



— Issachar Project —

**THE SECULARISATION
OF POLITICS:
EVANGELICAL
RESPONSES**

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The secularisation of politics: Evangelical responses

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A word of background

This paper argues that all of Europe is impacted by the secularisation of politics directly and/or indirectly as nations react to it. References to the West are cultural rather than geographically subjective, and as such they would include all countries and continents where Western political values and practices are common, including some Central or Eastern European and also South American countries etc. Even in European countries with apparently strongly Christian polities such as Hungary or Poland, the reaction to the more secularist countries of the EU can be based on nationally construed ideas of Christianity rather than Christianity itself – which in turn simply reinforces the effect of secularism upon politics.

The post-secular century

Politics was once described by Groucho Marx as: ‘the art of finding trouble everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedies’. Even so, as the way in which we achieve government – the right ordering of our relational priorities – there is a strong and consistent biblical injunction for Christians to be interested and involved in politics. This is inspired by the abiding validity of the Old Testament calls for justice and mercy, and the need to speak truth to power, and by the New Testament fulfilment of the law in Christ and the call for His people to demonstrate the signs of His coming Kingdom. In all of this, Christians have sought to see government that reflects the heart of God and balances freedom and order.¹ This has been fleshed out over centuries with many twists and turns. Despite a number of grave errors along the way, the influence of the Bible on political thought, speech and action is unparalleled, and has provided the foundations for modernity upon which has been built the liberal democracy that we enjoy in the West today.²

However, lately politics has begun to experience a shaking, a disturbance to the assumptions and institutions that became prominent in the 20th century. In many countries, this is taking the form of established ideologies intensifying their core doctrine – parties of the left and right going further left or further right.³ In other places, it is taking new forms of campaigning and protest oriented politics. Emphasising a single, dominant issue or synthesising a range of diverse issues, this involves both the rise of minority voices bemoaning their oppression, and the rise of hitherto silenced majority voices bemoaning their neglect.

Commentators are divided on what this represents. To some, these phenomena are simply another phase in the endless cycles of liberal democracy. To others, they represent the emergence or re-emergence of more sinister forces. Although the

reality may be a combination of both, the problem is that the common features of this new politics are identity and anger – features which have historically played out badly in Europe.

Arguably, what is most important for evangelical Christians to understand is the distinctly secular nature of what is happening. After centuries of centralised power and privilege, Christianity was displaced in Western politics during the 20th century, especially in Europe. As the flowering of the Enlightenment,⁴ this was the century which began with the upheaval that led to the First World War and was proceeded by further wars and intellectual and political revolutions⁵ to establish a secular worldview as the default worldview in the Western world. As such, the 20th century was indisputably the secular century, and the profound effects of this great experiment in society, in politics and in the church are still being felt.

The former Chief Rabbi to the UK, Jonathan Sacks, described these effects as ‘Cultural Climate Change’ – a wholesale shift away from Judeo-Christian morals and virtues – with no idea of what to replace them with, but with an expectation that all will continue to enjoy the benefits of such values – the freedoms, virtues, securities and wealth that accompany them. As Tim Keller observed in his address to the 2018 National Prayer Breakfast in the UK Parliament, our secular Western societies now clearly ‘lack the resources needed to realise their high ideals.’⁶ This conditioned desire for people to want the good stuff, but not the God stuff is what Os Guinness has called ‘a cut-flower culture’: a way of life that is like flowers in a vase which, despite their beautiful appearance, are in reality cut off from their life-giving roots. Like these flowers, our culture is in the process of death. The West is wilting. As Meic Pearse identifies in his book ‘Why the Rest Hates the West’⁷, externally the culture is viewed with a combination of envy (for all our wealth and security) and loathing (for all our immorality and excess). The former Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks put it like this:

“We are suffering from Arteriosclerosis of culture – a civilisation grown old. We need to re-learn the moral disciplines of freedom.”⁸

Whether the form of secularism affecting Western societies is programmatic or procedural,⁹ it is important for evangelicals to, like the tribe of Issachar, understand the times and know what to do. (1 Chronicles 12:32) And also, perhaps more importantly, to know what not to do.

The nature of secularism

Once considered an inevitability, globally secularism is being dramatically outpaced by religion.¹⁰ In the West, secularism is paradoxical. While it has never been so strong and influential, it has also never been so weak and exposed. Although secularism is a complex ideology that has originated over centuries, it is now most commonly expressed as secular humanism which places man at the centre of all things. (See Appendix 1) Though denying the existence of God, this has the effect of deifying man, which means that secularism is always functional atheism. It has to be,

because atheists always believe in *some sort of god*, and that god is just often themselves.

In public life, secularism is sustained by two myths: the myth of neutrality, which holds that, while all other worldviews and beliefs are biased, valuing some things and devaluing others, secularism isn't; and the myth of progress, which holds that humanity is in a process of inevitable advancement to an undefined utopia, and that human nature is essentially good or even perfectible. (See Appendix 2)

Secularism sees politics as ultimate not proximate. Consequently, as a non-religious belief system it is an ideology par excellence. So, in any analysis, it's important to first acknowledge that every ideology is an idolatry,¹¹ and that behind every idol there is a demon. To some, secularism represents a renewal of paganism or neo-paganism.¹² In this respect, it is worth noting that the three key features of paganism in the Bible are: idolatry; sexual immorality; and the shedding of innocent blood. All sins of Manasseh (2 Kings 21-23) attributable to the fall of Jerusalem – and all features of secularism today.

The politics of secularism

Default secularism in Western politics presents a number of significant challenges and opportunities for evangelical Christians. Perhaps most obviously, these challenges and opportunities relate to the fact that the forms of identity politics generated by secularism are inherently centrifugal, rather than centripetal. They drive people apart.¹³ Resisting and exposing this 'divide and rule' dimension of secular left/right politics must be a priority, not least because these two extremes need each other to exist. Indeed, they cannot live without each other. The left needs the right to justify its grievances. The right needs the left to justify its fears. Both are idolatrous. The left idolising the future and the need for radical change to achieve an undefined utopia. The right idolising the past and the need to protect the benefits of an imagined 'golden age'. For Christians who understand the biblical calling to have regard for what Edmund Burke called 'the dead, the living and the unborn' – those who went before us, those living now, and those who will follow us – the inadequacy of such a polarisation should be obvious.

Although Western media is generally polarised between liberal and conservative viewpoints, like the vast majority of Western universities, it is also significantly biased towards the liberal progressivism¹⁴ and is encouraging forms of identity politics that are distinctly illiberal.¹⁵ As these 'educated' elites seek to impose their evermore strange views on public life, often without any democratic mandate, there is a popular reaction. Politically, this reaction can be especially stark amidst times of economic turmoil or at times of sudden and dramatic social changes such as those brought about by mass immigration. As Ivan Krastev observes:

'The defining characteristic of the politics of threatened majorities is that when they vote, they do it imagining a future where they will be a minority group in their own

countries, where their culture and lifestyles will henceforth be endangered. It would be a major political mistake if liberals simply ignore or ridicule these fears.¹⁶

When such fears are ignored, these popular reactions are often co-opted by other secular elites to promote their own strange libertarian or nationalistic views.

To the right, the reactions represent democracy in action. To the left, they represent 'populism' – polite liberal code for xenophobia and bigotry in action.¹⁷ And so a zero-sum game then ensues between two competing secular factions. Each unconcerned with finding a consensus. Each seeking to totally vanquish the other. Each becoming increasingly shrill and even violent. All encouraged by a 'liberal' media which sees nearly everything through the prism of either a cultural capitulation to Islam or the resurgence of fascism, with the bar for what constitutes fascism being lowered with every new accusation.¹⁸ This is a great irony. Not least because of the fact – helpfully pointed out by Jonah Goldberg in his book *Liberal Fascism*¹⁹ – that secularism not only produces fascism, but secularism *is* fascism. It is a totalising and assimilating creed, unable to tolerate an authentically plural public square. Which explains why the alt-right and the woke¹ left are not opposites when it comes to race. They both define people by ethnic identity. As Daniel Hannan has observed:

“Identity politics is identity politics whoever it comes from. The alt-right look down on certain groups on genetic grounds, and now notice that the “woke left” does the same thing. We are dealing not with two opposed attitudes, but with two expressions of the same attitude.”²⁰

Each of these political expressions of secularism present distinct challenges for evangelical Christians.

With the leftist attitude being more obviously atheistic in tone and content, indeed explicitly anti-Christian in the sense that secularism is being primarily introduced via sexualism,²¹ we can see how the rights of religion are now being directly challenged by the religion of rights. In policy terms this 'political correctness' can be commonly seen in: the redefinition of marriage; the deconstruction of mother/father families; equality campaigns such as 'gender mainstreaming'; attempts to re-define cultural 'values' and what constitutes 'extremism'; subjective hate speech laws; the weaponization of safeguarding; LGBTQI+ indoctrination in social services and education systems; and expansive notions of 'harm'.²² Although some liberal Protestants and other secularised minority variants of Christianity may welcome aspects of this neo-Erastian agenda,²³ it will obviously be repellent to the vast majority of Evangelical Christians who hold to historically mainstream, theologically orthodox views of society, family life, marriage and sexual ethics.

Politically opposing such an agenda is not only understandable, it should be an urgent priority for all evangelicals. However, as the culture wars develop, the nature

¹ People who describe themselves as woke believe they have a special awareness of social justice issues. The term originates from the Black Lives Matter movement.

of such opposition is becoming increasingly perilous. Generally, the dangers here relate to the right and its pseudo appeal to Christian cultural identity. More specifically, they relate to the resurgence of nationalism – which nearly always ends in tears.

Possible Evangelical responses

Democracy is worth defending. Yet, it should not be idolised. Contrary to progressive descriptions, it is neither an ideal nor a ‘value’. It is a slow, messy and frustrating system to achieve government by popular consent, or as Churchill observed: ‘the worst form of government, except for all the others.’ Developed over centuries, the processes of democracy which benefit Western countries and have been copied across the world, have been successful because of the tempering effect of Judeo-Christian morality. Particularly the unqualified view that all human beings are created in the image of God and therefore equal in dignity and respect. Without this, democracy simply becomes just as oppressive as ‘all the others’. Distinctively Christian virtues such as forgiveness, mercy, self-sacrifice and truthfulness have provided the cultural oxygen for democracy to breathe. The de-Christianisation of Western politics in the last eighty years has been slowly but surely suffocating the system.

Resuscitation will only come through a new infusion of Christianity re-vitalising political life and political language. How can this happen? From an understanding of the distinctly secular nature of the challenges facing us, the answer lies in Christians taking responsibility in three important ways: avoiding being co-opted and corrupted; exposing the sandy foundations of secularism; and casting a vision for a better future.

1. Deliver us from temptation

First, there must be a concerted effort to resist the temptations to be carried off to the polarising extremes of both left and right. While the left appeal to a Christian sense of justice, the right appeals to a Christian sense of morality. Clearly both are politically important, but in isolation from each other they not only become deficient, they become dangerous. Consequently, church leaders have a responsibility to dissuade Christians from being seduced by the caricatures and easy answers being offered. This does not mean that Christians should opt out of politics. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer observed:

“Silence in the face of evil is evil itself. God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”

If we care about the world that God created, then opting out is not an option. It is important that our terms of engagement should be biblically, rather than secularly determined. In Romans 13, Paul outlines how we are to engage with the authorities, giving God’s people a set of principles such as:

The authorities have been instituted by God and should reflect God’s character, conforming to his design for our relational priorities;

The role of earthly authority is limited and is to restrain evil, judge evil and promote the common good (law is necessarily coercive);
Authorities/governments can be corrupted by various idolatries;
Christian prayer, service and leadership is important for good government (including participating in politics);
Christians should be model citizens, respect the authorities and engage with them;
and yet ...
Christians can never give uncritical allegiance to any authority, state, government, party or movement, since their first loyalty is to the Lord Jesus Christ.

With these principles in mind, it is important that evangelicals engage in politics with an understanding of how historically, Christianity has challenged both traditional (nation/tribe etc.) and modern (self/consumer) notions of identity. This is an important truth for evangelicals across Europe and in the USA who may be tempted to 'choose a side' in our unfolding secular catastrophe.

The central question that frames and fuels today's politics of identity is: 'Who am I?' The answer of the secular left is the deeply unsatisfying 'whoever you want to be', while the answer of the secular right is that: 'you are British/French/German etc., you have a history, a legacy, a story, and an identity that you can take pride in'. Even though the nationalist option may seem more appealing in a Western context with its promise sometimes to restore Christian morality, it is ultimately just as disappointing. While the leftist answer is fluid and precludes any prospect of solidarity beyond the consumer self,²⁴ the rightist answer, being based on shifting, politicised ideas of collective identity is equally as fleeting.

Maps are constantly redrawn in this world, because both nation states, political parties and even ethnicities are temporal, transitory things. As Isaiah (40:15) says: 'The nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as dust on the scales.' Consequently, while patriotism, a love and concern for country, can be healthy, history repeatedly shows that the superior nature of nationalism can be deeply problematic in politics. Either way, the New Testament shows us that our allegiance to any state or party should be secondary to our love and allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, the degree to which a state or party embodies and expresses the values of His Kingdom, is the degree to which it should expect the respect and loyalty of the followers of Jesus. Or as David Koyzis puts it: 'We should always obey the law, except when we shouldn't'.²⁵ We are Christians who happen to be British/French/German etc. Not British/French/Germans etc. who happen to be Christians. Identity for a Christian is not '*who* am I,' but '*whose* am I.'

In short, the problem is not primarily identity politics – it's that secularism as an overarching worldview is profoundly bad at giving answers to questions of identity. Both left and right may offer short-term, cathartic solutions, but ultimately because they lack an acknowledgment of our God-given identity and dignity (and therefore lack checks and balances in politics), they are both alienating and de-humanising. Consequently, the temptation for Christians to align closely with either identity should be strongly resisted, as should the temptation to join the oppression

Olympics of identity politics in which self-designated victim groups claim their rights and compete with each other for power. Indeed, there is an urgent need for Christianity to sweeten our embittered politics by bringing reconciliation, a sense of perspective and some balance to our degraded public debate.²⁶ This is how secular extremes, or religiously inspired extremes which react to them, must be neutralised.

2. Let there be light

With Christians no longer recognised as the ruling elites of the ‘establishment’ across Europe, they now exist as a minority at the margins, albeit with the vibrant and growing evangelical stream representing the future of Christianity in the West. While some lament the loss of Christendom status and influence, it is worth noting that the periphery is a position from which the mission of the gospel has historically been most effectively pursued.

This position is liberating because, with the Western establishment now firmly secular humanist, Christians are no longer obliged to defend it. Indeed, after centuries of Christianity being criticised for its cultural dominance, the tables have now turned. Today, the blame for the social, political and economic problems that are besetting Western society lies fully with secularism. Exposing the sandy foundations of this crumbling house needs to be priority for every Western Christian.

Perhaps the first place to start with a critique of secularism, is to point out the psychological and cultural effect it is having through the devaluing or denial of truth. As Jordan Petersen has observed:

“There’s a principle at the heart of western civilisation ... the idea of the Logos — which means something like coherent interpersonal communication of the truth — and from an archetypal perspective it’s the action of the logos that extracts order from chaos. We make order by articulating truth and then we inhabit the order... What Christianity did was take that proposition ... and turn it into a symbolic doctrine — taking the figure of Christ, who from a psychological and archetypal perspective is the ideal man — an image of the ideal — which is the word made flesh, the instantiation of the logos in the body so that it’s acted out in the world. It’s the fundamental proposition of western culture — and we’ve lost it, and we will not survive without it.”²⁷

Jesus is the Truth. The secular humanist renunciation of this has resulted in what Pope Benedict identified as ‘a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one’s own ego and desires’. Every opportunity should be taken to point out the unsustainability of this distinctively secular situation. Not least because of the effect that relativism is having upon political liberalism, which has been so corrupted that it could be argued that it no longer exists in Western culture.²⁸ With the secular mind seeing a legal solution to all problems there is an inherent contradiction in modern liberalism whereby it seems that the more freedoms we desire, the more laws we require. So, a deluge of legislation pours, moving it away from a biblical rationale of protecting people against injustice, to operating increasing on the basis that what is not legal is forbidden. This

legal positivism reflects the progressivism of the French Revolution and it has greatly expanded the imperial regulatory state²⁹ in many Western countries.

Without the restoration of the original Christian principles of liberalism, human rights and civil liberties will continue to be eroded and Western societies will inevitably drift towards authoritarianism. As Christopher Dawson predicted:

‘Once society is launched on the path of secularization it cannot stop in the half-way house of Liberalism; it must go on to the bitter end, whether that end be Communism or some alternative type of "totalitarian" secularism.’³⁰

Consequently, the redemption of classic liberalism, which was born out of evangelical non-conformism, needs to be an urgent priority for Christians today.

In this task it is critical that Christians expose the implications for the poor of the loss of Christian truth and morality. By undermining the cultural framework that encouraged charity and supported notions of a common good, and replacing it with increasingly self-actualising forms of individualism, secularism has weakened social bonds and eroded civil society to breaking point.³¹ In the scramble for either individual rights or personal wealth, it is the state and the market which become the dominant features of Western societies. The former reducing people to regulatory units and the latter reducing them to consumer units. The de-humanising effect of this secular humanism is to create a brave new world, which although well suited to those wealthy enough to enjoy the freedoms encouraged by the market and enforced by the state, has a devastating effect upon the poor, even to the point of consigning them poor to new social sub-categories, such as ‘underclass’ or what Karl Marx called the ‘lumpenproletariat’. As philosopher Zygmunt Bauman notes:

“The postmodern era is perhaps the first not to allocate a function to its poor – not a single redeeming feature which could prompt solidarity with the poor. Postmodern society produces its members first and foremost as consumers – and the poor are singularly unfit for that role; by no stretch of imagination can one hope that they would contribute to a ‘consumer-led recovery’. For the first time in history the poor are totally un-functional and wholly useless; as such they are, for all practical intents and purposes, ‘outside society’.³²

This social outcome of secularism is compounded by the elitism it fosters, especially amongst liberal progressives – what Jonathan Haidt identifies as WEIRD’s: Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, Democratic.³³ As democracy is idolised and empowerment is romanticised, the patronising effect of these atheist elites is that swathes of western populations are conditioned to believe that justice is ensured, that equality is a right, and that progress is inevitable. In the face of a systematic imposition of middle-class values, when these promises are exposed as hollow, popular disenchantment turns to resentment. Then voice is demanded by the non-elites, those left behind by the so-called ‘knowledge economy’ and ‘globalisation’ – otherwise known as technologized capitalism.³⁴

The reality is that for the vast majority of people secularism simply does not work. Whether in a leftist form or a rightist form it is at best inadequate and at worst an imposition. Yet, while exposing and critiquing its proliferating problems is becoming easier, it is not sufficient. In order to see de-secularisation Christians must begin to provide practical and reasonable solutions and alternatives.

3. What do you see?

Where there is no vision the people cast off restraint (Proverbs 29:18). Vision finds solutions, inspires imagination and action, brings people together, and it involves taking responsibility. This is counter intuitive for secularists because, rather than satisfying the self today, it is concerned with the lives of others in the future.

In order to move Western societies beyond the politics of protest, it is vital that Christians begin to cast vision for how things can be better.³⁵ Primarily, this means knowing what we want and articulating it well. Although most evangelicals know what they don't want, not many are able to formulate what they do want. This is similar to secularism in two ways: first, in the sense that Ideologies of the left and right are defined by what they are against, i.e. each other; and second; it lacks political imagination. Which is sad when one considers how much evangelicals have contributed to social and political reform in the West.

In reaction to secularism, some evangelicals become defensive and belligerent. Dissent is part of evangelical identity, but by assuming a protest posture it can also be counter-productive. This is because, although such political campaigning might be momentarily cathartic, it also unhelpfully fulfils negative stereotypes of evangelicals as angry moralists – and ultimately it has not proved to deliver any substantive cultural change. Some (though not many) in this posture desire an often-indistinct form of theocracy, a return to religious rule over society. Not only is this return to Jerusalem impractical, given the historic calamities of syncretising faith to political rule, it is also deeply undesirable.

Others, take what they see as a more exilic approach, as they seek to work with the secular paradigm, adopting its language and therein accepting its presuppositions. Often out of a fear of loss of comfort or status, they either cooperate with the prevailing atheist orthodoxies or simply fall silent in the hope to avoid being challenged – especially on sexuality issues.³⁶ But at what point does cooperation become complicity? And when does silence become denial? This is de facto secularisation of the church. Indeed, given the assimilatory fascistic nature of secularism it is highly unlikely that such Christianity has a future beyond being a domesticated parody of New Testament Christianity.³⁷ As Martin Luther King observed, "The way of acquiescence always leads to moral and spiritual suicide".

So what *do* we want? I would suggest that a more biblically faithful answer is neither a theocracy nor a seculocracy. Rather, we should be advocating for an authentically plural public square from a distinctively evangelical Christian perspective – a civil public square³⁸ of rights, responsibilities and respect where people can live together with their deepest differences. With the primacy of our gospel imperative in mind,

this would be a public square in which there is maximal freedom for the gospel to be proclaimed and lived out, and in which there is maximal respect for all who accept or reject the claims of the cross. Ahead of the return of our King and the fullness of His Kingdom, this is a noble and reasonable vision for society. And it will require leadership.

The secular crises of leadership affecting Western culture has reduced politics to either: the uninspiring management of economic imperatives; the utopian fantasies of progressivism; or the sentimental dreaming of nationalism. None of which can deal with challenges of today or bring hope for tomorrow. This is why the fostering of a culture of public leadership³⁹ is such a strategic priority for evangelicals across Europe. While it is true that our leadership in politics and elsewhere should be servant-leadership, without this practical focus on the people of God becoming a leader voice in society, all attempts to renew politics through various projects and programmes are just wishful thinking.

Napoleon once described a leader as a dealer in hope. And with depression and despair now key features of modern life hope is arguably what our secularised societies need most. Hope is what the people of God have (or should have), but what the lost do not have, despite them convincing themselves otherwise. The world has many false hopes, and the hopes of secular humanism are set upon man – a subject capable of astonishing goodness, but one which always disappoints and is usually politically disastrous. While the secular left hopes for a utopian future, the right hopes for an idealised past. But neither blind optimism in progress nor a return to an age of reason can save people or transform society.

Yet, our hope is a living hope. A true hope. A hope that has a name – Jesus. It is God's will that we overflow with this hope, and in times of great political turbulence it is hope that will ultimately provide the resilience needed to see and pursue better day. So, despite – or even perhaps because of – the challenging political context we find ourselves in – everything we say or do should be wrapped in hope.

In summary:

It is secularism that is responsible for the great upheavals being experienced in western politics. This illiberal and authoritarian ideology is inherently anti-Christian, and although its political expressions seek to appeal to Christian allegiances, they are ideologically resistant to any biblical prescriptions for change. As Rupert Shortt states:

'The so-called liberal State isn't liberal at all ... Among other things, it needs religion to provide a crucial reminder of its limits'⁴⁰

Our response must be threefold: to resist the temptation to be carried along by popular movements; to expose and critique secularism as the source of the

problems we face; and importantly, to articulate a vision for public life that is reasonable, inspiring, and above all else hopeful.

Appendix 1

Secularism: an overview

Generally, secularism is taken to mean: the belief or ideology that religion should not be involved with the ordinary social and political activities of a country. Not a single, clear worldview, it is a hybrid of ideas that represent a philosophical doctrine which basically rejects religion. As a feature of modernity, 'secularisation' describes the systematic process of de-sacralising public life, transforming it from being religious to be atheist. Related to this, 'secularity' tends to refer to a co-option, cooperation or confusion between the religious and the political in the context of the dualism of citizenship in heaven and citizenship on earth. This is the result of the fact that, although the concept of the secular is normally associated with atheism, it actually originated in the church, mostly for the sake of preserving peace among Christians, but also to allow non-Christians to have citizenship rights in the context of Christendom.

Theologically, the idea that there is a difference between the spiritual and political realm is often attributed to the call by Jesus to 'render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's' (although this can more accurately be read to mean that God is sovereign over everything). Augustine developed a more systematic division by distinguishing between two "cities," one that ordered the things of the earth (*civitas terrena*) and one that was ordered by God (*civitas dei*).

The Latin term *saecularis* was usually used to refer to "the present age," but in practice, it was also used to describe those members of the clergy who did not take monastic vows. The word most associated with the relationship between religion and politics is *seculum* – which describes the space or bubble in which the earthly, fleeting and temporal matters can be practically dealt with – in light of eternity, the Bible, truth etc.

The development of this idea of a political space between the temporal and the eternal explains how 'Renaissance Humanism' drew heavily from and operated largely within a Christian framework, and how many advances in human rights and human dignity were dependent on theological assumptions. This explicit Christian source is most notably expressed in European art. Over time, 'Enlightenment Humanism' sought to operate without the prior theological assumptions, albeit still within a cultural context dominated by Christian ideas. Undoubtedly, events like the Reformation, Revivals and the Great Awakenings all provided checks on the development of this form of secularism, but they also provided the philosophical fuel for this ideology by promoting fundamental truths that could be misinterpreted and misapplied, both by accident and design.

In turn, this enabled the development of 'Secular Humanism' which puts man as the measure of all things, affirming human uniqueness and significance, but denying the supernatural and the existence of God. Overwhelmingly deriving its positive human values from Christianity: significance, dignity, equality, justice, moral capacity etc., it

has become an ideology which seeks to subvert, supplant and even destroy the immense social, political and cultural contributions of Christianity.⁴¹

Importantly for this ideology, because the industrial revolution and the advances of science (much of which were led by Christians) man seemed god-like, the master of his destiny. Consequently, secular humanism posited that religion was either irrelevant or harmful to human flourishing – and that human ‘progress’ would surpass the achievements of the Christian God.

Secular humanism declared that man had not been created in God’s image, but that God had been created in man’s image. Irreligion, denying yet mirroring religion. Figuratively, this can be seen as a form of reverse biblical teleology – systematically undoing the truths of God by going back to the first great lie, that we can ‘be like God’ (Gen 3:5).

With this logic people like the philosophers of the French revolution, and others such as Comte, Strauss and John Stuart Mill sought to create a religion of humanity – a civic copy of Christianity but without all the hocus-pocus and restrictive morality. Here, a secular high priesthood of Feuerbach, Marx and Freud⁴² helped define the features of the modern age: scientific rationalism, materialism, liberalism, capitalism etc. Each contributing to an incremental de-sacralising of public life, and a reduction in the significance of the holy, the mysterious and the unknown.

Today, secularism is the dominant ideology in Western politics, and its success (in terms of supplanting Christianity as opposed to its practical outcomes and effects) can be largely attributed to: exploiting the social and political freedoms that Christianity brings, especially for individual freedom and critical reasoning; and the aping, imitating or subverting of the key doctrines and truths of Christianity.

It is also worth noting that, because secularism is a derivative of Christianity, Islam is philosophically better insulated against its parasitic effects and influence. Though not immune, it can legitimately claim to be less complicit in the rise of secularism.⁴³

Appendix 2

The sustaining myths of secularism

The myth of neutrality is the idea that, although all other worldviews and beliefs are biased – valuing some things and devaluing others, secularism isn't. Therefore, in a modern society full of competing views about values and lifestyle choices, it is only a 'secular state' that can provide the amoral bubble at the heart of society that enables us all to be able to do business politically. This is at best an error, and at worst a lie. Every ideology brings its own baggage to the table, and secularism is certainly no different. Whether it is France, China or Cuba, the so called secular state embodies a particular view of human nature and a public ethic. There is no such thing as an amoral public space. Even John Locke, the architect of the modern state acknowledged that, although the state must remain impersonal, it can never be amoral.

In Europe, secularists often point to the experience of the USA as an example of how neutrality enables politics. However, with its Jeffersonian 'wall of separation' between politics and religion, is not only heavily shaped by theological presuppositions, but it also enshrines the freedoms of religion as primary in the constitution of the republic. In other words, alongside a delineation of roles, there is a constitutional acknowledgement that the state would not exist or function without religion. Indeed, the constitution explicitly references God. These bald facts have not deterred legal activism in the name of atheism. With secularism assuming an increasingly explicit ideological dynamic in politics (especially the politics of identity) US elections have been aggressively contested over the balance of power on the Supreme Court. Although such contests have generated debates about the degree to which secularism is either procedural or programmatic have ensued,⁴⁴ they also helpfully demonstrate how secular neutrality is a fiction.

Essentially, the myth of progress proposes that today is better than yesterday, just because it's today – and that human nature is essentially good or even perfectible – despite what history and experience plainly tells us to the contrary. Without this myth, the secular agenda lapses into a Nietzschean nightmare – a world without reason or purpose. Dystopia. Not many atheists are willing to accept this nihilistic existence, and so whether be wilful disregard or cognitive dissonance, a delusion is maintained.

It is generally accepted that the secular idea of progress is a copy of the teleology of the Kingdom of God. In order to retain the hope and optimism that derive from the knowledge of the next life in heaven, the secular agenda empties salvation history of God, but seeks to perpetuate the salvific narrative notion that all things are moving inevitably, inexorably towards a utopia. By investing the idea of progress with ontological ultimacy – making it both the means and the ends, the ends justify the means, and people simply become a disposable resource to achieve them. On this basis, it could be argued that the idea of progress has killed and immiserated more people in human history than any other idea.

In politics, the progress narrative has illustrated how there is a strong fascist tendency in secularism. Indeed, it can be argued that it highlights how secularism and fascism are in fact the same thing.⁴⁵ This is because the ideas of choice, freedom and autonomy that are so central to a secular agenda require 'liberation' from any religiously informed moral restrictions – whether real or imagined. This means that the self *must* be freed to enjoy itself, and that the primary role of politics is to deliver and enforce this 'freedom'. A logic summed up perfectly by the great architect of the French Revolution Jean-Jacques Rousseau who stated: "it may be necessary to compel a man to be free." As the atheist philosopher John Gray has observed:

The trouble with secular myths is that they are frequently more harmful than the real thing. In traditional Christianity, the apocalyptic impulse was restrained by the insight that human beings are ineradicably flawed. In the secular religions that flowed from Christianity, this insight was lost. The result has been a form of tyranny, new in history that commits vast crimes in pursuit of heaven on earth.²

² John Gray, *Heresies – Against Progress and other illusions* (London: Granta, 2004), p. 44.

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- ²¹ The ideology or worldview that holds sexual identity, expression as paramount, and which sees all restraints to the actualisation of desire as oppressive, and increasingly sees alternative perspectives that suggest natural forms and moral boundaries as unacceptable or 'harmful' to human flourishing. It is notable that sexualism most aggressively championed in states which have redefined marriage. See: Kuby, G (2015) *The Global Sexual Revolution – Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom*, Kettering, Angelico Press

²² The expansive 'harm' narrative in policy relates to views that dissent from the new orthodoxy and may cause psychological distress (subjectively and/or ideologically defined), and are therefore seen and being harmful to society generally, and to children specifically.

²³ In the UK, this contemporary version of the chilling ideal/doctrine that the state should have supremacy over the church in theological and ecclesiastical matters can be seen in policy initiatives such as: the attempt within the Counter Extremism and Safeguarding Bill to create a new legal category of 'non-violent extremism'; and calls to define a new regulatory category of 'Spiritual Abuse'. Both of these would entail the state defining and regulating Christian doctrine and theology.

²⁴ The cultural Marxism most prevalent amongst secular elites is the form expounded by Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci pursuing a 'long march through the institutions' – in other words degrading all institutional forms such as family, religion, government to the point where replacement with Marxist forms is the only viable alternative. Although such cultural Marxism deploys the language of classic economic Marxism, it is now so conjoined ideologically to Foucauldian notions of social constructivism that its promotions of conventional socialist forms of solidarity are distinctly bourgeois and as such more rhetorical than substantive.

²⁵ 'Is It Time for American Christians to Disobey the Government?' by David Koyzis in *Christianity Today*, 18 March 2016: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/april/why-all-christians-should-consider-civil-disobedience.html>

²⁶ The emergence of 'post-truth' politics in new social media represents only the latest aspect of the degrading effect of secularism upon public discourse. This is because the [post]modern atheist denial of the possibility of an objective truth is reducing the capacity (or will) for civility. Without truth, there can be no honesty. Without honesty, there can be no trust. And without trust there can be no communication. So political debate descends into soundbites, point-scoring and entertainment.

²⁷ See: Truth in a time of chaos <https://mcgillespie.com/transcript-truth-time-chaos-jordan-peterson/>

²⁸ Philosophically, this is related to the advent of post-modernity, in which meta-narratives and reason are rejected. A phenomenon which, by relativizing truth elevates individual choice to the degree that the social and cultural resources and institutions which support freedom, such as religion, family, community, nation etc. are depleted. This is entirely and exclusively a product of secularism.

²⁹ The imperial regulatory state refers to the expansive nature of the legal (what is lawful and unlawful) and coercive (what right and wrong) reach of statutory and regulatory bodies into hitherto private spheres of life such as religious morality and parental authority.

³⁰ Dawson, C (1935: p64-65) *Religion and the Modern State*, London, Sheed & Ward

³¹ See: Putnam, R (2001) *Bowling Alone – The Collapse and Renewal of American Society*, New York, Simon & Schuster

³² Zygmunt Bauman, in Dennis Smith, *Zygmunt Bauman – Prophet of Postmodernity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999: p. 193

³³ Haidt, J (2012) *The Righteous Mind - why good people are divided by politics and religion*, London, Penguin

³⁴ See: Goodhart, J (2017) *The Road to Somewhere – The New Tribes Shaping British Politics*, London, Hurst & Co

³⁵ See: <http://www.eauk.org/church/campaigns/what-kind-of-society/full-report.cfm>

³⁶ It is worth noting that the major OT exilic books are condemnations of assimilation (Daniel), or falling silent/stopping action (Esther, Ezra, Haggai).

³⁷ First, secularism subverts Christianity, syncretising it by conferring social status on those who will baptise the less contentious elements of its political programme. It often does this by mobilising Christians to support secular causes. Once domesticated, the process of marginalisation and exclusion begins as influence in public life is increasingly curtailed. As this intensifies, in order to break generational transmission of values, children are indoctrinated via the secular school system and parental authority is challenged in the home via the law and the media. But it doesn't stop there. As the rights of religion are challenged by the religion of rights, the legitimacy of sacred texts begin to be questioned. And even this is not enough. With the accelerating deconstruction of the Christian contribution to Western culture, the faith is either 'museumised' as a relic or airbrushed out of history. This is what Christians are dealing with in western politics: a totalising ideology that cannot be negotiated with.

³⁸ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RP2D539cBFw>

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⁴⁰ 'What makes for a truly liberal state?' by Rupert Shortt in *Unherd*, 7 Aug 2018:

<https://unherd.com/2018/08/religious-voices-essential-truly-liberal-state/>

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⁴⁵ See: Goldberg (2009)