing as a »Judeo-Christian« religious and moral tradition that serves as the fount and foundation of certain modern political values such as liberty, equality, democracy and secularism. Many individu-

als, though I would not include myself in this collective, have been disciplined into this worldview and rely upon it to organize their approach to religion and politics. This JCS narrative connects a broad and diverse (even conflicting) set of religious traditions to Western models of secular governance, and has been particularly influential in the American political imagination. My intention is to come to terms academically with its global political influence.

So I am not suggesting that Christian or Judeo-Christian values *actually* form the basis of Western institutions or styles of governance, but rather that the *conviction* among adherents to this narrative that they do is in itself powerful enough to warrant critical scrutiny. I am also not suggesting that the concept of »Judeo-Christian« is either valid or invalid; this is not for me to decide.⁴ What I am arguing is that a specific variety of civic republican tradition emphasizing the connections between moral values allegedly held in common by Judaism and Christianity (Old Testament, Ten Commandments, etc.) and particular reference points for modern governance such as liberty, equality, and the separation of church and state has become powerful and therefore merits scholarly attention. This tradition is real *because* it is imagined; I am not asserting that it is imagined because it is real. To make the latter kind of claim, as U.S. President Barack Obama has said in reference to the debate over abortion rights, would be above my pay grade.

Take as an example the religious populism of Richard John Neuhaus. Neuhaus argues that Catholic moral arguments should »re-clothe the naked public square« as the basis of American identity and foreign policy. Americans for Neuhaus are a Christian people, and Catholic natural law theorizing should serve as the moral-religious foundation for American public life.⁵ Catholicism in this narrative is not the enemy of liberalism but »its true source and indispensable foundation« (Linker 2006). For Neuhaus and others who offer different riffs on this narrative, religion (understood as Catholicism, Christianity, and/or »Judeo-Christianity«) is the defining feature of Western civilization. Ted Jelen gets at this idea using Peter L. Berger's concept of a sacred canopy:

»in the United States, a »Judeo-Christian« tradition is thought to provide a moral basis for political life – what some analysts have described as a »sacred canopy« beneath which political affairs can be conducted. Religion is thought to perform a »priestly« function of legitimating political authority« (Jelen 2000: 11).⁶

Christian- and/or Judeo-Christian-derived forms of secular order, in this view, are among the core values of Western civilization and the common ground upon which Western democracy rests. Religion plays a constitutive role not outside but *within* secular politics (note the contrast with laicism), serving as »the basis of an ethical consensus without which popular government could not operate« (Jelen 2000: 34).

4 For a discussion of »secular witnesses belonging to the Judeo-Christian tradition« and the attempt to come to terms with their response to suicide bombing that is suggestive of one way in which this categorization may be helpful see Asad (2007: 91).

5 On Neuhaus's philosophy see Neuhaus (1984; 1990; 2006). For two very different critiques see Linker (2006) and Cavanaugh (1995: 410-412).

6 On the sacred canopy see Berger (1967).

In the laicist narrative, the Christian identity of the West has been superseded, radically transformed and essentially rendered irrelevant. A modern, rational West was reinvented and rejuvenated by democratic tendencies inherited from its Greek and Roman predecessors. The »Judeo-Christian« secularist story does not share this assumption that after the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment linkages between Western politics and public forms of Christianity were definitively severed. Working out of a different set of assumptions about the relationship between (Judeo)-Christianity and modern politics, it draws upon earlier European arrangements in which church and state were unified, each representing a different aspect of the same divine authority (Gedicks 1991: 116).

It is worth recalling that the perception of a larger Christian context within which both church and state were embedded sets the terms of American public discourse until quite recently, and in some places still does. Following the influx of immigrants to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, in most places it became politically expedient to operate in increasingly non-sectarian terms. While Protestant discourse took a back seat to a more generic civic religion, a *de facto* Protestant establishment continued to set the ground rules (Gedicks (1991: 122). The civic republican imagination of the Protestant majority informed the relation between religion and democratic politics in early America. Its influence was (is?) palpable in Legislative prayer, state acknowledgment of Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving and the Christian Sabbath, and the outlawing of blasphemy and punishment of atheism (Gedicks 1991: 123). As Frederick Mark Gedicks explains, Protestants

»opposed a particular Protestant denomination to Protestantism in general, which later they did not equate with an establishment. The notion of prayer and worship based on the Bible accepted by all Protestants did not amount to a general establishment, but constituted an essential foundation of civilization« (see Thomas Curry, *The First Freedoms*, pp. 123-4, in Gedicks 1991: 123, note 30).

To be secular in this line of reasoning meant not to privilege one Protestant denomination over another. The »common ground« of Protestant civilization was taken for granted, though of course dissenting Christians and others were excluded from it. A similar situation prevailed contemporaneously in England. In a study of nineteenth-century debates between British evangelicals and their utilitarian rivals, Peter van der Veer notes that despite their differences all agreed that, »civil society and the forms of knowledge on which it was based were ultimately part and parcel of Christian civilization« (van der Veer 1999: 28).

The Protestant claim to a »common ground,« though slowly eroded by increasing religious diversification and eventually (though often at glacial speed and not without contestation) modified to incorporate both some Catholic and, after World War II, some Jewish influences, nonetheless retains a cultural foothold in the United States. It is out of a celebratory reading and ongoing amendment of this cultural inheritance that the JCS narrative emerged and continues to shape modern dispositions toward the secular and the place of religion within it. A narrative of Protestant hegemony was transformed into a slightly more liberalized pluralism, drawing on a deep well of tradition in which first Protestant Christianity, then Christianity more broadly, then

Judaism were (selectively and not without dissent) linked to the possibility of civilization and cited as the source of first principles for governing ideas and institutions.

While Alexandre de Tocqueville long ago described this famously in reference to the United States (Tocqueville 1969: 292), more recently Robert Bellah, Connolly, Mark Juergensmeyer, Taylor, van der Veer, James Morone and Pizzorno have chronicled how religion resonates in and through modern liberalism and secularism. Morone paints a lively portrait of American history in which the nation develops »not from religious to secular but from revival to revival« (Morone 2003: 3). Connolly points to liberal thinkers such as J.S. Mill who extol Judeo-Christian tradition as the moral basis of civilizational unity and identity, and for whom it is »through Jewish and Christian culture above all that a territorial people acquires the civilizational conditions of possibility for representative government« (Connolly 1999:78). Van der Veer charts a long tradition of combining liberalism and evangelical moralism in Anglo-American political thought, describing British Liberal leader Gladstone's (1809-98) writings as invoking a »liberal view of progress [...] but added to this is the notion that progress is the Christian improvement of society and that in such progress we see the hand of God« (van der Veer 1999: 24). Taylor describes a »common ground« mode of secularism, in which members of a political community agree upon an ethic of peaceful coexistence and political order based on doctrines common to all Christian sects, or even to all theists. Historically, he suggests, this represented a successful compromise in Europe for warring sects because »political injunctions that flowed from this common core trumped the demands of a particular confessional allegiance« (Taylor: 1998:33). The objective was not to expel religion from politics in the name of an independent ethic, as in laicism, but to prevent the state from backing one (Christian) confession over another by appealing to that which all held in common. This even-handedness between (Christian) religious traditions was the basis of the original American separation of church and state (Taylor 1998: 35).

Unlike laicism, JCS does not claim to exclude religion (as long as the latter is understood as Christianity or, perhaps »Judeo-Christianity«) from modern spheres of power and authority. It diverges from laicism regarding the role of religious tradition in the maintenance of the secularist »separation« of church and state. While laicism assumes that religion has receded out of modern spheres of authority or diminished altogether, JCS is a form of religious »accommodationism« in which »religion (singular) is ultimately good for democratic politics, because a shared adherence to a common religious tradition provides a set of publicly accessible assumptions within which democratic politics can be conducted« (Jelen 2000: 90). In this political imaginary the separation of church and state is a unique Western achievement that emerged from adherence to common European religious and cultural traditions. You can't have one without the other.

In international relations the influence of Judeo-Christian secularist assumptions is palpable in arguments in which religious traditions are portrayed as the source of particular styles and institutions of governance, forms of civilizational identity, and violent clashes between so-called civilizations. Christianity, in many versions of this narrative, »Judeo-Christianity« in others, has culminated in the uniquely Western

achievement of the separation of church and state and the development of liberal democracy (Huntington 2001: 60). As Samuel Huntington argues, »Western Christianity, first Catholicism and then Protestantism, is historically the single most important characteristic of Western civilization« (Huntington 1996: 70). This prevailing dualism between »God and Caesar, church and state, spiritual and temporal authority [...] contributed immeasurably to the development of freedom in the West« and forms part of »the factors which enabled the West to take the lead in modernizing itself and the world« (Huntington 1996: 70, 72). Religion is the bedrock of this cultural inheritance, responsible for differentiating between civilizations and between individuals: »in the modern world, religion is a central, perhaps *the* central, force that motivates and mobilizes people« (Huntington 1996: 63, original emphasis).

Huntington's framework divides the world into two hierarchical categories: those who share the Christian or Judeo-Christian common ground and those who do not. This echoes divisions proposed in the 14th-century by Italian jurist Bartolus de Saxoferato, who divided the world into five classes: the »*populus Romanus*« or »almost all those who obey the Holy Mother Church«, and four classes of »*populus extranei*«: the Turks, the Jews, the Greeks and the Saracens (Pagden 1995: 28). Bartolus's scheme parallels Huntington's seven (or eight) major civilizations: Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and »possibly African«. Anthony Pagden describes the effects of these divisions:

»The effect of Bartolus's ethnic division is once again to limit ›the world‹ to a distinct cultural, political, and in this case religious, community. And again it places boundaries between what may be counted as the domain of the fully human world, and those others – which because of their rejection of the hegemony of the Western Church now also included the Greeks – who have no place within the *civitas*, and so no certain claim upon the moral considerations of those who do« (Pagden 1995: 28).

The dangerous assumption that a »Judeo-Christian« secular common ground ends abruptly at the edge of Western civilization leads to calls to defend this ground against internal and external enemies, resulting in what Connolly has described as »civilizational wars of aggressive defense of Western uniqueness« (Connolly 1999: 4). These wars can become aggressive as the common ground is challenged and reconfigured under the stress of a pluralistic West made up of Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, atheists, and agnostics, among others. At this point either the common ground is renegotiated or an aggressive defense of it is set in motion. Neuhaus supports the latter, arguing that the godless are incapable of a »morally convincing account« of the nation and concluding that, »those who believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus turn out to be the best citizens« (Neuhaus in Linker 2006).

This religio-secular triumphalism finds expression in International Relations in the idea that Western powers have a monopoly over the proper relationship between religion and politics. As John Keane argues,

»[t]he principle of secularism, which ›represents a realisation of crucial motifs of Christianity itself‹ (Bonhoeffer), is arguably founded upon a sublimated version of the Christian belief that Christianity is »the religion of religions« (Schleiermacher), and that Christianity is entitled to decided for non-Christian others what they can think or say—or even whether they are capable of thinking and saying anything at all« (Keane 2000: 14).

This reasoning normalizes particular religions and religious actors and marginalizes non-Western and non-»Judeo-Christian« perspectives on religion and politics. If the dualism between spiritual and temporary authority is accepted as uniquely Western and (Judeo)-Christian, then non-Westerners who want to democratize have no alternative but to adopt Western forms of secularism. In this scenario, non-Westerners who do *not* support Western (Christian) forms of secularism are portrayed as children who refuse to acknowledge that they are sick and need to stay in. Yet those who do advocate such forms are charged with advancing pale imitations of a robust Western secular ideal, thereby departing from (and potentially betraying) indigenous tradition. This has the effect of de-legitimizing indigenous negotiations and forms of secularism as they are associated with selling out to Western power and/or betraying local tradition. An example is the oppositional relationship that has developed between Euro-American secular politics and many forms of political Islam, a dynamic that I have discussed elsewhere (Hurd 2007) such that any variation of the latter is assumed to be a threat to any variation of the former.

Any attempt to fix the meaning of »religion« and define its relationship either in or out of politics—any attempt to displace the politics of secularism—is inherently political. From the perspective of democratic pluralism, claims to universality grounded either in the claim to have overcome religio-cultural particularities (laicism), or to have located successful moral and political order in any particular religio-cultural heritage (»Judeo-Christian« or any other), are equally problematic.

3. Conclusion

Bonnie Honig writes of two conflicting political impulses: the desire to decide undecidabilities, and the will to contest established institutions and identities (Honig 1993: 201). She criticizes theorists who limit their definition of politics to the former, which she describes as »juridical, administrative or regulative tasks of stabilizing moral and political subjects, building consensus, maintaining agreements, or consolidating communities and identities« (Honig 1993: 2). Rather than theorizing politics, she argues, they displace it (Honig 1993: 2). Like their counterparts in political theory, scholars of IR also yearn for closure, consensus, and the displacement of secularist politics. As Michael Barnett points out, »actors struggle over the power and the right to impose a legitimate vision of the world because doing so helps to construct social reality as much as it expresses it« (Williams 1996 quoted in Barnett 1998: 25). For most this is a secular vision of the world, and a secular social reality. Most, perhaps unconsciously, perhaps less so, think, work, struggle against and live within variations of the two forms of secularism described in this essay. These laws, institutions, and sensibilities do not merely reflect social reality but construct it by providing »a set of parameters, focal points, or even points of contention around which political discourse revolves« (Bukovansky 2002: 25). They facilitate closure and agreement around received settlements of the relation between religion and politics. Secularism, it turns out, is a powerful »pattern of political rule« (Asad 2006: 219).

Secularist settlements have only recently become subject to analysis by political scientists, in part because they tend to fall just beyond the peripheral vision of conventional empiricist and rational-choice methods that serve as the default approaches in mainstream political science. These settlements are sustained by a variety of assumptions: secularization as the most recent step in the worldly realization of Christian or »Judeo-Christian« morality, secularization as the natural evolution toward a universal morality that transcends the need for metaphysical moorings, secularization as a commendable side-effect of democratization and modernization, secularization as the result of the globalization of a modern state system in which religion has been privatized once and for all, among others. Though jostling with each other for supremacy, and sometimes colliding head-on, these powerful secularist narratives and projects strive to manage religious diversity, imbue state interest and identity with meaning, secure an image of contemporary international order as modern, secular and democratic, and normalize particular religions and religious actors as either fit or unfit for participation in politics. These entanglements between secularist formations and religious traditions, real or imagined, and real because they are imagined, confirm Barnett's intuition (forthcoming) that secular and religious elements in international order are not as cleanly segregated as IR theorists may have once assumed.

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