POWERS OF THE SECULAR MODERN

Talal Asad and His Interlocutors

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Contents

1 Introduction: The Anthropological Skepticism of Talal Asad
David Scott and Charles Hirschkind 1

2 Secularization Revisited: A Reply to Talal Asad
José Casanova 12

3 What Is an "Authorizing Discourse"?
Steven C. Caton 31

4 Fasting for Bin Laden: The Politics of Secularization in Contemporary India
Partha Chatterjee 57

5 Europe: A Minor Tradition
William E. Connolly 75

6 Secularism and the Argument from Nature
Veena Das 93

7 On General and Divine Economy: Talal Asad's Genealogy of the Secular and Emmanuel Levinas's Critique of Capitalism, Colonialism, and Money
Hent de Vries 113

8 The Tragic Sensibility of Talal Asad
David Scott 134

9 Redemption, Secularization, and Politics
George Shulman 154

2

Secularization Revisited: A Reply to Talal Asad

José Casanova

In his insightful and incisive criticism of my reformulation of the theory of secularization, Talal Asad claims that my position is not "an entirely coherent one. For if the legitimate role for deprivatized religion is carried out effectively," the other two components of the thesis—the differentiation of the secular spheres and the declining significance of religious beliefs, practices, and institutions—are also undermined. As a consequence, according to Asad, "It seems that nothing retrievable remains of the secularization thesis."[1]

Let me restate my thesis in order first to clarify what I deem to be a misreading of my position, and then to address what I consider to be Asad's valid criticism.[2] The main purpose of my reformulation of the thesis of secularization was to disaggregate what usually passes for a single theory of secularization into three separate propositions, which in my view need to be treated differently: 1) secularization as a differentiation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms, 2) secularization as a decline of religious beliefs and practices, and 3) secularization as a marginalization of religion to a privatized sphere. I insisted that the core component of the theory of secularization was the conceptualization of societal modernization as a process of functional differentiation and emancipation of the secular spheres—primarily the modern state, the capitalist market economy,

and modern science—from the religious sphere, and the concomitant differentiation and specialization of religion within its own newly found religious sphere. I argued that this was still the defensible core of the theory of secularization. I will examine later whether and to what extent this core is still defensible after Asad's compelling critique.

The other two subtheses, which are thought to explain what happens to religion in the modern world as a result of secular differentiation, I insisted are not defensible as general propositions either empirically or normatively, in the sense that they are not inherently concomitant with modernity. The assumption that religion tends to decline with progressive modernization, a notion that, as I pointed out, "has proven patently false as a general empirical proposition," was traced genealogically back to the Enlightenment critique of religion.[3] Asad has therefore misrepresented my position when he states that I hold this as a "viable" element of the thesis of secularization. As to the third component of the theory, the thesis of privatization, I argued that "the related proposition that modern differentiation *necessarily* entails the marginalization and privatization of religion, [and] its logical counterpart that public religions *necessarily* endanger the differentiated structures of modernity" are equally indefensible.

While recognizing the validity, or at least the suggestive promise, of my argument, Asad takes me to task for going only halfway by drawing an analytical distinction between those *kinds* of public religion that are compatible with modern differentiated structures, with liberal democratic norms, and with individual liberties, and those that are not. It is true that since my argument was directed primarily at liberal secular theories of the public sphere, I was particularly interested in examining those modern forms of public religion that are not intrinsically incompatible with differentiated modern structures and that are "desirable" from a modern normative perspective in that they could actually contribute to strengthening the public sphere of modern civil societies. But nowhere did I argue that forms of political religion which seek to undermine civil society or individual liberties are "indeed a rebellion against modernity and the universal values of Enlightenment."[4] They are simply religions that follow or are constituted by different norms. Moreover, it is a misrepresentation of my position to state that "only religions that have accepted the assumptions of liberal discourse are being commended." In my argument, the litmus test for a modern public religion was not the commitment to liberal "tolerance on the

basis of a distinctive relation between law and morality," but the recognition of freedom of conscience as an inviolable individual right. Such recognition does not need to be—and historically for many religious people it has not usually been—based on liberal or secular values.

Nor was the conception of a modern public sphere that I proposed reduced to a discursive communicative space restricted to rational debate. A more careful reading will show that on this point I clearly sought to distance myself from Habermas. I envision the modern public sphere as "a discursive or agonic space in principle open to all citizens and all issues," including issues of power and the power to set the terms of the debate.[5] Moreover, there is not a single public sphere; there are many competing and interrelated publics and a multiplicity of public spaces. I fully concur with Asad when he states that "when religion becomes an integral part of modern politics, it is not indifferent to debates about how the economy should be run, or which scientific projects should be funded, or what the broader aims of a national education system should be."[6] In principle I also have no objection to the creation of modern "hybrids" that may result from the entry of religion into these debates. My conception of modern differentiation or of the boundaries between the differentiated spheres is neither as rigid nor as fixed as Asad seems to imply. As I pointed out, not disapprovingly, "Religions throughout the world are entering the public sphere and the arena of political contestation . . . to participate in the very struggles to define and set the modern boundaries between the private and public spheres, between system and life-world, between legality and morality, between individual and society, between family, civil society, and state, between nations, states, civilizations and the world system."[7] The purpose of such interventions in the undifferentiated public sphere is not simply to "enrich public debate," but to challenge the very claims of the secular spheres to differentiated autonomy exempt from extrinsic normative constraints.

I also do not recognize as my own Asad's examination of "*the kind* of religion that enlightened intellectuals like Casanova see as compatible with modernity."[8] For, as I pointed out, "The very resurgence or reassertion of religious traditions may be viewed as a sign of the failure of the Enlightenment to redeem its own promises. Religious traditions are now confronting the differentiated secular spheres, challenging them to face their own obscurantist, ideological, and inauthentic claims. In many of these confrontations, it is religion which, as often as not, appears to be on the side of human enlightenment."[9] Furthermore, the purpose of such a confrontation is not simply to "evoke the moral sensibilities" of the nation by appealing to its conscience. I take the moral heterogeneity of modern societies for granted, and for that very reason I distinguished my position from neo-Durkheimian or communitarian theories of "civil religion."

But if my own true position, rather than the one misrepresented by Asad, does not seem so distant from Asad's position, it is still legitimate to ask whether anything retrievable remains of the secularization thesis. Why go through the trouble of reformulating the theory, rather than discarding it altogether as a myth? My reasons then and now, I submit, would seem to be the same ones that have led Asad to reconstruct a genealogy of the secular. I agree with Asad that to examine critically the formations of the secular and construct an anthropology of secularism remains one of the most relevant tasks for the social sciences today. To drop the concept or the theory of secularization would leave us analytically impoverished and without adequate conceptual tools in trying to trace the "genealogy" and "archeology" of Western modernity and to reveal the modern "order of things." Our approaches, however, are somewhat different. Asad follows a Foucauldian genealogical approach with illuminating results. I follow a more traditional comparative historical sociological analysis.

My purpose in attempting to offer a reformulation of the theory of secularization was to mediate in what I considered to be a fruitless and futile debate between European and American sociologists of religion concerning the validity of the theory of secularization. The fact that the contentious debate has continued unabated only indicates how unsuccessful my attempted mediation has proven to be and how ingrained are the positions.[10] Most European sociologists continue to hold unreflexively and uncritically to the traditional theory of secularization. For them the drastic secularization of European societies appears to be an empirically irrefutable fait accompli. Most American sociologists of religion, by contrast, have reduced the meaning of the concept of secularization to such an extent that they are convinced they have proven that secularization is a *myth* once they are able to show that, at least in the United States, none of the so-called "indicators" of secularization—such as church attendance, belief in God, frequency of prayer, and so on evince any long-term declining trend.

In the European context, secularization is a concept overloaded with multiple historically sedimented meanings that simply points to the ubiquitous and undeniable long-term historical shrinkage of the size, power, and functions of ecclesiastical institutions vis-à-vis other secular institutions. As the dictionary of any Western European language will show, to secularize means "to make worldly," to convert or transfer persons, things, meanings, and so on from religious or ecclesiastical to secular or civil use. But Europeans tend to use the term in a double sense, switching unconsciously back and forth between this traditional meaning of *secularization* and a second meaning that points to the progressive decline of religious beliefs and practices among individuals. This narrower meaning of secularization is secondary, posterior, and mainly derivative from the primary meaning. Europeans, however, see the two meanings of the term as intrinsically related because they view the two realities—the decline in the societal significance of religious institutions and the decline of religious beliefs and practices—as structurally related. Supposedly, one leads necessarily to the other.

American sociologists of religion tend to view things differently and practically restrict the use of the term *secularization* to its narrower meaning of decline of religious beliefs and practices among individuals. It is not so much that they question the secularization of society, but simply that they take it for granted as an unremarkable fact. The United States, they assume, has always been, at least constitutionally since independence, a secular society, as secular if not more so than any European society. Yet they see no evidence that this unquestionable fact has led to a progressive decline in the religious beliefs and practices of the American people. If anything, the historical evidence points in the opposite direction: progressive growth in religious beliefs and practices and progressive *churching* of the American population since independence.[11] Consequently, many American sociologists of religion tend to discard the theory of secularization as a European myth.[12]

Even after discounting the tendency of Americans to inflate their rates of church attendance and to exaggerate the depth and seriousness of their religious beliefs, the fact remains that Americans are generally more religious than most Europeans, with the possible exception of the Irish and the Poles.[13] Moreover, the very tendency of the Americans to exaggerate

their religiousness, in contrast to the opposite tendency of Europeans to discount and undercount their own persistent religiosity—tendencies that are evident among ordinary people as well as among scholars—are themselves part of the very different and consequential definitions of the situation in both places. Americans think that they are supposed to be religious, while Europeans think that they are supposed to be irreligious.

The progressive, though highly uneven, secularization of Europe is an undeniable social fact. An increasing majority of the European population has ceased participating in traditional religious practices, at least on a regular basis, even though they may still maintain relatively high levels of private individual religious beliefs.[14] But the standard explanations of the phenomenon in terms of general processes of modernization are not persuasive, since similar processes of modernization elsewhere (in the United States or in the cultural areas of other world religions) are not accompanied by the same secularizing results. We need to entertain seriously the proposition that secularization became a self-fulfilling prophecy in Europe once large sectors of the population of Western European societies, including the Christian churches, accepted the basic premises of the theory of secularization: that secularization is a teleological process of modern social change; that the more modern a society the more secular it becomes; that "secularity" is "a *sign of the times*." If such a proposition is correct, then the secularization of Western European societies can be explained better in terms of the triumph of the knowledge regime of secularism than in terms of structural processes of socio-economic development, such as urbanization, education, rationalization, and so on.

In such a context, the study of modern secularism, as an ideology, as a generalized worldview, and as a social movement, and of its role as a crucial carrier of processes of secularization and as a catalyst for counter-secularization responses should be high on the agenda of a self-reflexive comparative historical sociology of secularization. Otherwise, teleological theories of secularization become themselves conscious or unconscious vehicles for the transmission of secularist ideologies and worldviews. What makes the European situation so unique and exceptional when compared with the rest of the world is precisely the triumph of secularism as a teleological theory of religious development. The ideological critique of religion developed by the Enlightenment and carried out by a series of social movements throughout Europe from the eighteenth to the twentieth cen-

tury has informed European theories of secularization in such a way that those theories came to function not only as descriptive theories of social processes but also and more significantly as critical-genealogical theories of religion and as normative-teleological theories of religious development that presupposed religious decline as the telos of history.

It is time to abandon the eurocentric view that modern Western European developments, including the secularization of European Christianity, are general universal processes. The more one adopts a global perspective, the more it becomes obvious that the drastic secularization of Western European societies is a rather exceptional phenomenon, with few parallels elsewhere, other than in European settler societies such as New Zealand, Quebec, or Uruguay. Such an exceptional phenomenon demands, therefore, a more particular historical explanation. The collapse of the plausibility structures of European Christianity is so extraordinary that we need a better explanation than simply referring to general processes of modernization. Holding onto the traditional theory of secularization, by contrast, reassures modern secular Europeans, including sociologists of religion, that this collapse was natural, teleological, and quasi-providential. Such a view of secularization tends to make the phenomenon of secularization into something practically inevitable and irreversible. It turns into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

It is in reaction to the European failure to confront seriously the evidence of American religious vitality that a new American paradigm has emerged, offering an alternative explanation of the American religious dynamics that challenges the basic premises of the European theory of secularization.[15] In and of itself, the explanation of religious vitality in terms of the beneficial effects of the dual clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, "no establishment" and "free exercise" of religion, is not novel. Tocqueville, and Marx following him, had already maintained this basic insight.[16] The combination they observed of high secularization in the broad primary sense of social differentiation (i.e., "perfect disestablishment") and low secularization in the narrower secondary sense of religious decline ("land of religiosity par excellence") already put into question the alleged structural relationship between the two dimensions of secularization in the orthodox model. Tocqueville (p. 309), moreover, had already used the American evidence to question two basic premises of modern theories of secularization, which, as he pointed out, had their origins in the Enlightenment critique of religion under the ancien régime: that the advancement of rationalism (i.e., education and scientific knowledge) and individualism (i.e., liberal democracy and individual freedoms) would necessarily lead to the decline of religion.

What is refreshingly new in the American paradigm is the move to turn the European model of secularization on its head and to use the American evidence to postulate an equally general structural relationship between disestablishment or state deregulation, open free competitive and pluralistic religious markets, and high levels of individual religiosity.[17] With this reversal, what was until now the American exception attains normative status, while the previous European rule is now demoted to a deviation from the American norm. But it is this very move to turn a persuasive account of the exceptionally pluralistic and competitive American religious market into a universal general theory of religious economies that is problematic. The perils are precisely the same that led the European theory astray by turning a plausible account of the European historical process of secularization into a general theory of modern development.

Nevertheless, I believe that the theory of secularization is still useful, not only as a way of reconstructing analytically the transformations of modern European societies, but also as an analytical framework for a comparative research agenda that aims to examine the historical transformation of all world religions under conditions of modern structural differentiation, as long as the outcome of this transformation is not predetermined by the theory, and as long as we do not label as religious fundamentalism any countersecularization, or any religious transformation that does not follow the prescribed model.

The story of secularization is primarily a story of the tensions, conflicts, and patterns of differentiation between religious and worldly regimes. The European concept of secularization refers to a particular historical process of the transformation of Western Christendom and might not be directly applicable to other world religions with very different modes of structuration of the sacred and profane realms. It could hardly be applicable, for instance, to such "religions" as Confucianism or Taoism, insofar as they are not characterized by high tension with "the world" and have no ecclesiastical organization. In a sense those religions that have always been "worldly" and "lay" do not need to undergo a process of secularization. To secularize—that is, "to make worldly" or "to transfer from ecclesi-

astical to civil use"—is a process that does not make much sense in such a civilizational context. But to ask how religions like Confucianism or Taoism, or any other religion for that matter, respond to the imposition of the new global worldly regime of Western modernity becomes a very relevant question.

In the rest of this paper I would like to address what I consider to be the most valid aspect of Asad's critique. In my view, the fundamental question is whether the core of the theory of secularization—namely, the differentiation of the secular spheres from each other *and* from religious institutions and norms—is still defensible. I believe that secularization, as an empirical proposition and as an adequate way of conceptualizing analytically the historical transformation of Western European societies, is defensible.[18] But even if this is a valid claim, it raises two further questions that need to be scrutinized more critically than I was prepared to do. Firstly, to what extent is it possible to dissociate this analytical reconstruction of the historical process of differentiation of Western European societies from general theories of modernity that present secular differentiation as a normative project for all "modern" societies? As I pointed out then, "The theory of secularization is so intrinsically interwoven with all the theories of the modern world and with the self-understanding of modernity that one cannot simply discard the theory of secularization without putting into question the entire web, including much of the understanding of the social sciences."[19] Self-definitions of modernity are tautological insofar as secular differentiation is precisely what defines a society as modern. But can the analytical definition be dissociated from the normative project of turning the temporal age of modernity into a homogeneous global space until all contemporary societies *in* modernity but not *of* modernity become liberal modern secular societies?

Asad's parallel genealogies of religion and of the secular offer a way of deconstructing the secular self-understanding of modernity that is constitutive of the social sciences. Therein lies in my view his main critical contribution. But his analysis raises a further question, namely which of the possible alternative genealogies of the secular is one going to privilege? I do not have a ready answer to this question, but in my view Asad's genealogy of the secular is too indebted to the triumphalist self-genealogies of secularism he has so aptly exposed. I fully agree with Asad that "the secular" "should not be thought of as the space in which *real* human life gradually emancipates itself from the controlling power of 'religion' and thus achieves the latter's relocation."[20] This is so precisely because in the historical process of secularization, the religious and the secular are inextricably bound together and mutually condition each other. Asad's statement that "the genealogy of secularism has to be traced through the concept of the secular—in part to the Renaissance doctrine of humanism, in part to the Enlightenment concept of nature, and in part to Hegel's philosophy of history,"[21] fails to recognize the extent to which the formation of the secular is linked with the internal transformation of European Christianity, particularly through the Protestant Reformation. Should one define this transformation as a process of internal secularization of Christianity?

This has been, of course, an ardently contested issue, and Asad is, in my view, correct in distancing himself from the two contentious poles in the debate, from Karl Löwith, who, following Nietzsche, traced the genealogy of the secular idea of progress through the internal secularization of Christian postmillennial eschatology, as well as from Hans Blumenberg, who offered a "secularist" defense of the legitimacy of the Modern Age in order to cleanse secular modernity from any dubious religious pedigree.[22] Each of these antithetical genealogies, moreover, can have opposite readings. Parallel to Löwith's critical reading of secular teleologies, there is a celebratory Protestant reading of modernity, going from Hegel's *Early Theological Writings* through the Weber-Troeltsch axis to Talcott Parsons's interpretation of modern societies as the institutionalization of Christian principles.[23] Such a reading is operative, moreover, not only at the level of intellectual history but at the more popular level in the seemingly perennial postmillennial visions of America as "a City on a Hill," "beacon of freedom," and redeemer nation. While inverting Blumenberg's triumphalist evaluation, it seems to me that Asad's critical genealogy is nonetheless too close to Blumenberg's insofar as Asad seems to assign to the secular the power to constitute not only its own near-absolute modern hegemony but also the very category of the religious and its circumscribed space within the secular regime.

Following a more traditional comparative historical analysis, David Martin has shown convincingly that it is necessary to take into account two very different historical patterns of secularization. In the Latin-Catholic cultural area, and to some extent throughout continental Europe, there was a collision between religion and the differentiated secular spheres, that

is, between Catholic Christianity and modern science, modern capitalism, and the modern state. As a result of this protracted clash, the Enlightenment critique of religion found ample resonance there; the secularist genealogy of modernity was constructed as a triumphant emancipation of reason, freedom, and worldly pursuits from the constraints of religion, and practically every "progressive" European social movement from the time of the French Revolution to the present was informed by secularism.

In the Anglo-Protestant cultural area, by contrast, particularly in the United States, there was collusion between religion and the secular differentiated spheres. Irrespective of how one evaluates the elective affinities between ascetic Protestantism and the spirit of capitalism analyzed by Weber, there is little historical evidence of tension between American Protestantism and capitalism. There is also no manifest tension between science and religion in America prior to the Darwinian crisis at the end of the nineteenth century, and the secularization of the American university dates only from this period. The American Enlightenment had hardly any antireligious component. Even the separation of church and state that was constitutionally codified in the dual clause of the First Amendment had as much the purpose of protecting "the free exercise" of religion from state interference as that of protecting the federal state from any religious entanglement. James Madison's *Remonstrance*, the text that provided the rationale for the Virginia Statute on Religious Liberty, upon which the First Amendment was based, is a theological discourse on religious liberty as an inviolable individual right in need of protection from any political or religious establishment rather than a liberal secular discourse on overlapping consensus or the need to protect the liberal state and the public sphere from religious "infection." It is rare, at least until very recently, to find any progressive social movement in America appealing to secularist values. The appeals to the Gospel and to Christian values are certainly much more common throughout the history of American social movements as well as in the discourse of American presidents. Indeed, as jarring as such a discourse might sound to the enlightened ears of modern secular individuals, particularly European ones, no candidate for electoral office in America can afford to don a secularist or even an agnostic face in public.

The purpose of this comparison is not to reiterate the well-known fact that American society is more religious and therefore less secular than European societies. While the first may be true, the second proposition does not follow. On the contrary, the United States has always been the paradigmatic form of a modern secular, differentiated society. Yet the triumph of the secular came aided by religion rather than at its expense. The point I am trying to make is that Christianity, particularly Protestant Christianity is intrinsically implicated in the development of secular modernity. One could say that the existence of a theological discourse of the "saeculum" within medieval Christianity was the very condition of possibility and the point of departure of the process of secularization. This process, however, has two trajectories. The more familiar trajectory is envisioned in secularist narratives as the emancipation and expansion of the secular spheres at the expense of a much-diminished and confined religious sphere. Here the boundaries are well-kept, but they are relocated drastically, pushing religion into the margins. The other trajectory is one in which the monastery walls—that is, the symbolic boundaries between the secular and religious spheres—are shattered, allowing for a mutual penetration of religion by the secular and of the secular by religion. The boundaries themselves become so diffuse that it is not clear where religion begins and the secular ends.

Of course, one could also offer a secularist interpretation of this trajectory by arguing that what we are dealing with here is no longer "authentic" religion, but rather an accommodation of religion to secular demands in order to survive. Supposedly, religion becomes so secularized that it does not count as "religion" anymore.[24] But, as Asad has noted concerning this secularist understanding, "The interesting thing about this view is that although religion is regarded as alien to the secular, the latter is also seen to have generated religion. . . . Thus the insistence on a sharp separation between the religious and the secular goes with the paradoxical claim that the latter continually produces the former."[25] The notion of an "authentic" religion is no less problematic, as Asad's persistent critique of essentialist constructions of Islam and of the Islamic tradition has shown so persuasively. Is modern Christianity less authentic and therefore less Christian than medieval or ancient Christianity? Is Eastern less authentic than Western Christianity, or Catholic less authentic than Protestant Christianity? It should be obvious that social science should not be in the business of authenticating authoritatively what true religion or true tradition might be,

even when it cannot eschew making analytical distinctions.

The problem is that in the modern secular world the boundaries between the religious and the secular are so fluid that one ought to be very cautious when drawing such analytical distinctions. Let me illustrate this point through an analysis of the implication of religion in the crafting of what Asad views as "secular" human rights. Obviously I cannot attempt here a systematic reconstruction of the complex and multiple trajectories from medieval theological and canonical debates over natural law and natural rights, through early modern debates in secular legal and political theory, to modern declarations of universal human rights. Undoubtedly, the rise of bourgeois capitalism and the absolutist administrative state, the European colonial expansion, and the subjugation of conquered peoples and the slave trade were all crucial catalysts in these reformulations. But certainly the dissolution of medieval Christendom, the proliferation of competing churches unable to enforce their claims to territorial monopoly over the means of salvation, and the proliferation of dissenting sects challenging the claims of established state churches were equally relevant catalysts in "separating the individual right to (religious) belief from the authority of the state" and, one should add, from the authority of the church. To attribute this separation, as Asad seems to do, to the doctrine of secularism and to argue that "it is on this basis that the secularist principle of the right to freedom of belief and expression was crafted" is an overtly secularist reading of this process that overlooks the historical role of religious dissenters in claiming and securing their own rights.

Christian sects, particularly Baptists who on religious-theological grounds gave up the model of church, played a crucial role in the first historical codification of human rights in the Bills of Rights of the colonies and postcolonial states. Certainly the coalition of the secularist Jefferson, the religiously antiestablishmentarian Madison, and the mobilized Baptists was crucial in overcoming the resistance and securing the passage of the Virginia Statue on Religious Liberty. Today Christians continue to play an active role in the globalization of the discourse of human rights. The contemporary role of Catholics in this process is particularly striking and instructive. After all, the Catholic church had vehemently opposed the principle of human rights since the principle emerged at the time of the American and French revolutions. Pope Pius VI viewed the Declaration of the Rights of Man by the French National Assembly as a direct attack on the Catholic church. His 1791 papal Brief *Caritas* condemned the Declaration, stating that the formulation of the rights to freedom of religion and freedom of the press, as well as the Declaration on the Equality of All Men, was contrary to the divine principles of the church.[26] Pope Gregory XVI reiterated the condemnation in his encyclicals *Mirari vos* (1832) and *Singulari nos* (1834). Pius IX included the principle of human rights and most modern freedoms in the *Syllabus* (1864) of errors, pronouncing them anathema and irreconcilable with the Catholic faith. The principle of religious freedom was particularly odious, since it implied making equal the true religion and the false ones, as well as legitimizing separation of church and state.

But as part of the process of *aggiornamento* of the 1960s, the Catholic church has embraced the secular discourse of human rights, giving it a theological justification. John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1963) was the first to adopt the modern discourse, which has remained thereafter part of every papal encyclical and of most episcopal pastoral letters.[27] Papal pronouncements have consistently presented the protection of the human rights of every person as the moral foundation of a just social and political global order.[28] Moreover, while earlier encyclicals were usually addressed to the Catholic faithful, beginning with *Pacem in Terris* the popes have tended to address their pronouncements to the entire world and to all people.

The Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, recognized the inalienable right of every individual to freedom of conscience, based on the sacred dignity of the human person. As the American theologian John Courtney Murray, one of the main drafters of the declaration, explained, theologically this entailed the transference of the principle of *libertas ecclesiae*, which the church had guarded so zealously through the ages, to the individual human person, from *libertas ecclesiae* to *libertas personae*.[29] Besides the unanimous support of the American bishops, the most eloquent arguments in support of the vehemently contested declaration came from Cardinal Karol Wojtyła from Cracow, who had learned from the experience of trying to defend the freedom of the church under communism that the best line of defense, both theoretically and practically, was the defense of the inalienable right of the human person to freedom of conscience.

From now on, the most effective way for the papacy to protect the freedom of the church worldwide would no longer be to enter into concordats with individual states, trying to extract from both friendly and unfriendly regimes the most favorable conditions possible for Catholic subjects, but rather to proclaim *urbi et orbi* the sacred right of each and every person to freedom of religion and to remind every government, not through discreet diplomatic channels but publicly, of their duty to protect this sacred human right. In particular, John Paul II became an untiring world traveler proclaiming everywhere the sacred dignity of the human person, claiming to be the self-appointed spokesman of humanity and *defensor hominis*. The pope learned to play, perhaps more effectively than any competitor, the role of first citizen of a catholic (i.e., global and universal) human society. One could almost say that the pope is becoming the high priest of a new global civil religion of humanity.[30]

There can be no doubt about the geopolitical impact of this doctrinal transformation upon the democratization of Catholic societies throughout the world.[31] But how are we going to interpret this theological reformulation of the Catholic tradition? Are we going to view it as the final capitulation to the inevitable triumph of secular modernity after centuries of apparently futile resistance? Certainly the very concept of *aggiornamento*, with its semantic connotation of "bringing up to date" and "catching up" with the spirit of the age, would seem to warrant such a reading. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*—undoubtedly the most important and consequential document of the Second Vatican Council—explicitly recognizes the legitimacy of the modern *saeculum*, of the modern age and the modern world. From now on, action on behalf of peace and justice and participation in the transformation of the world will be a constitutive dimension of the church's divine mission. In the last decades, Catholic churches, Catholic movements, and Catholic elites everywhere have turned inner-worldly with a vengeance. How is one to evaluate this process of internal secularization of the Catholic tradition?

About the authoritative nature of the theological reformulation there can be no doubt. The Church Fathers, gathered in ecumenical council, claimed to be inspired by the Holy Spirit.[32] But even if one were, from a secular perspective, to discount this theological claim as nothing but a subterfuge to mask and legitimate the radical reform, it would not follow that it constituted an illegitimate break with Catholic tradition. As Asad has rightly pointed out, "The selectivity with which people approach their tradition doesn't necessarily undermine their claim to its integrity. Nor does the attempt to adapt the older concerns of a tradition's followers to their new predicament in itself dissolve the coherence of that tradition."[33] But could it not be viewed perhaps as an instance of unwitting accommodation to the cunning of secular liberal reason? The bishops would certainly protest such a reading, and it would seem farfetched to accuse John Paul II of secular or liberal reasoning. Certainly his explicit critiques of secularism and liberalism are as coherent as those provided by Asad.

Although the Second Vatican Council recognized the autonomy of the secular spheres, the Catholic church does not accept the claims of these spheres to be detached from public morality. It resists the relegation of religion and morality to the private sphere, insisting on the links between private and public morality. It criticizes the radical individualism that accompanies privatization and stresses the collective and communal—the ecclesial—character of the proclamation of faith and of religious practices, while simultaneously upholding the absolute rights of the individual conscience. It simultaneously affirms dogma (i.e., authoritative obligatory doctrines of faith) and freedom of conscience. It also maintains the principle of communal ethical life that demands that all parts of society work toward the common good and be subordinated to higher moral principles.

Despite some continuity, there is a clear break with traditional Catholic organicism. The common good is no longer tied to a static, ontological view of natural law, itself tied to a conception of a natural social order. The church's claim that it is the depository of the common good is no longer tied to its alleged expertise in a divinely prescribed natural law but rather to a newly claimed "expertise in humanity." It is the transcendent, divinized humanity revealed in Jesus Christ that serves to ground the sacred dignity of the human person, as well as the absolute values of human life and freedom. Ironically, the church escapes the nominalist critique of the traditional ontological conception of natural law by embracing the historicism implicit in the biblical message. It is this historicism that permits maintaining both the religious particularity and the anthropological universality of the Christian message. With some lingering neo-Thomist strains, this is the core of Karol Wojtyła's theology, equally visible in his prepapal writings and in his papal pronouncements.[34]

The fact that the pope links these allegedly universal norms and values—the sacred dignity of the human person as well as the inalienable

rights to human autonomy and self-determination—to a particular religious tradition is certainly bound to affect the reception of these universalistic claims by non-Christians. But conversely, in places where this particular religious tradition is still alive, it will serve to sanctify and legitimate modern liberal secular norms and values as Christian ones. The legitimation of liberal democracy is a case in point.

The traditional position of the Catholic church regarding modern political regimes had been neutrality toward all forms of government. While expressing its preference and the Catholic affinity for hierarchic and corporatist over republican and liberal democratic forms of government, the church also stressed its willingness to tolerate and coexist with the latter. Above all, the church always reminded the faithful to obey the rightful authorities. So long as the policies of these governments did not infringe systematically upon the corporate rights of the church to religious freedom, *libertas ecclesiae*, and to the exercise of its functions as *mater et magistra*, the church would not question their legitimacy. Only most rarely in those instances would the church resort to its traditional doctrine of lawful rebellion.[35]

The assumption of the modern doctrine of human rights has entailed not only the acceptance of democracy as a legitimate form of government but the recognition that modern democracy is a type of polity based on the universalist principles of individual freedom and individual rights. One can surely find continuity between the contemporary Catholic defense of human and civil rights against the modern authoritarian state and traditional Catholic critiques of tyranny and despotic rule. Against the arbitrary rule of tyrants as well as against the absolutist claims of the secular state, the church has always argued that the legitimacy of the state ought to be subordinated to the common good. But there is a fundamental difference between the traditional opposition to immoral rule because it violates natural law and the natural social order, and opposition to modern authoritarian rule because it violates the dignity of the human person and the inalienable rights to freedom, autonomy, and self-determination.

The purpose of this seeming digression into Catholic political theology has been to question what I consider to be the most problematic aspect of Asad's genealogy of the secular. Asad has presented a stark picture of the secular, liberal democracy, and the human rights regime, all blurred into an undifferentiated totality of Western modernity. If such a perspective is plausible, it would mean that the Catholic *aggiornamento* has contributed to the triumph of the secular regime across Catholic societies throughout the world. But Catholicism is not the only world religion undergoing similar *aggiornamentos*. Indeed, all world religions are challenged to respond to the global expansion of modernity by reformulating their traditions in an attempt to fashion their own versions of modernity. As I've pointed out elsewhere, it may be appropriate to interpret contemporary Islamic revival movements as types of *aggiornamento*.[36]

There are, of course, obvious differences between the contemporary Catholic and Islamic reforms. While the Catholic church has a clerical and hierarchic centralized administrative structure, the Islamic *umma*, at least within the Sunni tradition, has a more laic, egalitarian, and decentralized structure. Moreover, in comparison with the canonical and dogmatic modes of official infallible definition and interpretation of divine doctrines, Islam has more open, competitive, and pluralistic authoritative schools of law and interpretation, with a more fluid and decentralized organization of the *ulama*. Consequently, the Catholic *aggiornamento* had the character of an official, relatively uniform, and swift reform from above that encountered little contestation from below and could easily be enforced across the Catholic world, generating as a result a remarkable global homogenization of Catholic culture, at least among the elites. Lacking centralized institutions and administrative structures to define and enforce official doctrines, the ongoing Muslim responses to modern global realities and predicaments are and will likely remain plural, with multiple, diverse, and often contradictory outcomes. Actually, if there is anything on which most observers and analysts of contemporary Islam agree, it is that the Islamic tradition in the very recent past has undergone an unprecedented process of pluralization and fragmentation of religious authority, comparable to that initiated by the Protestant Reformation and operative ever since within Protestant Christianity.

Rather than furthering secularization, however, the general "modernization" or detraditionalization of Muslim societies has actually led to greater and wider access to religious education, which is moreover no longer under the control of the traditional *ulama*. As a result, not only Muslim intellectuals but ordinary Muslims across the world are engaged in contentious debates over their tradition and over the relationship of Islam to democracy, human rights, civil society, the public sphere, and the

nation-state.[37] In order to be attuned and appreciate the multiple modernities that are likely to be fashioned by the diverse Muslim practices informed by these debates, we need better and more critical analytical tools than those provided by the traditional theory of secularization and corresponding theories of religious fundamentalism. Asad's *Formations of the Secular* offers a much more helpful analytical approach.

3

What Is an "Authorizing Discourse"?

Steven C. Caton

July 2002. Sana'a, Republic of Yemen. The monsoon season but no rain. People are worried that the crops will fail, as they have in the previous five summers. Even the president has gone on TV to ask the country to pray for rain. One can hear them in the mosques all over the city and far into the night.

—S. CATON, DIARY ENTRY

As in other parts of the Middle East, the Republic of Yemen has suffered a long-term drought, though it has been more severe perhaps in Yemen than elsewhere in the region. Drought is not the only problem where water shortage is concerned, however. Due to overuse of bore-hole drilling, spurred on by overly ambitious agricultural development plans of the 1980s and 1990s, the water table has been dropping precipitously and in some parts of the country is below the level at which farming is still profitable or even in some cases possible, leading to the wholesale abandonment of once self-sufficient villages. According to some predictions, Sana'a, the capital, will run out of potable water by the year 2008 unless something drastic is done. Just what that something might be, however, is anyone's guess. Though it would help to restrict the depth to which wells may be drilled for water extraction, finding new or additional sources of water is unlikely. Nor can Yemen afford the relatively expensive process of water desalinization, and transporting water over great distances—much less the fantas-