The Disintegration of Christianity: Catholicism and Protestantism

La Desintegración del Cristianismo: Catolicismo y protestanismo

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Abstract

This paper explores cultural conflicts that marked the disintegration of Christianity under the challenges of various Reformation movements. The protestant reformation proposed a new age based on the liberation of conscience and emancipation from tradition. It would cause unprecedented social turmoil, where new religious freedoms required protection by means of secular coercion. The subsequent confessionalisation of territories proliferated new cultural models with the pretension to toleration but also increased the likelihood of civil war. Lastly, Reformation movements would create quasi-religious ideologies of chosen nations based on world-immanent perceptions of time. This essay ends with a reflection on the ambivalence of the Christian foundations for the collectivist and individualist radicalism of secular movements.

Keywords: Cultural Models, Catholicism, Reformation movements, Protestantism.

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Resumen

Este artículo explora los conflictos culturales que marcaron la desintegración del cristianismo bajo los desafíos de varios movimientos de Reforma. La reforma protestante propuso una nueva era basada en la liberación de la conciencia y la emancipación de la tradición. Causaría una agitación social sin precedentes, donde las nuevas libertades religiosas requerían protección por medio de la coerción secular. El posterior proceso para dotar de un carácter confesional a los territorios produjo nuevos modelos culturales con pretensiones de tolerancia, pero también aumentó la probabilidad de guerra civil. Por último, los movimientos de Reforma crearían ideologías casi religiosas de naciones elegidas basadas en percepciones del tiempo inmanentes al mundo. Este ensayo termina con una reflexión sobre la ambivalencia de los fundamentos cristianos para el radicalismo colectivista e individualista de los movimientos seculares.

Palabras-clave: Modelos culturales, catolicismo, movimientos de Reforma, protestantismo.

1. Christianity as a Cultural Model

To apply the notion of cultural wars to religion is not self-evident. The promise of redemption in monotheistic religion has its focus on transcendence, not the immanent social and cultural reality. Christianity's key promise of salvation rests on faith in the incarnated Christ and his self-sacrifice for the redemption of a sinful humanity. In order to secure cultural hegemony of faith permanently, such promises of salvation need to become part of tradition by means of cultural habits and symbolic boundaries. Covenants of the People of God are bound territorially and sustained politically. In this sense religious faiths have a secular foundation[2]. Christianity, for instance, could only become a permanent cultural model after it acquired the status of state religion in the late Roman Empire during the fourth century[3]. After persecutions of early Christians under emperors Decius and Diocletian in the third century AD, the fourth century brought an unexpected and profound turnaround. Emperor Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313 AD granted toleration and religious freedom to Christians who could leave their underground existence. By the end of the fourth century, emperor Theodosius made Christianity the official religion

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[2] The etymology of *saeculum* signified originally the lives of children born in the first year of a city's existence and later came to mean age, generation, or century; it stands in contrast not to religion but to eternity.

[3] Paul Veyne, *Quand notre monde est devenu chrétien,* Paris, Albin Michel, 2007.

of the Roman Empire. Before the fourth century, the religious hierarchy of early Christianity and hierarchies of the Roman Empire had been two entirely separate, often antagonistic, entities. Now, the two dimensions, secular and spiritual, would gradually become merged into an emerging body norms and conventions. Imperial support allowed Christian orators, bishops, and lower clergy and the erudite class of specialists of scripture to occupy the central areas of political discourse that previously had been reserved to educated pagan elites[4]. On the practical level, theological interpretations of faith culturally permeated the political secular frame. The cultural impact of Christianity was most widely and commonly felt in the way it structured secular time. Between the fourth and ninth centuries, the clergy elaborated the liturgical structure of the year, the Church calendar. Every single day had a meaning, showing the Church's will to bind humans and God by a continuous ritual engagement. The alliance of spiritual with temporal power of the time would redefine material culture and the urban landscape as well as locate worship inside exuberant monumental structures of Roman imperial architecture[5].

The impact on contemporaries was considerable. The Christian thinker Eusebius saw Constantine as an "imitation of God himself", who frames his earthly government in conformity with God's monarchy[6]. The growing influence of a political model –the empire– on theology would turn God, so to speak, into the emperor's double. Against Eusebius, however, St Augustine rejected the idea that God's purpose could be realized within the boundaries of earthly life and secular history[7]. Writing decades after Eusebius and confronted with the shockwaves that the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410 sent across the Christian world, St Augustine had to grapple with the fact that the cultural model of Christianity could decline. Yes, Christianity's attractiveness to Constantine was its hierarchal model based on one God, centralized papal authority, and canonical law. Nevertheless, the Roman empire faced fragility and collapse. All this provoked questions whether the pagan gods would have protected the eternal city better than the Christian God. Portraying the *saeculum* as a sinister thing, St Augustine distinguished between two spheres, the city of man and the city of God. His key point was that only the Church, not secular power, can represent the spiritual destiny of man. Only if the secular realm was emptied of false divinities could the full splendour and grace of Christianity became the transcendent anchor that could, in turn, legitimate secular political entities. In the Middle Ages, the

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[4] Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1994, p. 4.

[5] John O'Malley, *Four Cultures of the West*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2006, pp.186–95.

[6] Michael Kirwan, *Political Theology: A New Introduction,* London, Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2007, p.57.

[7] St Augustine, *Vom Gottestaat (De civitate Dei),* Books 1-10, 4th ed. (München: Dtv, 1997).

juridical language of Roman law would help transfer the *arcana ecclesiae* to the state[8]. Such mysteries of state elevated monarchical rule into a realm of dignity independent of the personal worthiness of the king. The *translatio imperii* conferred both the spiritual and the secular tradition of Rome to what later was to become the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation.

Even though Rome made Christianity in Europe culturally hegemonic, the prophetic texts of revelation attributed to Jerusalem and Athens the role of carriers of spiritual messages that demanded from the faithful radical changes in life conduct and ethical norms. Obviously, this was an extraordinarily hard task. By no means could one expect that faith and doctrine would create an ethical life-conduct in all walks of life. Already the early Christians gave in to social pressures to abide by obligations to offer sacrifice to pagan gods in Roman society. Could such Christians atone for their errors or would they be forever excluded from the Church? Should the Church be a small group of selected with high ethical standards or a broad popular Church with less demanding yardsticks? The task for Christians was presumably harder than for pagans. In polytheistic Roman religion, ritual cults punctuated life through ceremonies, feasts, or sacrifice. Ritual was a practice performed from time to time in collective gatherings with specific purpose to sacrifice to God in order to achieve certain benefits[9]. On the contrary, monotheism fundamentally transformed the ritual focus from blood sacrifice to ethical life-conduct. Biblical prophets insisted that not only specific ritual acts but the entire life –a life in peace and justice– should be at God's service. Crucial biblical stories testify to such an evolution. Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac was aborted as a ram appeared which God told him to sacrifice instead of his son. Christianity would create yet another, and very different attitude, to sacrifice. In Christian faith, God sacrificed himself, making Christ the Saviour simultaneously the lamb that was slain by its persecutors. Becoming Christian would primarily require not the outward and occasional ritual sacrifice but to witness Christ by a life-long ethical attitude, including the readiness to martyrdom. The Christianisation of Rome was therefore less concerned with respect for Sunday mass or with missionary tasks than with the eradication of the increasingly repulsive animal sacrifice[10]. Although the façade of paganism was maintained until the end of the fourth century, the official adoption of the Christian religion in 325 enforced a policy against pagan sacrifice.

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[8] Ernst Kantorowicz Mysteries of State. An Absolutist Concept and its late mediaeval origins", *Harvard Theological Review*, 48, 1 (1955), pp. 65-91.

[9] See Assmann, *Totale Religion*.

[10] Paul Veyne, *Quand notre monde*…., pp.175-83.

2. The Disintegration of Christianity

2.1 Dramas of Faith

If by cultural war we understand the deliberate intent to replace a cultural model by another one (by means of lies, half-truths, propaganda or manipulation) religious faith has been a foremost vehicle by which values, principles, or beliefs were questioned. From the crusades to the "wars of religion" in early modern Europe to the "culture wars" during the nineteenth century and religious fundamentalism in the twenty-first century, issues of faith have determined fault lines in society. From the late Roman Empire to early modern Europe, Christendom's spiritual unity was culturally held together despite sectarian movements and religious schisms. From the 14th century onwards, different reformation movements took issue with doctrine, liturgy, tradition, papal authority or the meaning of the Eucharist of the Catholic Church. Such reformation movements pretended bringing faith closer to the people, mainly through a turn towards individual justification through faith, not by means of grace or sacraments.

The conversion to a new faith is not the revelation of truth to individual beings but a forceful imposition of cultural hegemony on a society. Each form of covenant will be exposed to doubts, if not rebellion. The adoration of the Golden Calf made the Jews succumb to the fascination of an idol. In Jewish tradition, breaking the Covenant became an expression of guilt; equally, keeping the covenant was an expression of guilt. This ambivalence illustrates how spiritual commands can fail to control the instincts that may put one's own self above the awe and love one owes to God[11]. How to keep a covenant in the face of multiple temptations not to keep it? How to make sure that the community does not betray its own faith and loyalty? The creation of cultural models should be imagined as thresholds where subjectivities and aspirations are shaped across great drama, confusion, and despair[12]. Such limit situations create spiritual dramas and conflicting desires, something experienced also by nascent Christianity. The arrest and execution of Jesus created great anxiety and doubts amongst the disciples. The treason of Judas, Peter's denial, the doubt of Thomas, are indicators of this. Jesus's death could have become one more story in which it is rightful that the one has to die for the many, justifying the sacrifice of an innocent. Nevertheless, Christ's resurrection according to the Scriptures would imbue his followers with a steadfast belief in his second coming.

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[11] Rieff, Philip, *Charisma,* New York, Vintage Books, 2008.
[12] Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, Harald Wydra, *Breaking Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality,* New York, Berghahn, 2015.

The breakdown of a unified Christendom[13] was a genuine in-between condition *(Zwischenlage)* in which not only conceptions of faith, human will, sin, and grace but also fundamental notions of the public changed meaning[14]. The Reformation was a multi-layered set of movements over several centuries and wide geographical areas. Amongst its multiple centres and sources of inspiration one can include Hussitism in Bohemia during the fifteenth century, the Lollardy movement under John Wycliffe in England as well as reform councils of the Catholic church, and reform-minded clerics. Within the Holy Roman Empire the consequences reached into the 17th century. The War of Thirty Years, for instance, started as a conflict between the Catholic emperor and a Protestant prince over the succession in the crown of Bohemia. Initial toleration of Protestants in France, granted by the Edict of Nantes of 1598, would be revoked in 1685 by the Edict of Fontainebleau. The very term Protestantism has not primarily a theological but a political meaning. Six princes protested against the Edict of Speyer of 1529 in which the emperor revoked concessions made to Luther and declared him a heretic. Protestantism was not a united movement which would have assembled ideological forces, propagandistic myths, or outright lies to combat Catholic faith, doctrine or identity. Martin Luther was not consciously modern, set to destroy the spiritual order of Christendom. He should be considered as being "at the limits", a mediating link at the borderline between the declining medieval and the emerging modern world. In the eighth century, he might have become a St Boniface and in the eleventh century a Gregory[15]. The age of the Reformation was a transitional period, full of errors and misconceptions.

A famous indication for such an error is Nietzsche's claim that Luther's zeal entirely misunderstood the essence of the Renaissance. For Nietzsche, the Renaissance put into the foreground the noble, i.e. the counter-values to Christian values. Luther, on the contrary, in his short-sighted egoism only saw the corruption of the papacy and not the evidence: not Christianity sat on the papal chair but the triumph of life. For Nietzsche, Luther was a German monk with "vengeful instincts of an unsuccessful priest who in Rome revolted against the Renaissance"[16]. He failed to understand what was happening – namely that Christianity was being overcoming at its very centre by a humanist revolution – the only that it nurtured was his hatred.

Be it as it may, Luther underwent spiritual dramas as he grappled with ways to cope with sinful passions. The term *reformatio*, for instance, had a

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[13] Of course, taking into account the schism between Catholic and Orthodox Christianity in 1054.

[14] Carl Schmitt, *Ex captivitate salus.* 2nd edition, Berlin, Duncker&Humblot, 2002, pp. 70-3.

[15] Johann B. Müller, *Die Deutschen und Luther, Texte zur Geschichte und Wirkung*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1983, pp. 177-8.

[16] Friedrich Nietzsche, Der Antichrist, in: *Werke II*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997, pp. 1233-34.

double meaning. It evoked a renewal of Church institutions and religious faith but also the backward orientation towards recovering the old, original form of Christian faith. Luther and Calvin were both profoundly influenced by St Augustine. In the early fifth century AD the Bishop of Hippo witnessed the steep decline of the Roman empire. Similarly, the reformers aimed to remedy a dissatisfying, unbearable, and corrupted present. They had their eyes on the future but primarily invoked the mysticism of a deep past, a Golden Age. The hope was that the return to the origins of scripture, facilitated by their mass-printed translation into vernacular language, would renew faith against a corrupted and sinful reality. Such return to the roots was presented as a new age with new truths and the liberation of conscience. Being children of their times, leading reformers were confident regarding their individual capacities. They were more sceptical of divine grace and confidence in the Holy Spirit, arguing that human sin would be unredeemable other than by the power of will and faith. Whilst his teacher St Augustine had established the City of God as a beacon for the City of Man, Luther separated the temporal order of violence from the realm of love, generosity, and peace. His doctrine of two kingdoms would submit conscience to the will of secular princes. The demise of a unified Church would therefore mark the transition from sacred grace and a sense of transcendence towards the idea that one's mind is the origin of one's relationship towards higher beings[17]. The unprecedented subsequent social turmoil and public disorder would accelerate the demise of Christian culture.

Underneath the struggles for particular paths of reformation tectonic cultural shifts appeared. Such cultural shifts occurred along three axes of orientation around which the Christian model would disintegrate, producing rivalling fundamentalist streams. Paradoxically, the liberation of conscience subjected individuals to the discipline of confessional states. The disintegration of Christianity would spiritualise notions of enemies but it also would make immanent history the goals of redemption that increasingly were in the hands of secular carriers. Reformers proposed ideological truths of a new age, which would become the foundation of symbols and doctrines that instructed people to save themselves within the drama of history.

2.2. Conscience by Coercion

The Reformation's key goal was to emancipate human consciousness and individuality. It would – a century before Descartes – shift the sacred from the impersonal and transcendent to the personal conscience of individuals. The ultimate end of reformers might well have been a renewal of the sacred in a purer form. But by making this move, they would create a rebellion

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[17] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2007.

enhanced by human egocentrism and the will of the human self. Luther did not perform a dogmatic error. As Jacques Maritain, a Catholic philosopher, put it: "Lutheranism is not a system worked out by Luther; it is the overflow of Luther's individuality"[18]. The liberation of conscience from Catholic tradition was predicated on an alliance between individual conscience and secular power. Paradoxically, such emancipation required external discipline and coercion. The disputes in matters of faith would create a high degree of public unrest, social turmoil and disorder of the German lands. Luther looked to the protection by secular government as a major cohesive force with coercion and repression, not Christian virtue in the centre. Legislating in spiritual matters required external discipline imposed by secular authorities. Jean Calvin greatly admired the German reformer and demonstrated this with his reverence towards key theological doctrines. But the experiential basis of their theological journey was very different according to the territory and political circumstances. Luther enjoyed princely protection throughout his later life. Calvin fled his native France and established himself – at the second attempt – in the city of Geneva. Unlike Luther, Calvin produced a "political theory of church government" aimed to carry Protestantism into the territories that had resisted the early waves of conversion[19]. Yet another path was taken in England. The English Act of supremacy of 1534, promulgated by King Henry VIII. can be seen as a quite desperate attempt to "solve" the spiritual iron fist from the papacy Henry's goal was not spiritual renewal or revision of religious doctrine but rather personal power interests and control over the Church's properties and assets. It has been amply shown that the late medieval Church was not degenerate or superstitious, as claimed by the dominant Whig interpretation. Rather than a liberation from superstition, degeneration, or corruption, the English Reformation "dug a ditch, deep and dividing, between the English people and their past"[20]. Protestantism was a rejection, a negation of Pope, the Mass, relics, and saints, a "no" to medieval religion. It was less an institutional or doctrinal transformation but rather a ritual one, a "stripping of the altars". In spite of well-anchored practices and rituals that pervaded local beliefs as well as social and economic life, English Protestantism was carried by key figures in the English state who pursued such a course also in pursuit of hard economic interests. The long-term changes came due to alterations to religious practices, the removal of feast and Saints days, the abolition of monasteries, and the physical changes to religious spaces. Without the invention of the book print it would be unimaginable that the Reformation could spread across Europe within one generation.

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[18] Jacques Maritain, *Three Reformers. Luther, Descartes, Rousseau, Providence,* RI, Cluny, 2020 [1944], p.11.

[19] Harald Wydra, *Politics and the Sacred*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 79.

[20] Eamon Duffy*, The Stripping of the Alters*, 2nd edition, Yale University Press, 2005.

Continental Europe may not have followed the English path of Caesaropapism. Still, with the confessionalisation of territories, populations would become bound to the religious identity of their rulers. The Religious Peace of Augsburg in 1555 proclaimed that the secular ruler's faith would become the dominant faith of its subjects *(cuius regio, eius religio)*. Thus, the *ius reformandi* was endowed to the secular rulers of territories. For dissenters and those for dissenters and those who rejected forced conversion, only the *ius emigrandi* remained as a possibility. Thus, zealous reformers distorted St Augustine's fundamental distinction according to which only the Church, not secular power can represent the spiritual destiny of man. The new inner-worldly piety could spread with the help of the secular princes who adopted and defended their protestant religious identity. Sweden, for instance, entered the Thirty Years' War mainly on grounds of defending its religious identity[21]. In seventeenth-century Netherlands, "confessionalisation stimulated the development of mass vernacular cultures that were neither local nor fully European; it helped to create the cultural homogeneities that nationalism would later mythologise and extol"[22]. The Dutch state applied prescriptions of Calvinist faith to schools, orphanages, prisons, or workhouses. Here, the focus was on local institutions, which proved to be no less effective than absolutist states in the purpose of uniformising its citizens. Thus, Reformed Protestantism entered into the concrete life worlds of people in different territories. Calvinist-inspired teachings are often seen as an elitist religion with a set of predestined spiritual leader but the cultural imposition would soon create a unified popular conscience.

2.3 Confessionalism

Subordinating conscience to coercion, confessional states became the carriers that would break apart the spiritual authority that had existed beforehand. With the adoption of Christianity, the Roman empire became the defender of orthodoxy and dogma against sectarian and infidel versions of the revelation. Whilst the Old pre-Constantine Church knew interrogations of heretics before synods, it was the Edict of Thessaloniki (*Cunctos populos)* in 380 AD, an act of secular jurisdiction by emperor Theodosius I, which defended the equality of one deity in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This Edict grounded the faith of Catholic Christians in the Trinity and would discredit its detractors. Official secular authorities –following papal or ecclesiastical authorization– could punish heretics by means of confiscating property,

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[21] Erik Ringmar, *Identity, Interest and Action: A Cultural Explanation of Sweden's Intervention in the Thirty Years' War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

[22] Philip Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution Calvinism and the Rise of the State in Early Modern Europe,* Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2003, p.163.

withdrawing citizens' rights or public office up to the death penalty. On the one hand, not-yet-converted pagans are excluded but can possibly be redeemed. On the other hand, not-any-more Christians are condemned as heretics. During the Reformation, the struggle against heretics would disrupt public at multiple fronts. Before the Reformation, the right to resistance against tyrants applied within a political order ruled by spiritual authority (*auctoritas and potestas spiritualis*). The right to resistance in public law was, therefore, originally not conceived as a means of waging civil war but rather to defend the authority of the Christian kingdom. Conversely, in the era of confessional states the right to resistance against tyrants –formerly part of a recognized and superior order of government– now became instrumentalized for waging civil war. When humanity replaced God as an autonomous last instance enmity could become cosmic, thus creating massacres amongst Christians[23].

The protestant reformation would yet be another instance of cultural wars that occurred in monotheistic religions early on. Religious unity cannot be primarily the deed of individual faith. It requires cultures that make the renunciation of instinct reliable and permanent. Already Ancient Judaism saw violent conflicts over truth, belonging, and fidelity. Judaism was multi-cultural and international. Abraham was from Ur in Mesopotamia, whereas Moses was raised as an Egyptian. There are strong reasons to assume that the Jewish people "learnt" monotheism from the Egyptian model established by Pharao Amenhotep IV (Echnaton) but after the Exodus merged such a tradition with more popular beliefs in their ancestral lands of Juda. We could distinguish inclusive and exclusive Monotheism. In the former, one could worship one God but still tolerate those who worship another god. In the latter, the faith in one God should be extended to everybody in a given territory or under the rule of one authority. As Jan Assmann has well shown, monotheism was imposed by means of a language of violence, hatred, and guilt, notably in the book Deuteronomy, where scenes of massacres, punishment, expulsions, and destructions are described in detail[24]. This monotheism of fidelity required the Israelites to purify their own settlements from those other peoples who could have contaminated them with false Gods. As Jewish religion demanded unquestionable loyalty to one God, dissenters within its own ranks had to eradicated. It is very plausible that the violence directed at the canaanites was most probably an attack against the own history of the Israelites, the pagan Jewishness[25]. The anti-canaanite movement rejects a part of one's own history as much as the anti-judaism of the New Testament aims to disqualify parts of one's own Jewish past. Therefore, the canaanites are those non-converted

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[23] Reinhart Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten*, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp, 2006, pp. 274-98.
[24] Jan Assmann, *Totale Religion*, 3rd edition, Wien: Picus Verlag (2018), 27-29.
[25] Assmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

in their own ranks who did not stay faithful to the covenant. It is interesting that cultures of the exodus tradition tended to legitimate their own violence by reference to the Book of Deuteronomy. Emperor Charles V received every evening the reading of Deuteronomy chapter 20, in order to calm his conscience.

Such puritanism of a unified faith resurged when Reformation movements multiplied suspicion against heretics. As Eric Voegelin argued, Reformation movements would become ideological programmes that would aim to achieve an eschatology here in the immanent world[26]. In practical terms, the liberation of conscience turned states into carriers of goals that had been secularized and divinized at the same time. The schism produced was not political but occurred at the level of culture, which confessionalisation the carrier for what would become "secular re-tribalisation"[27]. Theologically, the eschaton is shrouded in mysteries out of reach for humans and entirely in the power of God. Yet, the project of realising the kingdom of God on earth requires precisely such carriers. Rejecting tradition and proclaiming the truth required new gospels, such as Calvin's Institutes. In matters of faith, the spiritual leaders of the Reformation would grant little space for tolerance, not hesitating to use excommunication and even the death penalty for heretical claims. The case of Thomas Müntzer is well known but the more significant one may be Jean Calvin's vicious attack against Miguel Servet who was burnt as a heretic precisely because he felt compelled by his conscience to reject the doctrine of the Trinity.

The egocentrism of reformers failed to see that Catholicism was fully aware of the problems to keep the covenant. The core of religious practices are essentially about preserving peace and keeping violence under control. When he appeared to the disciples after his resurrection, Jesus said "Peace be with you". But he declared several times that he did not come to bring peace but that he would have brought the sword in a world full of unrest[28]. In the view of German writer Heinrich Heine, Catholicism understood that Christianity's idea of destruction of sensuality was too much in contradiction with human nature[29]. It could never be realized, so Catholicism amounts to a concordat between God and the Devil, between the spirit and matter. Whilst the spirit is all-mighty, matter can still exercise its rights in practice. By means of confession, atonement, and the widespread sale of indulgences at the time, the Church tolerated sensuality and evil desires but nevertheless reserved the final victory to the spirit. Even dread, violence, and suffering should keep us open towards the limits, in wonder and awe about one's finitude.

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[26] Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction*, Yale, Yale University Press, 1951.

[27] Quoted in Wydra, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

[28] See Matthew, 10, 34, Luke, 12:51, or Revelation 6:4.

[29] Heinrich Heine, *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland* (ed. By Joerg Sommermeyer), Berlin, Orlando Syrg, 2019, pp. 101-102.

Of course, temptations and sin were a reality but so was the Christian faith that had developed a culture that should tame human desires. The pre-reformation Christendom was not a model in the sense of an objective and systematic body of knowledge, doctrine, or planning. It could not be analyzed from "outside". Before the Reformation, Catholic cultural order encompassed all human activities, channelled human desires and dominated daily practices. St Augustine already recognized that humans desire intensely but such desires are goalless. Sooner or later they will encounter attractive models. Such models are not normatively good or underpinned by some good reason. Rather, these desires –without cause, reason, or guarantee of becoming reality– will become justified, they will be appropriated as one's own. Human sinfulness may cause despair and hopelessness but salvation may be ardently desired. Anthropologically speaking, from earliest infancy, human beings imitate others, following their looks, their actions, their touch. Such desire constitutes the basis of learning, cooperation, and community in young children but is nevertheless omnipresent in "rational" adults as well. People do not desire or strive for something because they judge it good. They are attracted by someone else, by their models, who mediates such desires. As Spinoza put it, "if we imagine that someone loves, desires or hates something we ourselves love, desire, or hate, we shall thereby love, desire or hate it with greater constancy"[30].

Of course, models are always changing. "External" models can be embodied by great religious leaders, artists, or politicians, who could become decisive for one's own life. The founders of religious movements, as Karl Jaspers put it, were those who set the yardsticks[31]. For St Augustine, the desire for the good should be focused on the City of God. Most often, however, models are more "internal" to a person's proximate environment, including parents, siblings, friends, teachers, fellow colleagues, or lovers. In the late Middle Ages, Christianity was not a privately chosen held belief that could or could not be practiced depending on certain decisions of individuals. It was a way of life into which most people were born, as the Church accompanied people from birth to death, regulating daily and weekly life by Sunday service and regular prayer but also marking the annual cycle by great feasts. Everything was, as Lucien Febvre has well shown, saturated by Christianity, from the cradle to the grave.[32] It was impossible to escape the omnipresence of churches, the sounds of their bells, the ceremonies, which regulated time and urban space but also dominated education and the personal and institutional rites of passage. Catholic religion, with indulgence and corruption, with the papacy and the Inquisition cast a spell even on the intellectuals of the time.

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[30] Baruch de Spinoza, *The Ethics* (ed. By Edwing Curley), London, Penguin, 1996, part III, proposition 31.

[31] Karl Jaspers, *Die massgebenden Menschen*, 10th edition, München and Zürich, Piper, 1988.

[32] Lucien Febvre, Le Problème de l'incroyance au XVIe siècle. La religion de Rabelais, Paris, Albin Michel, 2003, pp. 307-325.

2.4. The Immanence of Chosen People (Nations)

With the Reformation, new models would be proposed by confident individual reformers or –as in England– by a powerful state bureaucracy. Reformation movements turned attention away from the city of God towards secular forms of chosen people or redeemer nations. Jacques Maritain attributed the errors attributed the errors of the Reformation to their immanentism[33]. The reformers believed that liberty and spirit lie essentially in opposition to what is not the self. They thus breached the spiritual connection between what is within and what is without. Luther claimed that truth and life can only reside inside the human subject. Everything extrinsic to us comes down to the destruction and death of our interior. For modern Protestant individualism, the Church and the Sacraments impose things on ourselves from outside. They thus separate us from God. Luther thus rejected the tradition according to which the very quality of spiritual beings consists of not being confined to their own separate, autonomous being. In such tradition, human beings can grow and thrive by the being of what is not themselves. Conversely, the egocentrism of the focus of salvation towards faith alone, Luther rejected grace and charity, which could regenerate and justify man from within and attributed only to faith the power to justify a sinner's life.

Beyond the rejection of transcendence, desires for models could hark back to by-gone epochs. The Exodus in the Ancient Testament, for instance, stands for the collective founding experience of freeing the Jewish people who were selected to be worthy of God's grace. The chosenness of the Jews was not manifest in political power but rather in repeated extraordinary ordeals such as expulsion, exile, and persecution. Such a collective identity would create the idea of the Jewish nation but also determine their global history as an existence that always can be revoked[34]. With new political alliances and growth of power, the Judeo-Christian tradition underwent a cultural transformation, as the symbol of a "chosen people" became adaptable for earthly and immanent purposes. Confessional secular nations claimed a status of exceptionalism for themselves. The institutional hierarchy and the papacy made Catholicism the model but also the main rival. Protestant movements attacked the pope with invectives and slander. Their attack at the substance concealed that they imitated the form. When Henry VIII became the supreme lord of the Church and his daughter Elizabeth II reiterated the second Act of Supremacy to become the supreme governor, they broke most clearly with the Christian maxim to give to Cesar's what is Cesar's and to give to God what is God's. The Calvinist doctrine of predestination promoted the

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[33] Maritain, Three Reformers, op.cit. pp.36-39.
[34] Michael Wolffsohn, *Eine andere jüdische Weltgeschichte,* Freiburg/Breisgau, Herder, 2022.

idea of 'chosen people', both in England, the Netherlands, or in the United States[35]. Such a vision of a chosen people would be used in the spiritual fight with new enemies. As Germany ceased to be the center of Catholicism, the status of model (and rival, of course) would turn to Catholic Spain. The Puritan Reformation in the England of the mid-17th century not only led to a gruesome civil war but also launched a cultural programme of reformation of manners. Perhaps more importantly, Cromwell linked the fight against papal Spain to the very being of the nation. "Why, truly, your great Enemy is the Spaniard. He is a natural enemy (…) by reason of that enmity that is in him against whatsoever is of God (…) And the Spaniard is not only our enemy accidentally, but he is providentially so; God having in His wisdom disposed it so to be, when he made a breach with the Spanish Nation 'long ago'"[36].

Of course, the Reformation forced the Catholic Church to undergo an often painful process of introspection and self-criticism. The Council of Trent (1545-63) triggered an unprecedented process of doctrinal and ecclesiastical reform. The Roman Catholic Church would become intransigent to heresy and supportive of absolutist power structures. However, it also produced new forms of combative spirituality, often in the creation of religious orders but also in a burgeoning mysticism. In spite of such efforts, the spiritual control of the Church over salvation decreased. The confessionalization of Christianity would not only increase rivalry of cultural models but also transform conceptions of time. In the late Roman period, Christianity's prospect of salvation after life introduced a conception of the future by which progress was meant to be personal preparation for the second coming of Christ. Christianity's expectation of the second coming shortened time in the sense that the extra-historical, transcendent realm would be the natural barrier. Until the Middle Ages, therefore, the Roman Catholic Church "controlled" eschatological expectations. After all, the Church's grip on the meaning of time was held by a view on eschatology, the "science" of the last things.

With the confessionalization of states conceptions of salvation would progressively become turned towards an immanent and secular future.[37] Now, the Church's monopoly of interpreting salvation and preparing people for the second coming subsided. The Catholic Church could hardly contain prophetic impulses and their violent consequences. The liberation of conscience had another effect: the Church's unique power as a mediator and controller of anger subsided. Over centuries, the Church possessed the monopoly of the sacraments and their power on the conscience of people. For many faithful in the Middle

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[35] Nations that were dismembered and oppressed by foreign powers could consider themselves as "chosen". The Polish nation, for instance, became identified as the "Christ of Nations".

[36] http://www.olivercromwell.org/Letters_and_speeches/speeches/Speech_7.pdf (accessed 17 June 2022).

[37] Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1979, pp. 24-27.

Ages, the statue of a saint at a street corner would have been more efficient than a police man is today. In order to achieve salvation, one needed to be a faithful member of the Church and lead a humble and pious life. For centuries, the purgatory would be a threat scenario that made faithful abide by the fear to have to atone for the sins committed in the earthly life. Anger management, so to speak, depended on the fear of the purgatory, where sinners would be judged for sins committed in the earthly past. The trend towards the immanent would lead to the loss of control over visionaries and millenarian movements, which turned nations into carriers of religious meaning.[38] From the millenarian dreams of Müntzer to Calvin's political theology, true believers would demand unconditional commitment to doctrines[39]. Before the Copernican Revolution the promise of search for salvation meant shortening the remaining time on earth. Now, public authorities in confessional states increasingly controlled world-immanent social and political arrangements. Over time, they would also appropriate the interpretive authority of the end of times in the sense of control over the future in immanent and secular time. One such move was to understand secular periods as categories of the philosophy of history. Whilst Christianity promised salvation after life on earth, Hegel and Marx proposed either the civil state as the highest form of civil society or the revolution as an end state of social integration. Political entities in modern times would thus engage in comprehensive programmes of transformation of the natural and social world. Secular states would become the dominant cultural force that would order human existence and temporal structures of social existence. They replaced transcendence by ideologies of progress and world-immanent prognostics of future development.

Secular narratives have praised the separation of religion from the tasks of government. They claim that the modern state overcame the destructive potential of faith and conscience during the 16th and 17th centuries. Such secular narratives are not only historically wrong but also methodologically doubtful[40]. Surely, the confessionalization of temporal political orders would create regimes of toleration. In the Low countries, for instance, Catholic mass services would be officially forbidden but still would be tolerated. Still, the blind spot of such accounts is to overlook how secular nations would become carriers of redemption and religious zeal. A prominent example concerns the foundational spirit of the United States[41]. Whilst the revivalism of the Great Awakening may not have "caused" the American Revolution in any direct way,

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[38] Voegelin, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-114.
[39] Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millenium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists oft he Middle Ages*, 3rd edition, London, Oxford University Press, 1970.
[40] William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2009.
[41] Thomas S. Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution,* New York, Basic Books, 2010.

it certainly forged a visceral bond among Protestantism, anti-Catholicism, and liberty. The American resistance against the British empire on the grounds of taxation alone is not convincing without the idea that justifications for dissent relied on obedience to God's ultimate authority. Providential chosenness was the highest ideal that could justify the creation of a new nation[42]. According to Ernest Lee Tuveson, the US had become the "redeemer nation"[43]. This term includes elements such as "chosen nation; millennial-utopian destiny for mankind; a continuing war between good (progress) and evil (reaction)". This millennial-utopian idea held that Providence worked intimately through special nations, as God had entered secular history on the side of America. America's redemptive mission arose out of a "reversal of the Augustinian interpretation of history". In St Augustine's depiction of the two cities, the City of God was separate from the earthly realm, which promoted the view of human fallenness as a condition that mankind would always possess due to original sin. The chosen American nation was not confined to an otherworldly City of God, but rather became a people on earth chosen by God to fight worthy battles against evil. Their readiness to sacrifice for freedom would justify their own moral and civilizational superiority. This idea that Providence worked intimately through special nations meant that "God had re-entered secular history as a participant", a claim to which "a majority of the Trinitarian Protestants of the United States" adhered. It is no surprise that US expansionism is inherently tied to self-declared moral righteousness, which justified exceptional measures and acts of war and violence as "pre-emptive" and claiming "innocent domination"[44].

3. Conclusion

Nietzsche's famous claim that humans killed God can hardly refer to a conscious act of coordinated malice. Rather, it makes more sense to see it as a long process of increasing confidence over the control of instincts, desires, and passions. Here, the Reformation's influence on the cultural making of modern conscience was crucial. For Nietzsche, conscience as an organ of self-restraint is not God's voice in man but the growing consciousness of all the cruelty and violence produced by humankind. "*Wieviel Grauen ist auf dem Grunde aller Dinge*"[45]. It is not God's voice in man but the instinct of cruelty that weighs on the memory of one's own past. One came to one's sense ("*kam*

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[42] Harry Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation,* New York, Viking 2006.

[43] Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role,* Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1968, pp.vii-viii.

[44] Jon Pahl, *Empire of Sacrifice. The Religious Origins of American Violence,* New York, New York University Press, 2010.

[45] Nietzsche, *Genealogie der Moral*, *Werke II*, *op. cit*., pp. 802-803.

man endlich zur Vernunft") because past cruelties didn't stop hurting. Such conscience arises once states become more powerful and confident, when internal dangers subside. Conversely, this victory of conscience also created a rejection of historical tradition. To express this with an Augustinian analogy: Once the City of God was lost from sight, the City of Man split in many different fundamentalist positions. Whereas the Roman empire's adoption of Christianity emptied the world of secular Gods, the post-Reformation epoch would make proliferate a variety of secular gods. Christianity's inner demons and heresies took wrong turns and led to massacres, civil wars, and often absurd dogmatism. Such embattled forms of spirituality have accompanied Judaism, Islam and Christianity ever since the early modern period[46]. They selectively retrieve doctrines, myths, and practices of the past in order to defend themselves against enemies. Such struggles can be led from within liberal and modernist societies but also can be taken up by groups in different countries in order to combat the "evil West". They create countercultures which allow them to withdraw from daily life in society but also, like in terrorist acts, unleash a cosmic war.

Political modernity saw the hybris of totalitarian movements. Hitler's materialism recognized only the blind gravity of matter as moving forces, whereas Stalin's question of how many divisions the Pope had, illustrated his contempt for spiritual force. Such materialism and disregard of Europe's spiritual heritage could be seen as a rebellion against conscience. Pope John Paul II rightly recognized the double-edge heritage of western Europe. It possessed a much richer cultural heritage –of Christendom, civilisation, art, science, and progress– than the Eastern part of the continent. Yet, concomitantly, this western part also produced a rationalistic-technological civilisation that imagined and put into work a world that could work on the assumption that 'God didn't exist'. With Enlightenment thought, man became alone, alone as the source and creator of his own history and his own civilization[47]. With the Cartesian revolution "*Cogito, ergo sum"* did subordinate the concern for *esse* (being) to the concern for *ens cogitans* (a thinking existence). Man would be alone as someone who decides on what is good and what is evil, to act as if God did not exist. The creation would become an object and function of human consciousness. However, this egocentric and secular humanism does not mean that evil has won the game. The measurement for evil is always the good. The dilemma is that the good does not exist without evil and that the existence of evil requires justifications. Even the rejection of transcendent ideas of God will become the measure of defining the "good" and the "evil". The devil, according to Goethe is "*ein Teil von jener Kraft, die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft"*[48].

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[46] Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God, Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, London, Harper Perennial, 2000.

[47] Pope John Paul II, *Pamięć i tożsamość*, Kraków, Znak, 2005, pp.16-19.

[48] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, Act 1, Scene 3

The confessional age caused the disintegration of Christianity but its ambivalent heritage is that it also contributed to the cultural foundations of modernity. It prefigured the formation of national economies and, in some cases, of national unification in states. Bible translations in vernacular language became the cultural carriers for national languages. It was not the faithful to the Catholic dogma nor Christianity as a treasure of divine truth who fought successfully against the aberrations of faith and mistreatment of human beings. Enlightenment rationalism formulated the rights of man and of the citizen and the puritans became the major abolitionists against slavery. The fight of communist movements for equality and emancipation of the oppressed against the dictatorship of capitalist profit was caught up in blind materialism and violated human dignity. Still, it contained remnants of a morality based on Christian roots in the sense of its revolt against the exploitation of the human person. The evolution of human rights in the early twentieth century saw an unprecedented turn from initially very critical positions to the Enlightenment roots of human rights towards the embracing of "Christian human rights".[49] The attacks against the supremacy of secularism are many. Recently, Hans Joas took issue with Max Weber's thesis of disenchantment, arguing that the rejection of tradition and ritual by protestanism did not prevent individualism from defending moral values[50]. The push for individualism did not prevent the possibility of self-transcendence.

Undoubtedly, the push for democracy was inspired by protestant versions of Christianity. Tocqueville claimed that the Christian-based promise of equality would almost providentially lead to democracy. The Christian foundations of democracy as government by consent and not as the tyranny of the majority would maintain the fundamental distinction between the things that are Caesar's and those that are God's. Christianity here was less of a credo but a fermentation of social and political life[51]. Following the *Säkularisation* of 1803 in the Holy Roman Empire, a "second confessional age" opened up. Countries of mixed confession such as Holland, Germany or Switzerland would see renewed conflicts between secular authorities and Catholic renewal. Primarily Catholic countries such as Spain, France, Italy, or Austria saw conflict between more progressive Catholics and those who remained faithful to the papacy. The Catholic reaction in the German *Kulturkampf* during the nineteenth century is traditionally seen as backward-oriented and regressive in opposition to progressive secularism[52]. Yet, the renewal of tradition and purity of faith did not mean Catholicism was anti-modern. Rather, the Church needed

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[49] Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.
[50] Hans Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen*, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp, 2017.
[51] Jacques Maritain, *Christianisme et démocratie*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 2005, pp. 49-51.
[52] A purview of papal encyclicals in the second half of the nineteenth century demonstrates their deep anti-modern spirit. n particular, see the encyclical Cuanta Cura (1864), in which Pope Pius IX condemned some 80 heresies in a syllabus of errors; also the encyclical Humanum Genus (1884), in which Pope Leo XIII took issue with freemasonry, naturalism, and the separation of Church and State.

modes of organization, which could further centralisation over provincial and local forms of faith. Confessional conflict would broaden political participation because the secularization process required the articulation of more traditional goals in the public sphere and by democratic means. In a similar vein, it would revitalize popular piety, pilgrimage, local cults, or rosarial devotions but also the expansion of schooling among deprived social groups. As a social and cultural programme, New Catholicism relied on properly modern form of collective action, mainly through voluntary associations, newspapers, and mass demonstration[53]. In 1891, Pope Leo XIII's Encyclica *Rerum Novarum* of 1891 engaged the Catholic Church in the social question of the workers by advocating the formation of unions and the right to property but also by rejecting secular socialism. In the early 20th century, the revolt of the masses, as Ortega put it, would lead to what Pope Pius XI. called the scandal of workers coming into the orbit of radical ideologies. In addition, the mass member party of a Catholic type would soon emancipate itself from clerical control. In the case of the French radical movement *Action Française*, for instance, its leader Charles Maurras advocated for Catholicism as a factor of social integration but this utterly functional use of Catholicism would lead to his excommunication by Pope Pius XI.

The flip side of individual salvation is the emergence of fundamentalism[54]. Profane secular culture appears to be indifferent to faith, tradition, and a sense of the sacred. Conversely, waves of de-traditionalization have created new, immediate, and quite individualist access to religion. Contemporary access to religion has often been anti-intellectual, emotional, and often radical[55]. The resurgence of religion is, as Olivier Roy put it, "holy ignorance", anti-traditionalist in the sense of replacing traditional worship by expectations of purity, presented as ideological truth, uncompromising, and radical. Faith communities grow, so to speak, as if they were ignorant of the deeper cultural identities that hold societies together. Fundamentalist faith –through mobile and easily diffused cultural referents– can spread easily and be adopted as a matter of individual choice in places where they are detached from ethnic and national identities. Religious commitment, at least in the developed secular world, today seems to be strangely free from the culturally rich institutional, ideological, and social organization by lawmakers, states, and Church authorities. Thus, the legacy of Protestantism, so keen to liberate conscience and emancipate it from tradition, has perhaps obtained victory, albeit it might well be a pyrrhic one.

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[53] Christopher Clark, "The New Catholicism and the European Culture Wars" [in Christopher M. and Wolfram Kaiser (eds) *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003], p. 13.

[54] Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *Fundamentalisms Observed*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp. 814-482.

[55] Olivier Roy, *Holy Ignorance*, London, Hurst, 2010.

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