



## *Beyond the separation between Church and State?*

The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, WRR) is an independent advisory body for Dutch government policy. The Council focuses on policy issues with long term social, economic, technological and political significance, which, as a consequence, transcend the policy domains of the various ministries. Members of the Council are highly qualified academics, appointed by the government for a period of five years. The WRR is an independent think tank; it directs its own research programme, which is funded from the budget of the Prime Minister's Office.

The annual WRR lecture offers policy makers and academics a high profile opportunity to discuss current policy issues with long term relevance for Dutch society.

WRR

SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL FOR GOVERNMENT POLICY

*Hans Joas  
Alan Wolfe*

WRR lecture 2006

## *Beyond the Separation between Church and State?*

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WRR-Lecture 2006

*Hans Joas  
Alan Wolfe*

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## **DVD WRR-Lecture 19 December 2006, Nieuwe Kerk, The Hague**

### **Lecture and discussions featuring:**

*Job Cohen, Piet-Hein Donner, Prof. Heleen Dupuis, Prof. Wim van de Donk, Jacobine Geel, Prof. Hans Joas, Prof. Alan Wolfe*



## WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

*Wim van de Donk, Chairman of the Scientific Council for  
Government Policy*

Your Eminence, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman,  
When we selected ‘Religion and the Public Domain’ as the topic for our traditional annual lecture, we could not have dared to hope that it would attract so much interest. But since we have chosen to organize this year’s lecture in this beautiful and inspiring building, the Nieuwe Kerk, we have plenty of room to accommodate you all. On behalf of my colleagues, members of the Scientific Council of Government Policy, I wish to express our gratitude to you all for having accepted our invitation to be with us this afternoon.

Please allow me if you will to offer a special word of welcome to those who will be playing a special role during the next two days – this afternoon during the lectures, and tomorrow morning during the mini-symposium.

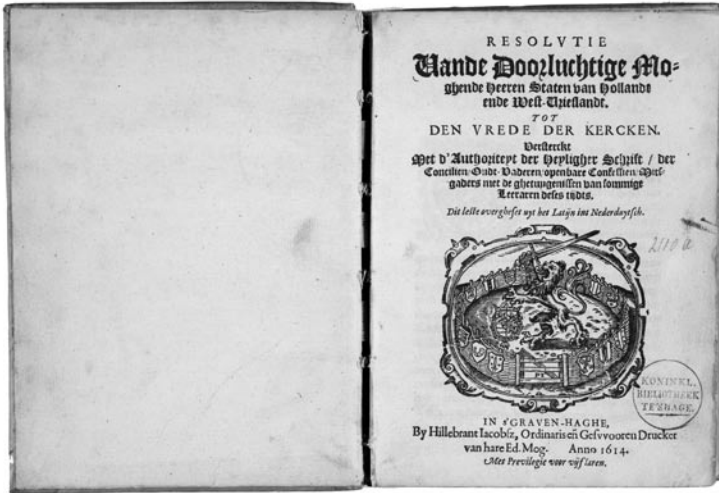
First and foremost I would like to express a warm word of welcome to our speakers for this afternoon: Hans Joas, professor of sociology in Chicago and Erfurt, among others, and Alan Wolfe, professor at Boston College, and just recently appointed by the American Political Studies Association to chair a special task force on Religion and American Democracy. We are honoured that you have accepted our invitation to be key-note speakers for this fourth annual WRR-lecture.

I also would like to address a special word of welcome to Job Cohen, Mayor of Amsterdam, Piet Hein Donner, former Dutch Minister of Justice, and Heleen Dupuis, member of the Dutch Senate and emeritus professor of ethics at the University of Leiden. I also am very grateful that Jacobine Geel, theologian and currently also acting as chairman of the Citizens’ Forum, accepted our invitation to lead the panel after the coffee break. Finally, I also would like to say a special word of welcome professor Jean Pierre Machelon, Dean of the Law Faculty at the René Descartes University in Paris, and author of a

report on the future of the relationship between Church and State, which he recently presented to the French Minister of the Interior. Tomorrow morning, the authors who have contributed to the book that will be presented today, will gather in the offices of the Prime Minister to listen to your lecture on the recent developments regarding the debate about the church-state relationships in France, a nation in which the separation of church and state, guided by the conception of 'laïcité', has been discussed intensively the last century, and that is of particular importance in current debates in our country.

Dear guests, please allow me, before I will ask Hans Joas and Alan Wolfe to speak to us, make a few introductory remarks on the topic. I will be very short, since a more extensive introduction to the theme and the reasons why the Scientific Council for Government Policy has decided to study it, can be found in the book (*Geloven in het Publieke Domein*, *Believing in the Public Domain*), that we will present to you this afternoon.

**Fig.1** Titlepage of the 'Resolutie tot den vrede der kercken' (resolution between churches) that was drafted by Grotius on commission of Johan van Oldenbarneveldt (state-secretary of the Dutch Republic), and approved by the States of Holland 1614.



SOURCE: NATIONAL LIBRARY OF THE NETHERLANDS

Let me start with an image that shows that the topic that we will discuss today, is not a new topic at all. For centuries, discussions about the relationships between churches and political power, between religion and the public domain have been paramount in Dutch political life. The image here depicts the title page of a work by Hugo de Groot – Hugo Grotius – written on commission from Johan van Oldenbarnevelt and the States of Holland (1614). It is taken from a resolution on the peace of the churches, a resolution that reflected the complex relationships between major theological debates and Dutch politics in the beginning of the seventeenth century. The history of this document points to a relationship between religion and the public domain which is as long and turbulent as it is complex. Already at that time religious developments were linked in a complicated way to aspects of domestic and foreign politics. It should serve as a warning to anyone wishing to publish on that relationship: remember where it led for Hugo Grotius and, even worse, for his patron.



Why, then, has the WRR dared to decide to devote a lecture and an exploratory discussion to this topic? The reason, Ladies and Gentlemen, is that we believe that a forward-looking and open analysis of important developments in society cannot get around what has come to be described in the scientific literature as a 'return of religion'. Whether religion has actually ever gone away, and if so precisely what it is that is returning, is something we will be discussing at length this afternoon. This may come as a surprise, because many regard religion indeed more as a topic for a gathering of historians than for a meeting organised by a group of people who are concerned with exploring the future.

We take a different view on this: a ruling political elite which sees religion primarily as something of the past is closing its eyes to a development which can seriously affect the quality of society in the future, in both a positive and a negative sense. A knowledge and understanding of those developments is necessary to prevent religion becoming a *de facto* blind spot, black hole or dead end for policymakers and decision-makers.

In his splendid book under the fine title '*Earthly Powers*', for which an excellent Dutch translation is now available under the title '*Aardse Machten*', and which deals with the relationship between religion and politics from the French Revolution until the First World War, Michael Burleigh provides a wonderful commentary on the poem '*Dover Beach*' by Matthew Arnold. In that poem, the relationship between religion and the public domain is portrayed as a narrow beach, from which the sea slowly recedes in a sort of infinite ebb. That image of a receding sea suggests an image of a reverse climate change, as we might say with an oblique reference to a recent American film. You will have understood that I am referring to the film made by former Vice-President Al Gore, entitled '*An Inconvenient Truth*'. Burleigh's criticism refers to what some would also consider to be an inconvenient truth. That 'truth' concerns the secularisation thesis, which many have long accepted as an incontrovertible 'theory of evolution' with regard to modern societies. In these societies, many scholars have predicted 'religion' was on the way out. However, based on his research on the relationship between religion and modern

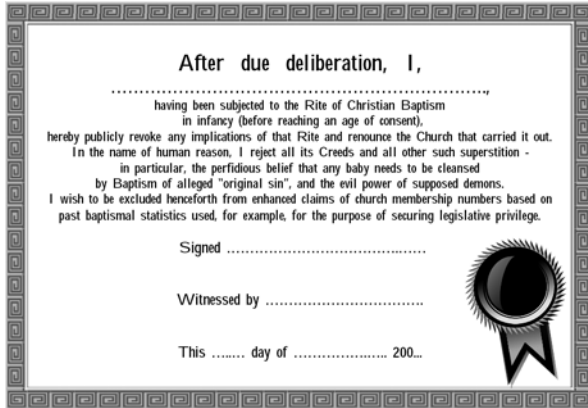
societies, Burleigh suggests a different metaphor, which he believes verbalises that relationship much more effectively than the metaphor of the narrow beach and the continuous ebb. That relationship, he argues, is encapsulated much better in an image of complex currents, constantly moving back and forth, washing over a rocky shore, with its tidal pools to which the waves continually add. The history of European secularisation, he writes, is more capricious than inevitable.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the same could be said of the history of religion and the way in which it manifests itself within society. This afternoon we will be talking about *secularisation*, the relationship with modernisation, and about the *transformation* of religion. Why? Because it may very well be the case, according to indications from an exploratory study by the WRR, that we are not so much seeing a return of religion, but above all a radical change in religion. The key words with which we seek to describe the developments in our society today can also, it appears, all be linked to the phenomenon of religion. Let me discuss and present some of these key-developments.

### **Major trends in society**

*Secularisation*, distancing oneself from religion, is portrayed in the image I am showing you by a document from the British Secular Society, perhaps known to some of you from the major role played in it by Mister Bean (Rowan Atkinson). It is a document that can be used to undo an earlier baptism. The *debaptism certificate* can be downloaded on request.

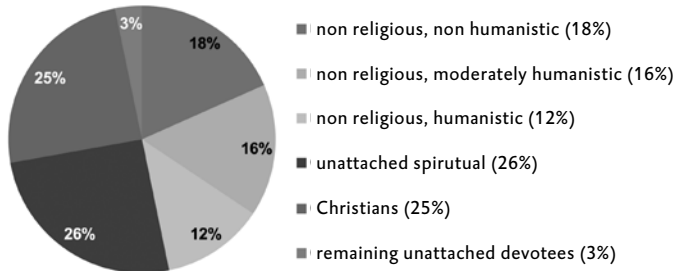
**Fig. 2 Certificate of de-baptism (the Natural Secular Society, Verenigd Koninkrijk).**



SOURCE: [HTTP://WWW.SECULARISM.ORG.UK](http://www.secularism.org.uk)

Secularisation has also had a major impact on Dutch society, as the next figure shows. One of the most important impacts is an ongoing *de*-institutionalisation of religion. Slightly more than one quarter of the total population counts itself as belonging to an ('institutionalised') religion. That does not mean however, that 'religion' has entirely disappeared from that society. But at least traditional institutionalised forms of religion have lost a great deal of their importance.

**Fig. 3 Ideology/religion in contemporary Dutch Society -2006**



SOURCE: MOTIVATION, WRR

We are seeing an increase in society of what might be described as free spirituals: a group of people who espouse the view that religion is less and less easy to harness within institutions and structures.

For all those who study modern societies, such a transformation of religion will not come as a surprise. Familiar trends such as de-institutionalisation, individualisation, commercialisation, digitalisation also manifest themselves in the domain of religion, meaning and ideology. In these few words of welcome I will not elaborate on this, but just to give you an idea, I have selected a few images to illustrate what this mean.

Figure four shows the internetpage of a lady, a former remonstrant pastor who offers spiritual services for those that are not affiliated with an institutionalised religion.

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**Fig 4. De-institutionalisation: MotherSuperior.nl**



Pastorale dienstverlening en geestelijke begeleiding zonder  
kerkelijke of religieuze binding, onder meer bij inzegening  
van levensverbindtissen, trouwdiensten, overangsrituelen  
en crisissituaties.

SOURCE [WWW.MOEDEROVERSTE.NL](http://WWW.MOEDEROVERSTE.NL)

**Fig 5. Commercialisation, [www.rentapriest.com](http://www.rentapriest.com)**



SOURCE [WWW.RENTAPRIEST.COM](http://WWW.RENTAPRIEST.COM)/CITI MINISTRIES INC.

**Fig. 6 Internationalisation, a clash of religions?**



PHOTO: WIM VAN DE DONK

Figure five shows how even priests, these days, have found a 'commercial market' for their spiritual profession. Figure six shows the wall that has been erected in the West-Bank, near Bethlehem. This photo was taken during a recent visit in the middle East. It is an icon of how religion still plays a major role in international politics. These were just some pictures as an introduction that will be lead to a further exploration into the complex relationship, between 'religion' and the public domain.

It is much too early to examine whether these and other developments have any significance for the equally controversial and complex relationship between church and state, between religion and the public domain. The fact that religion as a phenomenon is less easy to define and 'capture', is 'leaching' as it were, into many different guises, is not always easy for a government and a judge to grapple with. If judgments have to be made between conflicting fundamental rights, it is useful if it can be made clear precisely who and what can claim protection.

And there are more such questions that can be asked: There are questions concerning the relationship between religion/ideology and citizenship and democracy. Does the recent rediscovery of religion by administrators and politicians in the context of social bonding and cohesion not also carry dangers? Will it not quickly lead to an instrumental incorporation into government policy of a domain that is itself best served by a strict separation between State and Church? And if we are talking about the separation of Church and State, do we then mean a rigid normative principle which stands in the way of an easy relationship between religion and the public domain? Or has a more easy relationship become possible precisely just because of that separation of church and state?

Wim van de Donk  
Chairman WRR



## DOES MODERNISATION LEAD TO SECULARISATION?

*Hans Joas*

The topic I am going to deal with in this talk is: Does Modernisation lead to Secularisation? I think it makes sense to begin my reflections with a few thoughts why this topic – which might sound like a rather abstract problem of the social sciences – currently attracts so much attention. I will then briefly clarify the ways in which I use the two main concepts ‘secularisation’ and ‘modernisation’, offer a sketch of a historical argument why the secularisation thesis is wrong, and derive some political conclusions from this argument.

There are four reasons for this attention, two more or less obvious, two others much less so and more in connection with profound cultural changes taking place in our time<sup>1</sup>. The two obvious reasons are of a political character, and you are all familiar with them. The spectacular terrorist attacks of 9/11/2001 have made it clear to all contemporaries that there are highly politicized forms of religion in the Islamic world and among alienated Muslims in the West today. This has intensified the interest in other forms of the politicisation of Islam and in the role of other religious justifications of violent political action, e.g. in the Jewish settler movement on the West Bank or in the connection between certain forms of Protestant fundamentalism in the U.S. and the foreign policy of the Bush administration. The second context, particularly prevalent in Europe, is the problem of the integration of Muslim immigrants into European societies and, although definitely to distinguish from this, the question of the expansion of the European Union, particularly with regard to the possibility of Turkey joining the EU. Whatever one’s perspective on these questions is, nobody denies that the immigration problems challenge the existing and very diverse arrangements between state and religion in Europe and that the problems of EU expansion challenge the self-understanding of Europeans and their definition of what constitutes European values and the European cultural or political identity. We can often observe rather paradoxical situations here,



for example when intellectuals emphasize the Christian character of Europe against a Turkish membership without ever having positively referred to Christianity in their writings before. Or when completely secularised East German high school students whose deeply religious Muslim fellow students in Berlin ridicule them for having no religion at all suddenly develop an interest in the religious roots of their own culture. Thus questions become inevitable like those that inquire whether Europe can only define itself as Christian or rather by delimiting itself against its Christian origins, whether Christianity is only a cultural heritage or rather a constant source of inspiration, whether it is only Christianity or all Abrahamic religions with their shared view of transcendence that can be the foundation of European identity.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to the less obvious changes I think we first have to have the courage to declare the end of 'postmodernity'. By this I want to say that an intellectual current that has dominated intellectual and cultural life since the late 1970's has clearly exhausted itself. It may have been a good antidote to the social planning euphoria of the 1960's and the quasi-revolutionary utopias of the 1970's, but its plea for unlimited creativity and plurality could in itself not offer any strong arguments against the enemies of pluralism and for the protection and transmission to new generations of the ethos of toleration. In this changed atmosphere important scholarly works on the emergence and the history of this ethos of toleration have been produced, but again we see the whole spectrum of responses between those who believe in a 'radical enlightenment' and those who emphasize that the first institutionalisation of religious freedom in North America in the 17<sup>th</sup> century is the result of a deeply religious motivation. I am referring to the Puritan preacher Roger Williams who argued that the religiously persecuted Puritans should not try to establish a theocratic order in America, but make it possible for every human being, all Christians, but even "Turks, heathens and Jews", to develop his or her authentic relationship to God.<sup>3</sup>

This 'end of postmodernity' is the third context I had in mind. This is the declaration of the exhaustion of a certain form of cultural self-understanding, not of the end of all the changes that have often been adduced as typical for our time (like individualisation in the area of

religion). And the fourth is now the question that will be in the focus of my presentation. There is widespread doubt today that the secularisation thesis – an assumption that has been developed out of an overgeneralisation of certain specificities of European religious history – is truly tenable. But what exactly do we mean when we speak of the connection between secularisation and modernisation?

The concept of secularisation was originally a *legal* term which was first used exclusively to denote the change-over from monastic orders to ‘secular priests’. Studies of the history of the concept show that the term first became general currency in early 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe when large amounts of church property were transferred to, or taken over by, the state.<sup>4</sup> Such aspects are not the province of this paper. However, in the wake of legal ‘secularisation’, the 19<sup>th</sup> century also saw the emergence both of a philosophical-theological and a socio-logical discourse on ‘secularisation’ – both of which, regrettably, were fraught with their own types of multiple meanings.

The *philosophical* and *theological* narrative was primarily concerned with ‘genealogical’ connections between hallmark features of modern society and culture on the one hand and the Christian faith on the other. In such approaches the accent could be placed on quite different places on the value scale. Thus while some viewed modern society as such a perfect embodiment of Christian ideals that they considered the separation of the church from state and society as increasingly superfluous, others were more concerned that large parts of society still showed the imprint of Christian ideas and ways of thought that had not yet been fully discarded.

The most salient attempt to untangle the complex of meanings used in *sociological* discourse is that undertaken by the Spanish-American sociologist of religion José Casanova.<sup>5</sup> He ascribes three separate meanings to the concept of secularisation as deployed in the social sciences: the decreasing significance of religion or a retreat of religion from the public sphere or the release of parts of society (such as the economy, science, the arts or politics) from direct religious control. Confusing these meanings gives rise to a great deal of misunderstanding. Obviously clarification of the conceptual terms tells us nothing

of the causal relationships existing between such disparate processes. And such elucidation is by no means the last word as the concept of religion itself is fraught with ambiguity. If we speak of the decreasing significance of 'religion', for instance, this can refer to changes in attitudes to faith or in participation in religious practices and rituals or membership of churches and faith-based communities, whereby tendencies to a decreasing significance in one respect by no means imply that they hold equally true in all other respects. People can still be believers without going to church just as they can remain members of a church even after losing their faith.

Likewise the formula of a retreat of religion from the public sphere – often expressed as a modern 'privatisation' of religion – is by no means devoid of ambiguity. We need to ask where this private sphere is actually located, whether it refers to a relinquishment of close bonds with the state or with political life in general or whether it rather serves to indicate a withdrawal from open communication in families and small groups to the closed inner life of the individual. The present context does not allow proper investigation of all these complex interweavings. This paper deals solely with the first of three meanings, treating it in as much depth as constraints of space allow.

The concept of 'modernisation' too is susceptible of a wide range of interpretation. It is not taken here to indicate the transition to some period of 'modernity' in whatever form that might take, but rather as a term for the continuous process of economic growth and its consequences and that took also place before there was anything like a period of 'modernity'. The various forms these consequences might take and their interconnections are beyond the scope of the paper. Thus the question 'Does Modernisation lead to Secularisation?' should be taken solely to mean 'Does economic growth necessarily lead to a decrease in the role played by religion?' – a decrease that can lead to the vanishing point. This paper shall investigate the implied inevitability of this process and not to what exact extent any country, Germany for instance or The Netherlands, is currently 'secularised'.

Many believers shall no doubt find such a question absurd or irrelevant as their religious convictions do not allow them to see why

greater economic prosperity or technological progress should have a deleterious impact on faith. Other believers will take the assertion that modernisation leads to secularisation at face value as they have developed a view of themselves as an ‘endangered’ species that can best serve faith by resisting modernisation in all its forms.

But who actually shares the assertion that forms the subject of this paper, when did it first come about and on what foundations does it rest?

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century this assumption has been shared by an astonishingly broad range of proponents in the social sciences and nearly all the famous names in philosophy. Whilst this might not be surprising for Marxist philosophers and sociologists, the assumption is also shared by such thinkers as Max Weber and Émile Durkheim, Sigmund Freud and George Herbert Mead, not to mention Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the most vehement critics of Christianity. It is indeed more difficult to find those who did not share it. Leading names here are William James and Alexis de Tocqueville, Jacob Burckhardt and Ernst Troeltsch. And whether Max Weber should figure in the list is a debatable point: although his thesis of “the disenchantment of the world” can certainly be read as a contribution to the theory of secularisation, his insights into the inevitability of the personal struggle for salvation can, with equal certainty, be read in a different light.<sup>6</sup> Even the Protestant sociologist of religion Peter Berger predicted in 1968 that by the year 2000 there would be practically no more religious institutions, just isolated believers huddled together in an ocean of secularity.<sup>7</sup> To date there is no conclusive research as to the exact historical point when the assumption of the disappearance of religions first came about. What is meant here is not a history of atheism but rather the prediction that the workings of history itself, without the need for any interventions on the part of militant atheists, would lead to the disappearance of religion. According to our present state of knowledge, it would appear that this assumption can be first found in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century among the early proponents of the English enlightenment who forecast the demise of Christianity by 1900 at the latest. Certain remarks in the writings of Frederick the Great, Voltaire and Thomas Jefferson also foreshadow it. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century these various springs had come together in a mighty river.<sup>8</sup>

It is remarkable that proponents of the assumption found it so obvious that they were hardly bothered with its theological derivation and empirical investigation. In the light of this we can question in fact whether it is correct to speak of a *theory* of secularisation and ask whether it would not be more accurate to use the more lowly term secularisation *thesis*. If we look at the implicit assumptions in this literature we find that it is often based on overtly problematic understandings of what religious faith is. Religious faith is taken to be pseudo-knowledge or pseudo-science doomed to impotence by the progress of science, or the consequence of material and intellectual impoverishment to be rendered superfluous by the advent of greater prosperity and a more just social and political order, or products of circumstances in which questions of meaning and the choice between different meaning systems are devalued by authoritarian education and cultural uniformity so that the onset of individualism and cultural pluralism shall force religion into retreat. All such interpretations of faith are fundamentally wide off the mark. To mount a critique, we need a more appropriate definition of faith, religious experience and their interpretation.<sup>9</sup>

However, at this juncture we are dealing with quite a different issue, namely a view of the social reality of faith or in other words with a sociological critique of the secularisation thesis. Let us assume that this thesis applies to Europe – the most secularised part of the world – at least as a description if not as a way of analysis. This brings us a first step nearer to the advocates of the assumption under scrutiny. However, we then need to ask in four stages, (1) whether European exceptions to the secularisation rule can be adequately explained by the secularisation theory; (2) what does the major exception of the USA look like when viewed closer up; (3) what picture is given from a non-Eurocentric perspective, and; (4) what forms do the older histories of religion take in the secularisation thesis. Answers to all these questions can obviously only be given here in a very summary way.

1. There is a general consensus that countries like Poland and Ireland, and to some extent Croatia and the old parts of Bavaria, are exceptions to the secularisation rule. Proponents of the secularisation theory explain the relative robustness of religious resistance in

these countries by the fusion of religious and national identities. The Polish people have certainly always found Catholicism a decisive factor in their resistance to Protestant Prussia and Orthodox or communist Russia while a similar view can be applied to the Irish in their struggle against the Protestant British. It is not my intention to cast doubt on such a connection; what we are questioning, however, is whether religion should be understood as a relic from the past that owes its continued existence to political reasons without which it would be destined to vanish. This standpoint conceals the fact that religious identity in all its clear demarcations is first formed in the same process as that of national identity or at least receives impulses that strengthen or disseminate or perhaps even instrumentalise it from the same process. Political mobilisation of religion can lead to the re-emergence of traditional forms of religion where forms of religious practice on the verge of dying out have new life breathed into them or are reinvented as pseudo-traditions. Thus new dangers of exclusion (e.g. Protestants in an independent Catholic Ireland) are also inherent in the political mobilisation of religion. If national and confessional identities are closely interwoven, it is difficult for a confessional minority not to be identified with the old repressive powers once national independence has been achieved. As the troubles in Northern Ireland show, such lines of conflict are still very much in evidence in present-day Western Europe. Even so, in global terms the political mobilisation of Islam is currently of far greater significance. Yet here too it would be missing the point to simply regard Islam as a traditional legacy of the past in the modern world. Similar considerations also apply to the political mobilisation of Hinduism in India. What is crucial in all these cases is that we need to abandon the understanding of religion as a relic.

2. Whilst the European exceptions always offer an opt-out of classifying less secularised societies as not fully modern, this option is closed when we turn to the USA. Nobody contests the 'modernity' of America just as nobody contests that according to all the indicators – no matter how controversial any particular one might be – America shows substantially and continually higher levels of religiosity than nearly all European societies: religious life in

America is flourishing and even highly productive. New forms of evangelism are engendered (TV evangelism, mega churches) along with new, often highly successful, religious movements (Mormons, Pentecostalism). Leading American figures were among the pioneers of the internal reforms of the Catholic Church in the Second Vatican Council (John Courtney Murray). America now sets the tone for the reception of eastern religions by educated sections of the population and indeed nowhere else do all the world's religions interact and mutually influence one another more intensely than they do in America.

The enduring view that like the European 'exceptions' this could be explained by a fusion of national and religious identities ('the Puritan legacy') was discredited when empirical studies showed that membership of religious communities in the USA has risen fairly steadily from 1800 to 1950 and indeed practically tripled during this period (relative to the size of the population). Thus any talk of a secularisation process that has been simply delayed can definitely be ruled out.

Another closely related explanation can also be discounted on empirical grounds: the assumption that the high level of religiosity in America, even though not a legacy of the puritanical Pilgrim Fathers, was part of the baggage brought over by later generations of immigrants. As a great number of these came over from countries like Ireland and Poland, it could be argued that America constituted a kind of geographic displacement of European backwardness or aberrance. It could be equally shown, however, that migration to the USA made migrants in general more active in their religious lives than they previously were. And the same would apply (with a few exceptions) to the waves of migration we are now experiencing.

The most plausible explanation now in circulation ascribes the vitality of religious life in America to the plurality of religions in conjunction with an early separation of state and 'church' – a separation, however, in which the state adopts a nurturing attitude to all forms of religion and not a sceptical stance as did the secular state in France. Unlike in Europe with its state-protected religious territorial monopolies, in America a person dissatisfied with the politics or theology

of a religious community must never drop out into a fringe group or counter-culture, they can always find their niche in the rich and broad spectrum of religious communities. Such communities are more market-oriented and less dependent on the state; they tend to adopt an entrepreneurial not a bureaucratic stance. For instance, church congregations have no qualms about using marketing instruments like questionnaires to determine the level of satisfaction among their members and prospective members. And as the readiness of members to make donations is of vital importance for the continued existence of the community, it is fostered and promoted by professional forms of management. Market-like conditions promote endeavours to found new 'enterprises'. Religious communities do not sit back and wait for new members to join them but rather embrace a proactive stance that combines religious aspects with the daily concerns of the target group (such as migrants). This brings its own set of dangers and off-shoots which are not less important than those of the bureaucratically structured official churches. So-called church shopping is the least of them; to a large extent this is only played out in the Protestant churches and aided by the increasingly wide-spread perception that theological differences between the swath of Protestant denominations are of minimal importance. It refers to an act of free choice (for instance when moving house) to join a new religious community that offers more attractive social or spiritual assets than the old one. In my opinion certain problems arise when religious communities advertise faith or community membership particularly as means to preordained ends. Aspirations for wealth or political power but also for such ideals as a slim body or physical beauty then become endowed with a magic dimension. What we should note here is that the legal and economic conditions underpinning the actions of religious communities appear to be the decisive factors in terms of the secularisation effects of modernisation. Of equal importance, however, is the question of whether the given plurality of religious communities is perceived as a valuable asset – in other words whether there is a commitment to plurality as a value. Thus what is decisive for the USA is not the existence of a market of religious options in itself, but rather a fixed institutionalisation of religious freedom.<sup>10</sup>



3. The mere act of taking account of the USA can prove unsettling to the Euro-centric point of view. From the standpoint of global history, the idea of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a time of comprehensive secularisation is completely untenable. On the contrary this period can rather be countenanced as a time of the quasi triumphalist expansion of religion.<sup>11</sup> A Euro-centric perspective overlooks two essential factors: the religious consequences of European expansion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the impact of technological innovations on non-European religions.

Obviously, although European expansion did not begin in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it reached its peak during that time and was frequently coupled with the efforts of missionaries. It is difficult to outline the effects of missionary work and colonialisation in such a short space but it should be immediately apparent that any other description for them is more apposite than that of 'secularisation'. In Africa and parts of Latin America the spreading of Christianity occurred (accompanied in Africa by the spreading of Islam) even though this was 'from the top downwards' so that it required a spreading of the faith across several generations before it was firmly rooted in the population. In Asia colonialisation and missionary work tended to encounter cultures and religions that saw themselves as superior to the intruders even though they felt threatened by them. Here we find a spectrum of reactions ranging from a transformation of the own religious traditions in the sense of a partial rapprochement to Christianity to forthright opposition. Especially with regard to Hinduism and Confucianism, observers have noted how these two faiths first constituted themselves as religions under the pressure of the challenges thrown up by Christianity and colonialisation. The use of printing presses by the missionaries and the building of churches revolutionised the use of media and construction technology, including those of non-Christian religions. For the understanding of the subsequent development of religion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, two factors are of key importance: the development of the state in a post-colonial era and the respective relationships between state and religion. In Latin America we can see a transition from the mainly state-supported monopoly of Catholicism to a plurality of religions, whilst in Africa the failure of states to achieve or retain consolidation in the post-colonial era is the crucial factor.

4. Most proponents of the secularisation theory totally overestimate the actual extent of religiosity in Europe prior to the onset of the modern secularisation process. Yet for a very long time even among priests (to say nothing of the laity) knowledge of the faith was in a lamentable, not to say grotesque, state of underdevelopment. Church attendance was meagre and churches themselves were thin on the ground whilst anti-clericalism and indifference to religion was rife, particularly in rural areas. Industrialisation in its cradle country of Great Britain first brought with it a significant increase in religious practices and church membership over a long period which reached its peak at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus we cannot talk of the de-christianisation of Europe – simply because Europe was never properly ‘christianised’ in the first place; this is how Gabriel LeBras once put it, perhaps slightly overstating the case.<sup>12</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw in some newly industrialised countries (like Germany) the tragic alienation of large parts of the urban working class from the church on the one hand and intensive campaigns, often taking the form of re-traditionalised doctrine, for those sections of the population amenable to faith on the other.

None of these remarks suggests that Western Europe and a small number of ex-colonial settler-states (such as New Zealand) or a small number of post-communist societies are not heavily secularised. Even so, after the overview given in this paper, it should be difficult to retain a belief in the validity of the thesis that secularisation is a necessary corollary of modernisation. The reasons why Europe constitutes an ‘exceptional case’ certainly need closer investigation.

But for our discussion today let me draw three main conclusions from such a refutation of the secularisation thesis:

1. The assumption shared by radical secularists and anti-modern religionists that a strict separation of state and religion forces religion into the private sphere and leads in the long run not only to a privatisation of religion, but also its decline – this assumption is wrong. Radical secularists would welcome such a development, anti modern religionists abhor it – but the assumption is wrong. Religion can flourish under conditions of separation if, on the one

hand, this separation encourages the participation of believers and of religious organisations in political life and if, on the other hand, the believers and their organisations develop their own theological reasons for such a separation.

2. To the extent that the secularisation thesis is a self-fulfilling prophecy, the destruction of this prophecy will have consequences on religious life. Although we should not speak of a 'return of religion' as if it had ever disappeared and we should not conflate an increased attention paid to religion in the media with a religious change in itself, there are indicators that indeed a changing cultural climate in Europe leads to a slight reversal of the secularizing trends since the 1960's.
3. Religions as such don't act. It is always human beings who act, i.e. believers with a certain understanding of their faith, but also with certain political goals, economic interests and social characteristics. If we bear this in mind, we can immediately recognize all talk about a possible clash of religions (or civilisations) as misguided from the outset. It is, therefore, more fruitful to interpret some of the typical bones of contention in the current political and religious landscape – like headscarves and the full-body veil – as symptoms of conflicts and not as indicators of the unassimilability of certain religions. As believers always have to ask themselves as to whether their articulation of their faith is convincing, so secularists have to be willing to see signs of religious protest as indicators for a less than convincing appearance of a political and social order.

## WHO'S AFRAID OF AMERICAN RELIGION?

*Alan Wolfe*

When I decided that I would become interested in questions involving the separation between church and state, I had absolutely no idea what one of the major consequences of that decision would be. And that is, that I would get to speak in all the world's most beautiful churches. So, I want to thank very much Wim van de Donk and the other members of the Council for the opportunity to add de Nieuwe Kerk to the list of magnificent European churches in which I have spoken. Thank you very much.

We may be at the end of a settlement with respect to religion and the state that has lasted for two or three centuries. And I think that is one of the reasons why so many of us have gotten interested in the question of religion and politics. It has been a fairly long period, but the period that we are in now is a period that has obviously been shaped by the religious and sectarian wars of an earlier time; it is a period shaped by the Thirty-Years War, the Protestant reformations, the rise of a link between religion and politics in the absolutist Monarchies in France, the inquisition in Spain and Italy, and in Protestant countries by the ominous Consistory and Calvin's Geneva. This was a long period in our pre-modern history in which religion and the state worked together in such ways as to convince large numbers of people that if you blend religion and politics too carefully the result will be sectarian violence, the oppression of liberty, and the oppression of individual conscience, such that it was required in one way or another, even in countries which still had officially established churches, to separate these realms in order to protect human liberty, to protect freedom of conscience, and to protect the world against violence.

Some separation of religion and politics was thus required. After all, you had these two models: (1) the model of religious warfare and religious oppression; and (2) the model of the emerging Enlightenment. And it is testimony to human progress that if you put the Spanish inquisition up against enlightenment, at least for most thinking

people that was no choice at all. Obviously, the model of progress and the model of enlightenment would be the one chosen by rational people thinking about the best choices they could make. In that sense, some settlement like the one we have experienced for the last couple of hundred years would seem to be inevitable. But now the feeling is increasing that this settlement, this separation, this decision to put religion in one sphere and politics in another, may be coming to an end. And I think it is the sense that this long period that emerged out of our religious history may be coming to an end, and that we may be entering a new period, and a new configuration about how to address these issues, is what is worrying or thrilling, depending upon one's perspective, so many individuals.

Certainly, one example that is frequently cited as evidence for the fact that this period may be coming to an end is my own country. As Hans Joas suggests, almost no one, whatever his or her interpretation, would look at the United States as a country that could be described as thoroughly secular. Indeed, religion is playing an increasing role in the United States. We have heard many examples of this and I needn't bore you with them, but I think that you are all aware and probably as concerned as I am, that when the president of the world's leading superpower says that part of the reason he makes the foreign policy decisions that he does is because God has spoken to him, you begin to think that perhaps we're not in the era of the Enlightenment, and the era of separation between church and state anymore. This is the United States, which has seen the rise of the religious right, which has seen the rise of a fairly aggressive form of conservative religion, which does not believe in enlightened values, which would prefer to teach intelligent design or creationism in the schools as an alternative to Darwinian evolutionary theory, and which challenges the whole set of principles upon which the separation between church and state has been based. If one sees a development like that, not in some backwater country, not in some country that has missed the rise of modernity, but in a country that is the very essence and the very expression of all that is held to be dynamic and modern in the world, certainly this is cause for believing that perhaps we are entering some new era, with respect to issues of church and state and the role they play with respect to one another. So that is one major reason

for thinking that this period in which religion and politics are kept in separate spheres may be coming to an end.

Of course, the second major reason for thinking this period is coming to an end is what is happening in your part of the world. What is happening in Europe is a rediscovery of the power of religion, a rediscovery that has been brought about by a number of factors, but which I think is caused primarily by increased immigration of religious believers to a Europe that was much more secular before this wave of immigration began. I don't mean to focus simply on the presence of religious immigrants in Europe, because that would seem to blame the immigrants. More interesting, I think, is the rediscovery among Europeans who have long roots in Europe of the relationship between Europe and Christendom and thus the re-establishment of a sense that Europe is primarily Christian and ought to remain Christian. This rediscovery takes the form of a reaction against immigration, and especially against immigration from Islamic countries. Some of the most secular countries in the world have rediscovered their Christianity. Often it is not a religious Christianity; it is what we in the United States would call an identity politics Christianity. Christianity in this sense is an expression of a particular, almost ethnic identity, as opposed to a set of religious beliefs. But it is nonetheless the case that the fewer people that go to church in any particular European country, the greater will be the sense that that country is Christian in some way in order to meet what people in that country see as a threat from Islam.

So, given what looks like (1) the development of a set of theocratic tendencies in the United States, and (2) the rediscovery of religious conflict in Europe, may we not be at the end of this long settlement, and may we not be on the brink of some new emergence of a pattern of interaction between religion and politics in which the kind of enlightenment/separationist/non-establishment view of religion that, I think, worked very well for a long period of time, is becoming increasingly obsolete. Well that is the question about which I want to share some thoughts. I do think that we may be coming to the end of an era, but I am not one who worries significantly about it. In other words, it does seem to me that we are going through an inevitable

transition. But I do not see a return to some kind of pre-enlightenment, more theocratic relationship between church and state emerging out of this transition. In short, we are not going backwards. If we emerge in some new kind of settlement, it is not going to be the one we experienced in the pre-modern period in Europe, but something entirely different. And I want to use my own country primarily as the argument for that, because there is this concern that the United States is turning in a more theocratic direction.

One of the major bestsellers in the United States now is a book called *American Theocracy*, written by an influential political consultant and analyst named Kevin Phillips. And there are a large number of other books that predict some dangerous consequences for the United States as a result of the re-emergence of religious faith. Some of them are written by atheists such as Richard Dawkins, the prominent evolutionary psychologist, and Daniel Dennett, a philosopher highly influenced by Darwinian theory. We now have a string of books in the United States warning us against a possible return to theocracy. If theocracy means government by religion, I think that those warnings are wildly overblown. And I want to offer three reasons why, in my opinion, it would be wrong to characterize whatever is emerging in my country as theocratic. Something is emerging, something interesting is happening, but it is not theocratic at least in the sense that refers back to the pre-modern history of Europe.

First of all, the separation of church and state, an issue that Hans Joas talked about in his presentation just before mine, is very much alive and well in the United States. You may hear otherwise sometimes and you may certainly be correct to get the impression that something is wrong with the separation of church and state in the United States when you hear comments such as the ones that the president made or when you read about prominent American generals who talk about Islam as an inferior religion to American Christianity as one of our leading military strategists has done. I can understand that people in Europe might conclude that the president of the United States is Jerry Falwell and the vice-president is Pat Robertson. These more theocratically inclined people are certainly getting a significant amount of attention. And it is also the case that President Bush is a

deeply religious man, or at least he says he is. I have no way to know about that, but he does use religious language. There are also disturbingly theocratic developments happening in the United States. I could mention any number but I will just illustrate with one. The Air Force Academy is currently at the center of a huge controversy over the explicit endorsement by the military leadership of the Air Force Academy of evangelical, proselytizing methods in the recruitment of Air Force officers. The Air Force Academy, in case you don't know, is located in Colorado Springs, Colorado, which is also the home of almost all of the evangelical Christian organisations, what we call parachurch organisations, such as the Reverend James Dobson's group Focus on the Family, one of the most vehemently right-wing of the Christian groups, that influence the president. So, in this hotbed of evangelical Protestantism, the Air Force Academy is almost officially endorsing proselytizing military officers. This is absolutely unforgivable in our society because it is not only violating the separation between church and state, but it is also taking the symbol of national unity, the military, the institution that embodies the defence of our entire society, and using it for purely sectarian purposes.

So you do hear about these kind of things, and there are causes for worry. But even with those exceptions, I think in many ways we are actually witnessing a flourishing of separationism in the United States rather than the opposite. And Hans Joas has already told us one of the reasons why. Hans mentioned the extremely important theologian and religious figure in American history, Roger Williams, who is a Baptist. The Baptists are the single largest Protestant denomination in the United States; one fourth of all Americans are Baptists of one kind or another. Baptists are usually thought of as among the more conservative of evangelical or born-again Christians, but as Roger Williams' role in the history of the church indicates, Baptists have historically long believed in church-state separation. In fact, they have been our firmest believers in it.

Many people believe that the separation of church and state was written into the American Constitution by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, who were Enlightenment figures whose personal religiosity was a form of deism, a kind of soft, liquid religion according to



which God sets the world in motion but then retires to the sidelines. And it certainly is true that you can read in the writings of Jefferson and Madison sceptical ideas about established religions. Historians point out that of the first six presidents of the United States, not a single one of them was a conventional Christian. They included deists like Jefferson and Madison, and John Adams, a follower of Unitarianism, which denies the Trinity. James Monroe, our sixth president, was probably as close to an atheist as one can find. Clearly, the United States emerged in this era of the Enlightenment, and the separation of church and state is part of that. I often say that if the United States had been found thirty years earlier, or thirty years later, it would be a very different country. This is because thirty years earlier was the first great awakening of Jonathan Edwards, thirty years later was the second great awakening of John Wesley and the Methodist church. We happened to found our country right smack in the middle between those two awakenings, fortunately in my view. Nonetheless, while there is certainly a lot of truth in the idea that the United States was founded as a reflection of the Enlightenment, Jefferson would not have been able to assemble a majority for his particular view of God, even back then. He required the support of deeply devout, religious believers. And, fortunately, one of Jefferson's closest friends and strongest political allies was the greatest Baptist thinker of his time, a direct descendant in this regard of Roger Williams, a man named John Leland, who in Roger Williams' fashion argued that separation between church and state was good for religion. That separation between church and state protects the faithful against the interventions of government, just as Jefferson believed that separation prevented religion from influencing government too much.

Separation between church and state came to the United States because sceptics have supported it as well as deeply devout Protestants. In fact, from a Protestant perspective, separation of church and state was another word for Protestantism, which meant church-state establishment was another word for Catholicism. Separation was thus tied to the fact that the United States had so few Catholics in the country, except in the state of Maryland. And naming a state after Mary was in itself an abomination. But with the exception of Maryland this was a thoroughly Protestant country and separationism in

that sense came fairly easy. Now, it is true that there has been some falling back on that ideal, including among the Baptists. Almost nobody knows this but in 1973, when the United States Supreme Court issued its famous decision in *Roe vs. Wade*, granting a woman the right to abortion, the Southern Baptist convention, the most conservative Protestant denomination in America, supported the Court's decision. Part of the reasoning here was that since Catholics were opposed to abortion so Baptists would inevitably be for it. In addition, Baptists believed even as late as 1973 that if the state could tell a woman what she could do with her body, it could also tell men and women what to do with their minds. This basically libertarian idea that you come to your own decisions in order to reach what is best for you, and that that is between you and your God, is so essential to Baptist history, that you can understand why the Southern Baptist Convention supported a libertarian decision that was critical of government in 1973. Ten years later they were totally opposed, they changed their minds, they issued an apology, and became leaders of the anti-abortion movement. But we are increasingly hearing echoes of the earlier tendencies among conservative believers, the tendency that if you are a Protestant Christian, if you are a born-again Christian, it is wrong to stray from the principle of separation between church and state. Catholics, by the way, since Vatican II, have also adopted the principle of separation between church and state. They were lead in this matter by a very prominent American Catholic priest named John Courtney Murray. So Catholics have finally, after many years, come around to endorsing the same principle.

I won't continue with this point for much longer, but I'll tell you that just the other day, I was asked by a local paper, the *Boston Globe*, what in your opinion was the most important thing that happened in 2006. Some people will say, "the Red Sox didn't win the World Series," but what I will say is the moment a couple of weeks ago when Rick Warren, a very prominent Baptist Minister and evangelical Christian, invited senator Barack Obama to his church on World AIDS day to speak about the struggle against AIDS. The fact that such a prominent Baptist figure would invite a Democratic senator, and a Democratic senator who is a known supporter of a woman's right to choose, really is an enormously significant development. It signals

that Rick Warren, a man whose book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, has sold 25 million copies, and who is the most prominent evangelical preacher in America, knows that the Baptist over-involvement with politics has been bad for his religion. And he is reaching out, now in bipartisan fashion, to suggest very strongly that he no longer views himself as a client of the Republican Party. Furthermore, I think that this is increasingly the trend among serious religious thinkers in the United States. So, separation between church and state is alive and well, and it is alive and well because it serves religion. We are a very religious country, but we are also a country that in my view is never going to go back to a theocracy, because separation is built into our culture. It is too powerful.

Secondly, and again Hans Joas touched upon this briefly in his talk, a theocracy means that we would establish government by religion. But there is an immediate problem in the United States if you tried to do that, and that is: which religion would you choose? The most significant fact about American religion, and it is a fact that has been true since the very founding of the United States, is that no religion has ever been a majority religion in the United States. Never, not once, not in any period of time, have a majority of Americans belonged to one religion. We do not include a religious question on the census. We used to include such a question, but the Supreme Court threw that out at the turn of the twentieth century, and the Court argued, I think quite rightly, that it was wrong for government to ask people personal confessional questions. That would have the aura of oppression around it, if an official representative of the government can knock on the door and say: 'oh, by the way, what is your religious faith?' So we don't include a religious question on the census, and I gather that you don't either in Holland. Canada does, different countries have different experiences, and France of course does not. Hence we don't really know, exactly and precisely, who belongs to which religion. We use data that is compiled from surveys and compiled by churches themselves. But nonetheless everyone who studies American religion agrees that the single religious denomination in the United States is the Catholic Church. Actually 25 percent of Americans is Catholic. The second largest denomination is the Southern Baptist Convention with about 22 percent of Americans. The Meth-

odist church, which both George W. Bush and Hillary Clinton belong to, is about 20 percent, and the list extends down to the Jews who are 2 percent. One quarter of Americans belongs to the largest religious denomination, and that has been true for at least well over a hundred years. Estimates from the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century suggest that the Catholic/Baptist population was almost identical in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to how it is now. So if you were to establish a religion, which one would it be? You can't really establish any one religion.

I think that this state of affairs has all kinds of consequences for arguments about the relationship between religion and politics, because it means that even though we have so many different religions, every single religion in America has one thing in common and that is: every single religion in America is a minority religion. You have large minority religions, and small minority religions, but every religion knows what it means to be in a minority. And being in a minority conveys a certain kind of similarity. If you are in a minority, you always have to face the question of being different from the majority. And that, I think, has an enormous impact upon what happens to a religion in the United States. One example I frequently use is that, as we know in this terrible, tragic situation in the Middle East, we have religious war, certainly between Israel and its neighbours, wars that are fuelled by religious hostility, and religious hatred. In the United States, what is so striking within our country is the extent to which Jews and Muslims share so much, because they are both minority religions in a predominantly Christian country. So although they may be at war elsewhere in the world, they have all kinds of things they need to tell each other in the United States. For example, if you are a Muslim and you cannot find halal food, is kosher food then acceptable? The answer, by the way, is yes; it is acceptable.

Jews and Muslims also have to deal with the fact that a large number of conservative members of both religious faiths emerge out of situations in which women and men were treated differently in houses of worship. But laws and social norms in the United States require a commitment to gender equality. How do you negotiate the history of your own religious tradition with the norms of the new society?

Well, Jews and Muslims will frequently come together and say: here's how we deal with this, and here's how we deal with that. Their minority status is what in fact gives them a great deal in common. How do you pray in a workplace environment? How, if you are a Jew or a Muslim, do you respond to what is happening in the Air Force Academy? I raise this question because the lawsuit against the Academy was brought by a Jewish graduate of the Academy whose son was studying to be a cadet. Jews and Muslims antagonistic outside the United States are by their minority status brought together inside the United States. So the fact that all religions in America are minority religions seems to me to strike against any dangers of a return to a theocratic situation in which one religion becomes the major religion.

This example of Jews and Muslims suggests a third and in some ways even more important reason why we will not be establishing a theocracy any time soon. And that is because in my view, you can study religion by looking at its sacred texts, by looking at its laws, by looking at what religious leaders say about it, or you can study religion by looking at the actual practices of ordinary people in the course of their actual lives. There has been a tremendous resurgence in the social sciences, in sociology and anthropology and to some degree in political science of what scholars call lived religion. This is the study of religion as it is actually practiced by real people, which means that you don't focus on the sacred texts, you don't focus on the clergy, you don't focus on the doctrines; you focus on what happens to people when they go to church, as opposed to what the clergy say in church. And the picture that has emerged from this burgeoning literature on religion and practice or lived religion is a picture that would give great discomfort to anyone who thinks that we can re-establish a theocracy in the United States. And that is because religion in practice looks entirely different from religion in theory. In theory, religion seems to entail the claim that if my religion is true then yours must be false. But this commitment to a one, true faith is not the way most Americans think about their religion. They may love their particular religion, but try suggesting, say to a Catholic, that somebody from a different faith tradition, say a Jew, will never be saved and will therefore go to hell. There is always a pause and some awkwardness, and then they will say, 'oh no, some of my best friends are Jewish'. Something like that will ordinarily be the response.

This situation is a difficult thing to negotiate if you are a religious leader. If you are a born again Christian, you really do believe that a born again relationship with Jesus is the only way to salvation. That is at the core of what you do. Everything you do follows from that. If you didn't believe that, you wouldn't be who you are. But what about the people in your pews? Are they just going to go out and share that sentiment when the corporations they work for are filled with people that come from different traditions, and the country clubs that they belong to are filled with such people; it is an entirely different world for them, and I think that this is a major difference between leaders and average people.

A religion in theory is about creeds; it is about theologies. I sometimes say, and you might find this helpful, that you always hear that America is the most religious country among the rich liberal democracies. That is true. But it is the least theologically minded among all the major liberal rich countries. There isn't much theology in America, there isn't much teaching of theology, there isn't much interest in theology. Theologies and creeds and doctrines just simply are not part of what people experience when they experience religion. Since I am speaking in an environment so strongly influenced by Calvinism, I should mention that Calvinism's single largest religious denomination in the United States is the Presbyterian Church, not the Christian Reform church which originally came from Holland, but the Presbyterian Church which came from Scotland. If I were to talk to Americans who belong to Presbyterian churches, and say: Hey, there used to be this guy named John Calvin, and he believed in this idea called predestination, in fact he actually believed in something he called double predestination, and this means that whether you are going to heaven or to hell is entirely out of your hands. In other words, nothing you do will influence God in any way whatsoever. And I say this to people in the Calvinist churches. And they say: well, I don't believe that! In fact, they say: no one could ever believe that! This situation arises because the idea of predestination is so alien, so foreign to the way Americans think about things. They think that going out and doing good things in the world will increase your chance of salvation. They think that being a good neighbour, not beating up your spouse, and being nice to your children will make God look

favourably upon you. Of course, Calvin didn't actually believe that. His position was that God's authority is so capricious and so arbitrary that even someone who is beating up his child could conceivably be someone who God had selected for salvation. But for most American Presbyterians that is absolutely impossible. And these are the people who claim to have some commitment to doctrine! This point may also explain why so many Lutherans in America believe that Martin Luther was a great civil rights leader, who died unfortunately by an assassin's bullet. And it is perhaps why ten percent of Americans believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife.

I know that you all hear that Americans are bible readers. That may be true, but biblical knowledge in the United States is about at the same level as political knowledge. A recent poll of people between the ages of 18-21 asked them which party controlled Congress. Now 50 percent will get that right on the basis of random selection, but 40 percent got it right. So political knowledge is not exactly high. Biblical knowledge is roughly at the same level, as we witnessed during some of our presidential campaigns. You may recall that Howard Dean, who was a candidate for President, thought that the book of Job was in the New Testament. That really didn't count against him since not many people could have identified which Testament it was in.

In practice, then, American religion is really about the heart. It is about emotion, feeling, and identity. It is about being 'spiritual.' I realize that when I tell some of these stories it may come across that I am being contemptuous about the fact that people don't know their own traditions. I don't mean to be contemptuous at all; I mean to be analytic and descriptive. I am describing a religion of feeling. I am trying to explain, for example, why so many Americans are born into one religion but migrate to another one in the course of their lifetime, why, roughly speaking, 25 percent of Hispanic Americans are now evangelical and Protestant rather than Catholic, the religion in which they were raised. I am showing why even people within Protestant traditions change one to another.

If religion is that liquid, to use Wim van de Donk's term, it too works against the establishment of any kind of theocracy. It actually

promotes a considerable amount of toleration. I describe American religious switching as a moral insurance policy. It works this way. You might be thirty and belong to religion A, but you have no idea what religion you will belong to when you are sixty because at thirty you belong to a different religion than the one you had at age fifteen. Consequently, any negative comments that you may make about a religion may be about the one you are going to join someplace down the road. There is also the unpredictability of what religion your future spouse might be, or even what religion your child's spouse might be. Americans love marrying. And you don't know whom the next person coming into your life in one way or another is going to be. In this kind of fluid environment, I think we have thin rather than thick religions, and I am sure that for many theologians this is very disturbing. When I give a talk like this in churches, the reaction I will very often get from the theological community, from the clergy, is that I am describing a very depressing thinning out of religion; their preference, of course, would be for a thicker sense of religious identity. For a theologian, that may very well be understandable. But I am not a theologian; that is not my business. I see the thinning out as indeed taking away from a certain kind of seriousness about religion, but at the same time adding a great deal of practical benefits for the problem of managing societies in highly pluralistic periods.

So, I have given you three reasons for my thesis that there is no new theocracy emerging in the United States, even though we may be witnessing a burgeoning of religion: first, there is the vibrancy of the separation between church and state; second, there is the fact of religious pluralism in the United States that tends to prevent any one religion from becoming ascendant; and, third, there is the way in which religion is practiced in the United States that tends to encourage the toleration of all religions rather than the ascendancy of any particular one religion. Many people say that since the United States has already had three great awakenings, that this period with the rise of the religious right, represents a fourth great awakening. I don't. The religious right is definitely significant. In my view, however, it is not the result of some new religious outbreak among people. I actually view it as a political development, and I view its leading figures such as Pat Robertson and Jerry Fallwell as primarily political figures. It is a



movement that grew out of an opportunity that both the Republican Party and some conservative political activists saw to use religion to gain political power. Thus it doesn't have that much to do with faith, and I would not interpret it as the emergence of a new great awakening in the United States.

I don't particularly like it when people use religion to promote their political ideology, but it does have one benefit. It does encourage participation in a democracy. Everyone is entitled to express their views, to organize themselves, and conservative Christians are entitled to their views on gay marriage, abortion, and anything else; let them come out, let them be in the political system, let them argue it out. And what has happened is fascinating. Over the thirty years when they have done that, more and more people, including more and more Christians and conservative Christians, have recognized that if you change your mind about abortion between 1973 and 1984, God can't possibly have changed his mind over that period, so it really is a political movement. And, as a political movement, it is subject to the same kind of criticism to which all other political movements are subject. There is no special sacred status that a group gets by clothing its political language in the language of God. Of course, they do that: they say that if you attack us then you are anti-religion. But, in fact, once it is politics, attack and offence are perfectly proper. I have to leave it to you if there are any implications of what I have said for Europe and for its particular situation.

## NOTES

- 1 For a much fuller statement on these reasons, see my introduction to: Hans Joas/Klaus Wiegandt (eds.), *Säkularisierung und die Weltreligionen*. Frankfurt/Main 2007, pp. 9-38.
- 2 On these questions of European identity see my introduction to: Hans Joas/Klaus Wiegandt (eds.), *Die kulturellen Werte Europas*. Frankfurt/Main 2005, pp. 11-39. (An English translation of this volume will be published by Liverpool University Press in 2008.)
- 3 For a more detailed argument see Hans Joas, Max Weber and the 'Origins of Human Rights: A Study of Cultural Innovation', in: Charles Camic et al. (eds.), *Max Weber's 'Economy and Society'. A Critical Companion*. Stanford, Cal. 2005, pp. 366-382.
- 4 See, for example, Giacomo Marramao, *Die Säkularisierung der westlichen Welt*. Frankfurt/Main 1996.
- 5 José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago 1994.
- 6 For an intense plea not to see Weber as a secularisation theorist, cf. Joachim Vahland, Entzauberung. Max Weber und seine Interpreten, in: *Kant-Studien* 90 (1999), pp. 410-433.
- 7 New York Times, February 25, 1968.
- 8 Rodney Stark, 'Secularisation', R.I.P., in: *Sociology of Religion* 60 (1999), pp. 249-273.
- 9 For a more detailed discussion see my book "*Braucht der Mensch Religion?*" Freiburg, Herder Verlag, 2004, to be published in English translation as "*Do We Need Religion?*" in the Yale Cultural Sociology series, Boulder, Co., Paradigm Publications.
- 10 On the religious situation in the US (with bibliographical references) see Hans Joas, 'Die religiöse Lage in den USA', in: Joas/Wiegandt (eds.), *Säkularisierung*, pp. 312-328.
- 11 C. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 178—1914*. Oxford 2004, pp.325-365.
- 12 Gabriel Le Bras, 'Déchristianisation': mot fallacieux, in: *Social Compass* 10 (1963), p. 447.



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