Religion Shapes Culture . . . Even in a Secular World

Recovering Christianity in a Secular Age

Irrepressibly Religious

In his 1887 notebook entry on "European Nihilism," Friedrich Nietzsche looked forward to his preferred future for the continent. In his litany of anti-virtues, Nietzsche celebrated the idea that there are no "final goals" to existence, repudiated the notion that every human being has "infinite value," and relished the extinction of spiritual consolation. The "strongest" persons, in this dawning era of nihilism, "are those who have no *need* of extreme dogmas, those who not only concede but love a good measure of chance and nonsense."[1] "God," Nietzsche averred, "is much too extreme a hypothesis."[2]

Despite attempts to kill the Deity off, the project to end religion in the West has failed rather miserably. Even such a dedicated nihilist as Michel Foucault hears someone whisper in his ear, in the closing sentence of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: "[Y]ou may have killed God beneath the weight of all you have said; but don't imagine that, with all that you are saying, you will make a man that will live longer than he."[3] Foucault, of course, flattered himself by taking up Nietzsche's mantle to, once again, declare the death of God. Throughout human history, human beings have proven to be irrepressibly religious creatures. Culture, after all, reflects the deepest longings and aspirations of the human spirit. We find something to give the status of being ultimate, something having the status of not depending on anything else. And what is the divine, if not something of fundamental importance? That really is the best definition of religion: the reverence, worship, and awe of something ultimate.[4] Even avowed atheists, at the end of the day, still have to come up with some sort of placeholder for the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus Christ in order to explain how the universe got here. For instance, what is Richard Dawkins' reverential treatment of Darwinian natural selection, other than an attempt to suggest that something other than the God of the Bible—in this case, the laws of biology—is absolutely necessary to explain the origin, diversity, and beauty that we find on planet earth and in the cosmos? Throughout the course of human civilization, what has been seen as being ultimate has been worshipped. And that which is worshipped always makes demands upon its followers. In that sense, absolutely everyone is religious. Dawkins' god may not be personal, but his worldview bears the marks of religious fervor. He has a list of orthodoxies and is quick to cast out heretics from his midst.   Despite earnest attempts to do away with it in modern times, religion cannot and will not go away. Faith shapes culture. It is simply a matter of which belief

system a society chooses and how effective that faith is nourishing the animating impulses of a people.

There is, then, a crucially important difference between institutionalized religion and religion itself. Institutionalized religion focuses on organization, church hierarchy, bodies of formalized doctrine, and ecclesiastical structure. For reasons that I will explain, this aspect of religion is in grave circumstances—particularly in its Christian expressions—in the secular West. But the religious impulse itself is fundamental to the human condition. For this reason, despite the best efforts of those who would wish to stamp it out, religion will never go away.

Wars of Religion: Damage to Christian Credibility in the Public Square

To raise the question of the declining fortunes of institutional Christianity is, of course, to beg a much, much larger question: why was the Christian religion abandoned in the first place by the leading intellectuals and cultural elites on the continent? Although the process of secularization is a well-worn tale for some, the story bears repeating. Christian apologists describe secularization (i.e. the removal of dominant religious ideas and symbols from the public sphere) as being a reaction against traditional religion.[5] While this is certainly a part of the big picture, there is another way to look at things. Simply put, secularism became plausible in light of certain events in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe.

The first event worth mentioning involves Savonarola's attempt at reform in late fifteenth-century Florence. Denouncing the corruption and the worldliness of the Church, the Dominican friar called for a political revolution based upon moral and spiritual reform. He condemned the art, culture, and literature that flourished in the time of Lorenzo the Magnificent. In his now infamous "Bonfire of the Vanities," Savonarola sought to purify the Church by banning, destroying, and/or burning Renaissance art, secular books, game tables, chess tables, and literary texts related to humanist thought. Upon the death of Lorenzo, Savonarola and the political party he inspired rose to power and repudiated the contemporary Italian culture in a radical attempt at national holiness. Their requirements for morality were harsh, but they justified their actions by claiming that what they were building was a Christian nation. But Savonarola's preaching failed to inspire the nation to repent or rally to his cause. He received a condemnation from Rome for acclaiming prophetic powers for himself and was eventually burned at the stake by Alexander VI.

Niccolò Machiavelli took special note of Savonarola's inability to reform Italy both morally and politically. For the author of *The Prince*, attempts to change culture by appealing to holiness and right living first paled in comparison to the more persuasive method of a quartered army. "Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus could not have made their institutions respected for long if they had been unarmed." "[A]s in our own times," Machiavelli averred, "happened to Brother Girolamo Savonarola, who was ruined in his new institutions when the populace began to believe in them no longer, since he had no way of holding steady those who had believed, nor of making the unbelievers believe."[6]

What mattered for the prince, Machiavelli concluded, was not religious zeal but the power to enforce one's will on others. As a result, those who follow in Machiavelli's train view the Church as gravitating to one of two extremes: it is either corrupt or harshly moralistic. In either case, the law of parsimony reveals what really matters when it comes to governance: the sword. The Church's distinctives, derived from divine revelation, thus do not play a meaningful role in government. This point of view increasingly came to be regarded as "realism."

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries turned out to be an unmitigated disaster for the reputation of the Church's engagement with culture. The French Wars of Religion (1562-1598), with their mixture of Protestant and Catholic intrigue, proved that arguments over theological orthodoxy, and attempts to purge out heresy, make for dangerous domestic policy. Even at the level of popular culture, the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre still lives on in infamy. A failed assassination attempt on Protestant leader Gaspard de Coligny's life turned into a mass slaughter against Huguenot (Calvinist) men, women, and children. In the ensuing weeks after August 24, 1572, the city of Paris devolved into anarchy.

Although recent attempts have been made by Marxist interpretation to portray the French Wars of Religion as little more than socio-economic class warfare, the evidence resists attempts to sweep away the worldview-ish origins of these conflicts. As Mack P. Holt contends in his contribution to the *Cambridge New Approaches to European History*, the conflagration is best understood as having religious origins, with "religion" being defined not only as mere theological doctrines, but also the complex sociological entailments and group interests that result from what people believe.[7] Thus, the question became, "Who (i.e. which interest group) has the right to define culture?" And even with all of the complex sociological data taken into consideration, there can be no denying that people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries dealt with such weighty matters through their worldview. Inevitably, worldviews deal with ultimate questions; and ultimate questions inexorably result in religious commitments. And no one can deny that religion precipitated or aggravated much of the violence.

In Germany, in the wake of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther himself had some difficulty explaining how one could be free from the dictates of the papacy when it came to matters of faith but still beholden to the princes when it came to the matter of civil obedience. To explain the paradox, Luther penned an essay entitled "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed." In it, Luther proposed a "two kingdoms" view. The Church, he argued, knows no law but the love of the gospel as the people of God; it is the colony of heaven which resides temporarily on earth. The other kingdom, however, belongs to secular rulers. Arguing from Romans 13, the reformer claimed that earthly government is the purview of sinners. Still, God uses the sword of the state to keep law and order and instill terror in those who do evil. These two kingdoms, however, can never be composed. They are, in this world at least, separate.[8]

With this "two kingdoms" model, Luther introduced a terrible conundrum into Western thought. Although the Reformation accelerated the dissolution of the medieval synthesis between church and state and opened up the possibility for religious freedom, Luther

simultaneously (and quite unwittingly) sowed the seeds for the demise of religion's role as a source of cultural authority. Certainly Luther could not have imagined a Germany in which the princes would no longer take stock of their Christian heritage. Despite his own theorizing, Luther's contemporaries and successors strove to govern on the basis of theological distinctions. And by doing so, both Protestant and Catholic forces at work inside Germany presided over one of the darkest chapters in European history.

On the heels of the Reformation, the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) further besmirched the reputation of religion's involvement in matters of the state. The war scarred the German landscape. Mercenary armies were set loose upon the population. The following chart (Figure 1) gives a sense of the devastating population losses in Germany by the end of the war.[9]
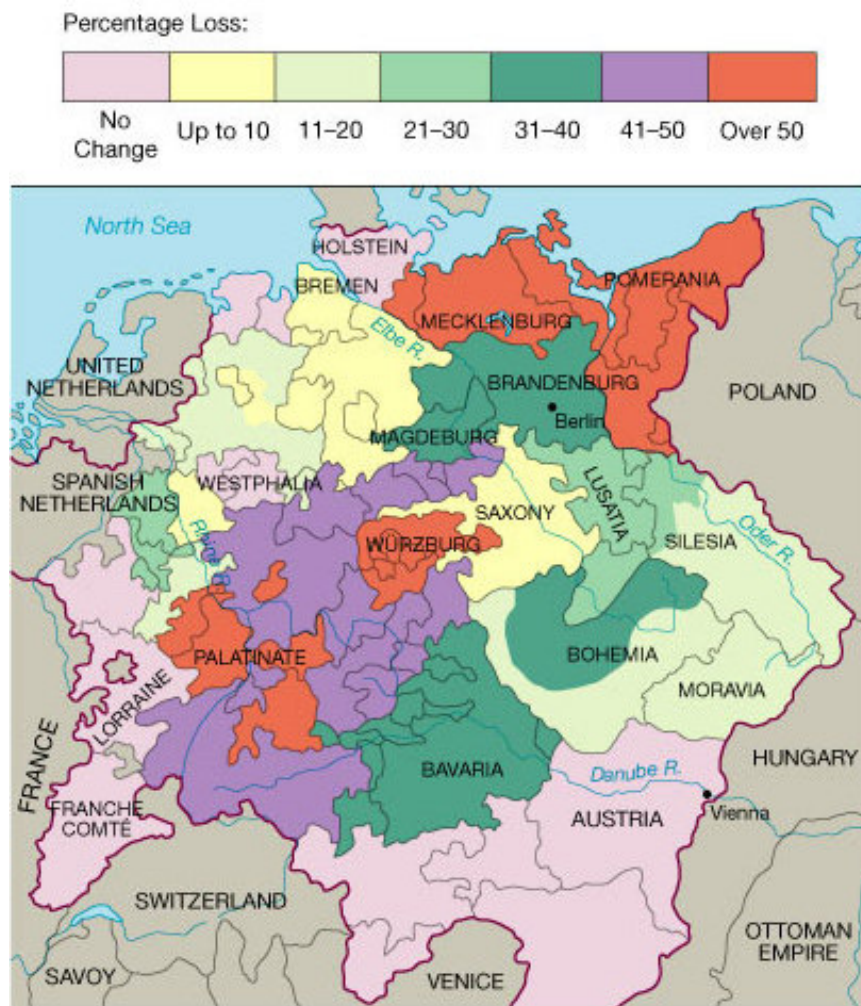
Population Loss in Germany During the Thirty Years' War

The Plausibility of Secularism

Clearly, during the wars of religion, Christianity had become terribly distorted from the time of the witness of the early Christians, from a day in which the early Church gained social capital and credibility in the Roman Empire. But is it any wonder in the wake of this experience why the cultural elite of Europe would want to revisit the centrality of Christianity as the defining worldview for European culture? So, when Voltaire criticized what he viewed as the all-too-Pollyannish-worldview that "God is working everything out for the greater good" against this backdrop, we can better understand the energy behind his dictum *Écrasez l'infâme*—"Crush religious superstition!"[10] And when Immanuel Kant declared, "*Sapere aude!*—'Have courage to use your own reason'—that is the motto of enlightenment," we can see the impetus behind this declaration of cultural independence from the dictates of the clergy and the theologians.[11]

In the English-speaking world, no philosopher levied a more trenchant critique of theology's role in forming government than Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679). Hobbes' worldview took shape in the light of the English Civil War which, once again, was largely religious in nature. Hobbes feared Catholicism's unification of church and state on the one hand, because it centralized power. But he just as strongly worried that the Protestant doctrine of the priesthood of believers would lead to anarchy. For this reason, the author of *Leviathan* sought to remove political questions from the arena of theological debates and turned them into a science of common sense and natural justice. And so Political "Science" as we know it was born. As Columbia University professor Mark Lilla sums up Hobbes' contribution:

> Before Hobbes, those who sought to refute political theology kept finding themselves driven deeper into it as they tried to solve the many puzzles of God, man, and world. Hobbes showed the way out by doing something ingenious: he changed the subject.

> The aim of *Leviathan* is to attack and destroy the entire tradition of Christian political theology, what Hobbes called, the "Kingdom of Darkness." Yet the treatise begins, not with theology or politics, God or kings, but with physiology. Specifically, it begins with an exploration of the human eye and how it perceives the world. On the very first page of his work Hobbes makes an implicit profession of faith: that to understand religion and politics, we need not understand anything about God; we need only understand man as we find him, a body alone in the world.[12]

Hell above Ground

Hobbes' dream to relegate the study of politics to just the study of the brute realities of man's physical existence known through the vehicles of modern science, however, left the human being vulnerable to any ideology predicated upon appeals to scientism. By the end of the twentieth century, estimates for the number of innocents killed under the auspices

of governments run by secular utopian (and often anti-religious) ideologies range between 100 to 200 million persons. The First and Second World Wars, Mao's Revolution, Stalin's slaughter of innocents, and the killing fields of Cambodia clearly were not conflicts fought upon religious grounds, but they resulted in horrors completely out of proportion to the wars of religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As George Steiner wrote in his 1970 T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures, Voltaire predicted the end of mass brutality from authoritarian rulers or despots would come to an end with the demise of religion's influence in the public square. Voltaire could not have been more wrong, says Steiner. On the contrary, "indifference" on the subject of religious truth breeds intolerance.[13] Steiner continues, "The epilogue to belief, the passage of religious belief into hollow convention, seems to be a more dangerous process than the *philosophes* anticipated."   In the place of a literal hell to punish those who did evil in this life when they die, Steiner observes, modern ideologies instead relocated hell above ground.[14] The twentieth century bares ample witness to the results of this new barbarism. The problem then, appears not to be religious ideas about man, but the man himself.

In this light, postmodernism must be seen primarily as a protest against these totalizing metanarratives about reality that ruled the modern world, what Jean-Francois Lyotard calls "crimes against humanity."[15] The postmodern project attempts to subvert, resist, and undermine ideologies that oppress groups who live on the boundaries of culture on the basis that there is some independent and rationally verifiable means of telling human beings how things must be for everyone at all times in all places. The concept of deconstruction, therefore, offers a method whereby the imperious power structures of a text (whether that be *The Communist Manifesto*, *Mein Kampf*, or even the Bible) may be undermined. As philosopher John Caputo has put it: "Whenever deconstruction finds a nutshell—a secure axiom or a pithy maxim—the very idea is to crack it open and disturb this tranquility."[16]

As such, a feeling of unease characterizes postmodern life in the West. Certitude is in short supply. Yet thoroughgoing nihilism, both intuitively and practically, seems to be very difficult to practice. When U.S. National Public Radio interviewer Renee Montagne noted with incredulity that rock performer David Bowie's 2002 album actually had elements of hope on it, especially in light of the starkness and bleakness in Bowie's previous recording catalogue, the artist responded with a reference to the then 55-year-old's young family: "I think I have to imbue my songs with a certain sense of optimism now, more than I ever did before, because I have a child."[17] Indeed, it is very difficult being a nihilist with a two-year-old running around the house. Optimism, hope, and love: these are categories that are metaphysical in nature. They speak of transcendence and the permanence of things beyond the mere physicality of the world.

Life with God after the Crisis of Institutional Religion

Interest in the transcendence of human life and a religious instinct by themselves, however, do not automatically translate into good news for traditional religious structures. As the Protestant Church faced the prospects of life in Germany after the Holocaust, it had to face up to the grim reality that the response of the Church in opposing

Hitler had been too little, too late. Much of the blame lay at the feet of the Lutheran Church, who were easily co-opted into becoming the Reich Church. As heroic as the Confessing Church movement had been, the reality was that the movement against Hitler led by church leaders such as Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer had been a rear-guard action. With the notable and admirable exception of strong resistance from Roman Catholic territories in Germany, most German Christians welcomed the rise of Adolf Hitler. They did so because, as the journalist Milton Mayer so powerfully pointed out in his extensive series of postwar interviews with German citizens, *They Thought They Were Free.*[18]

This state of affairs was not lost on Bonhoeffer himself. He commented to his friend Eberhard Bethge about the culture now thrust upon the West: "We are now moving to a completely religionless time; people as they are now simply cannot be religious anymore." The traditional structures and hierarchies of the Church had failed to stop genocide. Writing from his cell at Tegel Prison in May 1944 to his godson on the occasion of his baptism, Bonhoeffer reflected:

> We have grown up with the experience of our parents and grandparents that a man can and must plan, develop, and shape his own life, and that life has a purpose, about which a man must make up his mind, and which he must then pursue will all his strength. But we have learnt by experience that we cannot plan even for the coming day, that what we have built up is being destroyed overnight, and that our life, in contrast to that of our parents, has become formless or even fragmentary. In spite of that, I can only say that I have no wish to live in any other time than our own, even though it is so inconsiderate of our outward well-being. We realize more clearly than formerly that the world lies under the wrath and grace of God. We read in Jer. 45: 'Thus says the Lord: Behold what I have built I am breaking down, and what I have planted I am plucking up . . . And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not; for, behold, I am bringing evil upon all flesh; . . . but I will give your life as a prize of war in all places you may go.' If we can save our souls unscathed out of the wreckage of our material possessions, let us be satisfied with that. If the Creator destroys his own handiwork, what right have we to lament the destruction of ours? It will be the task of our generation, not to 'seek great things', but to save and preserve our souls out of the chaos, and to realize that it is the only thing we can carry as a 'prize' from the burning building. 'Keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the springs of life (Prov. 4:23).[19]

Bonhoeffer understood that Christians would have to inhabit an entirely different type of existence if the Church was to once again truly be what God wanted it to be in the postwar environment. Rather than making its plans on the basis of what would be the best "strategy for engagement" that would improve its position with the society that emerged after Hitler, Bonhoeffer believed that the spiritual power for God's people to be salt and light would have to be given back to them by God himself. This modern martyr saw a new cultural environment ensuing in which the Church would have to once again become like its Lord Jesus, who came into the world not to be served, but to serve and give up his life

for the many. The Church, like Jesus himself, must become the guileless "man for others." As the Apostle Peter reminded a persecuted group of first-century Christians, followers of Jesus should "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (1 Pet. 2:12). Rather than enjoying a position of privilege as elites in a cultural hierarchy, Bonhoeffer realized that the "The church stands, not at the boundaries [of culture] where human powers give out, but in the middle of the village." We must not seek great things for ourselves, Bonhoeffer maintained, but rather seek the welfare of the actual communities in which individual churches find themselves. Put differently, there must be a transparent goodness and way of life practiced by the Church which can be easily detected by the neighbors of local Christian communities. Somehow, everyone— both those who profess Christ and those who do not—should be able to see that in some very real sense, the Church is there for them and their children.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his disciples that the meek will inherit the earth. They must not seek great things for their own benefit, but rather seek the good of the communities in which individual churches and faith-based organizations find themselves. After the Holocaust, Christianity can never again afford to run the danger of being regarded as "just" another ideology or party to the prevailing Will to Power. Rather, the Church, as Rev. Tim Keller of Redeemer Church in New York City has put it, must be "in the city, for the city" seeking common ground: the health of our communities, families, and neighborhoods. Regaining the trust of one's neighbors is the first step to building cultural credibility.   By investing themselves wholeheartedly to the local contexts in which they are planted, Bonhoeffer envisioned a group of Christians who see themselves as "belonging wholly to the world." In that case, he wrote his friend Bethge, "Christ is no longer [merely] an object of religion."[20]

And let us not forget that this was the way a small, rag-tag, imperially-persecuted group of followers of Jesus effected change in the second, third, and fourth centuries AD. As sociologist Rodney Stark has demonstrated, the reason for the success of the early Christians began with their theological convictions. Here was a group of people who actually believed that the God who created the universe subjected himself to weakness by becoming a real human being and opened himself to sharing, and taking upon himself, the sufferings common to humanity. "For God so loved the world" was not an esoteric philosophy of some sort. As the Gospel of John so memorably puts it, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). When earthquakes, famines, race riots, and plagues swept through communities, the Christians stayed behind and nursed those with no hope back to health. In time, the evident goodness of Christians in meeting human needs had a cumulative effect on Roman culture. For example, they stayed behind in cities like Antioch to care for the sick and dying when they were abandoned by the cultural elites who were wealthy enough to flee the city in an attempt to avoid the spread of disease or social calamity. Meanwhile, the people left behind began to believe that maybe this message of Jesus really was true. And thus, over time, the world of Caesar became the world of Christ. As Stark concludes: "what Christians gave to their converts was their humanity" in the midst of a brutish pagan culture. "In this sense virtue *was* its

own reward."[21] Stark also describes the effect of Christians on their communities in the midst of social crises:

> [Antioch was] a city filled with misery, danger, fear, despair, and hatred. A city where the average family lived a squalid life in filthy and cramped quarters, where at least half of the children died at birth or during infancy, and where most of the children who lived lost at least one parent before reaching maturity. A city filled with hatred and fear rooted in intense ethnic antagonisms and exacerbated by a constant stream of strangers. A city so lacking in stable networks of attachments that petty incidents could prompt mob violence. A city where crime flourished and the streets were dangerous at night. And, perhaps above all, a city repeatedly smashed by cataclysmic catastrophes: where a resident could literally expect to be homeless from time to time, providing that he or she was among the survivors . . .
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> Christianity revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and new kinds of social relationship able to cope with many urgent urban problems. To cities filled with the homeless and the impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fires, and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services.[22]

This sort of doctrine and behavior made Christianity unique among the world religions. In stark relief to the other great mystery religion of the first few centuries AD, Mithraism, Christianity was not merely a power religion. In Greco-Roman mythology, Mithras killed the bull Taurus, and that gave him the right to rule the stars and control the seasons. Jesus of Nazareth came to die but conquered death through his resurrection, which made him the Lord of life instead of death.[23]

Engaging the culture in the way described above, however, must not be mistaken as a call for some sort of Quietism. Certainly, Bonhoeffer was no shrinking violet. He did, after all, openly oppose the Nazi regime and actively sought to undermine Hitler—to the point of involving himself in a plot to assassinate the Führer. Certainly, evil must be stopped when it threatens the lives of the innocents and the defenseless. This stance characterized the Christian position from the early centuries, as Christians opposed the brutality of the Roman gladiatorial games, infanticide, and the horrendous treatment of women in the ancient world.[24]   But at its best, Christianity has affected the prevailing culture through the solidarity of its community and the social presence of its people. And so, for example, when a non-believer walked into a celebration of the Lord's Supper at a Christian gathering in the early centuries AD, she witnessed a remarkable phenomenon taking place. Members of the privileged classes, for example, would be serving the agape meal to

members of the slave class—a very powerful image which repudiated the hierarchical class structure of Roman society.[25]

Conclusion

It is the Christian spirit of service and sacrifice that found its way into Western culture and makes us who we are. Consequently, it is not an accident that it is the Western nations who lead in charitable giving and who most greatly come to the aid of tsunami, cyclone, earthquake, and famine victims when crises arise. For example, in 2008, so far the United States government has given roughly $360 million to the World Food Program. The grand total for the OPEC nations comes to $1.5 million.[26] Religion shapes culture. In the *Torah*, it is a tenet of faith to provide assistance to the outsider or alien (Deut. 10:18-19, 14:21ff, 16:11ff). And, of course, Jesus almost single-handedly introduced the concept of charity into the West when he outlined the Golden Rule of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matt. 7:12). Ultimately, this explains the reason why Western nations are more charitable: their cultures are downstream from these dicta. Is it any wonder then that the nations of the Global South currently look to Christianity as their source of hope—in ever-increasing numbers? Or that intellectuals in the great Chinese universities seek insight from the Christian tradition, the philosophical seed-bed that precipitated the rise of modern science, capitalism, etc.?

The future of Christianity in Europe rests not upon the will to power, but the will to do the good. For the Church to recover its credibility in Europe, in the wake of the Wars of Religion in Europe and the Holocaust taking place in the heart of the Christian West, Christians will have to relearn the spiritual disciplines and practices of righteousness that made their forbearers great. As Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) so beautifully put it in his essay on *Europe: Today and Tomorrow*:

> God sustains the world, but he does this essentially by means of our freedom; this should be the freedom to do good, which is capable of opposing freedom to do evil. Faith does not create a better world, but it awakens and strengthens those ethical forces that construct ethical embankments and bulwarks against the tide of evil. Faith awakens the freedom to do good and fortifies it against the temptation to use freedom in a distorted way to choose evil. The graves of the Second World War commend to us the task of strengthening the forces of good: it is an invitation to work, to live, and to suffer for the propagation and reinforcement of those values and truths that build a united world with God as its fulcrum. God promised Abraham that he would not destroy the city of Sodom if at least ten just men could be found there (Gen. 18:32). We must make sure, then, that there will never be a day without those ten just men who can save an entire city.[27]

If Christianity is to be seriously regarded once again in Europe, then the Church will have to regain the ground that has been lost over the past five centuries. As important as making the rational argument in favor of Christianity is, and will continue to be, the Church must realize that the objections which modern persons have to traditional religion

are not finally rational. They are emotional, deep-seated, and embedded in individual biographies and family histories. So what evidence for Christian belief can be marshaled under such adverse conditions? The Church must return to the materials which St. Paul outlined as the basis for social capital: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. "Against such things," wrote the apostle, "there is no law."

If, however, the prevailing *zeitgeist* of the twenty-first century is "Show, Don't Tell," the Christian response will happily engage in its own project of deconstruction against secularism: "Show AND Tell." By demonstrating their faith in tangible ways that anyone can understand and by articulating *why* they believed in the first place, followers of Jesus have the opportunity to prove that the fabric of society can be held together by traditional religious belief once again. The lifeblood of culture, and the flow of moral energy that keeps a society intact, we believe, rests upon such a recovery.[28] More pointedly, it is crucial that this *élan* penetrates into the hearts of the coming generation of Britons, Europeans, and Americans. It was Goethe who observed that, "The destiny of any nation at any given time depends on the opinions of its young men under twenty-five."

So, to restate the question: If religion shapes culture, for Europe, Britain, and America, which religion will it be? Which worldview? Which belief system will capture the imagination of the greater part of the coming generation? And secondarily, what do we stand to lose if the answer to that question is not "Judeo-Christian"?

Endnotes

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, "European Nihilism," in *The Nietzsche Reader*, eds. Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 389.

[2] Ibid., 386.

[3] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 193.

[4] See, for example, Roy Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*, rev. ed. (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2005), 24.

[5] For an excellent summary of the process of secularization, see Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (1967; repr., New York: Doubleday, 1990), 105-125.

[6] Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Peter Bondanella (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 22-23.

[7] Accordingly, Holt explains, "In these terms, Protestants and Catholics alike in the sixteenth century each viewed the other as pollutants of their own particular notion of the body social, as threats to their own conception of ordered society. When a mob of Catholic winegrowers set fire to a barn in Beaune where a clandestine group of Protestants had observed the Lord's Supper in both kinds on Easter Sunday of 1561, for example, their actions went far beyond an expression of discontent and intolerance of the Calvinist theology of the eucharist. Those winegrowers were cleansing the body social of the pollutant of Protestantism, and in the process, preventing a dangerous and threatening cancer from spreading. By setting ablaze the barn where that pollution had taken place, they were purifying by fire the social space those Protestants had desecrated." Mack P. Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 1562-1629 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2.

[8] Luther wrote: "If anyone attempted to rule the world by the gospel and to abolish all temporal law and sword on the plea that all are baptized and Christian, and that, according to the gospel, there shall be among them no law or sword – or need for either – tell me, friend, what would he be doing? He would be loosing the ropes and chains of the savage wild beasts and letting them bite and mangle everyone, meanwhile insisting that they were harmless, tame, and gentle creatures; but I would have the proof in my wounds. Just so would the wicked under the name of Christian abuse evangelical freedom, carry on their rascality, and insist that they were Christians subject to neither law nor sword, as some are already raving and ranting." "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 436-437.

[9] See Mark A. Kishlansky, Patrick J. Geary, and Patricia O'Brien, *Civilization in the West*, 5th ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2006). Database online, available at *Pearson Website*, http://wps.ablongman.com/wps/media/objects/262/268312/art/figures/KISH312.jpg (accessed June 12, 2008).

[10] Voltaire wrote *Candide* as a send-up of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's response to the problem of evil. Leibniz attempted to argue on the basis of modal logic, that the current world which obtains is the greatest possible world. Voltaire often closed his correspondence with this as a peroration. Its usage is often applied to the Christian religion or clergy. See Voltaire, *Letters on England*, trans. Leonard Tancock (1980; repr., New York: Penguin, 2005).

[11] The full context for the quote is: "Enlightenment is man's release from self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-

incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude!* –'Have courage to use your own reason!'–that is the motto of enlightenment." Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What Is Enlightenment?*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: Liberal Arts, 1959), 85.

[12] Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 75-76.

[13] George Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes toward the Redefinition of Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971), 47.

[14] Ibid., 55-56.

[15] See, for example, Jean Francois Lyotard, "Defining the Postmodern," *Queens College Website*, http://qcpages.qc.edu/ENGLISH/Staff/richter/Lyotard.htm (ac accessed June 12, 2008).

[16] John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 1997), 32.

[17] Renee Montagne, "Interview with David Bowie," *Morning Edition*, August 28, 2002, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1149058 (accessed June 12, 2008).

[18] Milton Mayer, *They Thought They Were Free: The Germans, 1933-45*, 2nd rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

[19] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Reginald Fuller, Frank Clark, et. al. (London: SCM, 1967), 168-169.

[20] Ibid., 153.

[21] Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Socialist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 215.

[22] Ibid., 160-161.

[23] There is a good reason for the starkly different reactions to cultural challenges between Islam, on the one hand, and Christianity, on the other. There are, after all, two very distinct theological worldviews at work. Islam stresses the power, perfection, glory, and unassailability of their religion. Allah is a solitary and even arbitrary sovereign. His word, the Qur'an, was purportedly delivered perfectly to Muhammad and thus is untranslatable in any other language save Arabic. According to Islam, Muhammad cannot be maligned in even the slightest way. For a fundamentalist Muslim, all blasphemers must die. This is not the case with Christianity. God is a Trinity of loving persons, living in community. His followers are encouraged to translate his Word into every tongue known to man. In the person of the Jesus of Nazareth, God became flesh and associated himself with all sorts of unsavory characters—prostitutes, tax-collectors, and even a murderer-turned-apostle like Paul. And most importantly of all, Christ Jesus "did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant . . . and . . . he humbled himself" (Phil. 2:6-8). Indeed, he opened himself up to all manners of blasphemy, humiliation, and torture—even to the point of death on a cross. He welcomed all of these because he desired to save sinners because he loved them.

[24] See *Kairos Journal* occasional paper, "Legatees of a Great Inheritance: How the Judeo-Christian Tradition Has Shaped the West."

[25] See, for example, Robert M. Grant, *Early Christianity and Society* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977),130-134); Ray Vander Laan, *In the Dust of the Rabbi* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 109ff.

[26] George Russell, "A Gulf in Giving: Oil-Rich States Starve the World Food Program," May 9, 2008, *FOX News Website*, http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,354677,00.html (accessed June 12, 2008).

[27] Joseph Ratzinger, *Europe: Today and Tomorrow* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007), 113.

[28] I am employing a definition of culture here first outlined by Johann Herder.