

DANGERS AND PROMISE IN THE ENCOUNTER OF THEOLOGY AND THE SECULAR INTELLECTUAL WORLD

*No movement that aspires to more than mere belief or inconsequential talk
in public can remain indifferent to state power in a secular world.*

—Talal Asad¹

1. SOMEWHERE BETWEEN NOTRE DAME AND DUKE

I am honored to be asked by the Catholic Theological Society to address you on the topic, “Dangers and Promise in the Encounter of Theology and the Secular Intellectual World.” I am also aware I am in a precarious position. I am, after all, a “sectarian, fideistic, tribalist,” or at least I have been so described by James Gustafson in an address to the Catholic Theological Society in 1984.² More recently Gustafson has identified me, along with Peter Ochs and John Milbank, as a representative of a “rejection-strategy” against secular learning and, in particular, the sciences.³ In his book, *Democracy and Tradition*, Jeff Stout seems to support Gustafson’s charge by suggesting that I have rejected “liberalism” as a “secularist ideology that masks a discriminatory program for policing what religious people can say in public.”⁴

¹Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2003) 200.

²Gustafson’s address was published as “The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church, and the University,” in *CTSA Proceedings* 40 (1985): 83-94. For my response see the introduction to my book, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001) 1-19. *Christian Existence Today* was originally published in 1988. For a good discussion of Gustafson’s criticism and my response, see Gavin D’Costa, *Theology in the Public Square: Church, Academy, and Nation*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Oxford; Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005) 77-87.

³James Gustafson, *An Examined Faith: The Grace of Self-Doubt* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004) 37-44. Gustafson bases his case on the description given to the series, “Radical Traditions: Theology in a Postcritical Key,” that Peter Ochs and I edit. Gustafson is quite critical of our disavowal of “modernist” reading habits, but it seems odd for him to criticize us for rejecting secular intellectual sources, because it was exactly those sources that taught us to be critical of “modernism.” I also find it quite odd that Gustafson, who criticizes us for not exercising appropriate scholarly care toward those we criticize, has no difficulty criticizing Peter and me without reading what we write.

⁴Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004) 76. I confess when I read this sentence in Stout’s book I was a bit surprised because

This makes it all the more remarkable that you have asked me to address you and, in particular, on this topic. Of course you may have done so in an anthropological mode, that is, you simply want to confirm by observation that I am a “sectarian, fidiestic, tribalist” who assumes that the “secular” must be rejected in the name of theology. If, however, this is an anthropological exercise you must be careful because anthropologists have become so sensitive about the ethical issues raised by their study of “the other” they now spend most of their time studying other anthropologists.

I am, moreover, aware that I am at the Catholic Theological Society. Will what I have to say about the “secular intellectual world” confirm the opinion many of you may have that I do not have an adequate account of “the natural?” Is my refusal to begin Christian ethics with a robust account of natural law a failure to understand that grace does not destroy nature but rather grace perfects and completes nature? Or do my doubts about natural theology in *With the Grain of the Universe* suggest that I must disavow what we may learn about God from other sources?⁵ I mention these matters because they bear on the argument I will develop below; namely, that the identification of natural law with secular reason in the attempt to insure a common moral discourse can result in a failure to recognize the challenge presented by the development of the modern state.⁶

I do not, of course, believe that I have an inadequate account of the “natural,” natural law, or natural theology. Some may doubt whether I have developed a robust constructive account of natural law, but I have often argued that at the very

I could not remember using “secular” as a description of “liberalism.” Stout quite rightly notes that Rawls, for example, particularly after *Political Liberalism*, insists that his account of public reason is not equivalent to secular reason and secular values. In particular see Rawls, “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited,” in *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) 143, 148. But I cannot find anywhere where I suggested that Rawls’s account of reason is secular. “Secular” is not a word I often use. I did, however, discover in a footnote in *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1994) that I had disavowed having any “theory” of the secular. Yet in the same footnote I commended Milbank’s account of the secular which may have given Stout the impression I think liberalism to be a “secular ideology.” In spite of my commendation of Milbank’s account, an account I continue to find instructive, I remain hesitant to underwrite Weberian accounts of the “secular.” As I hope this paper makes clear, secular as a description is primarily an account of modern political arrangements.

⁵Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids MI: Brazos Press, 2001).

⁶John Howard Yoder observed that “the notion of ‘nature’ in medieval Catholic thought was not the modern one of knowing how to talk with outsiders. The medieval concept of natural law was developed in a world where there were no non-Christians present in the neighborhood, and no nontheists in the known world that needing to be convinced . . . it (natural law) was to distinguish the things that everyone (including Christians) need to obey from those elements of divine moral guidance from Scripture which can be left to the Hebrews.” *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001) 42.

least we can discover what it means to be a creature through negative results.⁷ My difficulty with natural law is not whether or not such a law is constitutive of our existence. Rather my difficulty is with the presumption of some defenders of natural law that natural law is rational in contrast to revelation. In other words, my criticism of the attempt to make natural law a rational bedrock for ethics reflects my doubts in general about the foundationalist epistemological enterprise.⁸

My refusal to “do” epistemology I learned from philosophers such as Wittgenstein, Anscombe, and MacIntyre. That I have tried to do theology in a manner that reflects what I learned from them makes the charge that I “reject” what can be learned from “secular sources” seem quite odd to me. Some, of course, may question whether Wittgenstein, Anscombe, and MacIntyre are secular thinkers. Anscombe and MacIntyre are Roman Catholics, but MacIntyre insists that his philosophy does not in any way depend on his theological convictions.⁹

⁷See, e.g., my chapter, “Natural Law, Tragedy, and Theological Ethics,” in my book, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations into Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977) 57-70. I would argue the case quite differently today, but that essay made clear I did not think it possible to ever leave natural law behind. By “negative results” I mean that we discover how we have gone wrong from the reasons we have given to hide from ourselves how we have gone wrong. See my essays, “A Story-Formed Community: Reflections on Watership Down,” in *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethics* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) 9-35, and “The Truth about God: The Decalogue as Condition for Truthful Speech,” in *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) 37-39.

⁸See, e.g., my *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983) 64-71. In a recent dissertation written at the University of Virginia entitled “Agency and Practical Reason: The Critique of Modern Moral Theory from Anscombe and Hauerwas,” Mark Ryan puts the matter well, noting that I refuse to dichotomize reason and revelation, seeing “no need to negate (abstract from) the particular and history-like character of scriptural revelation in order to be rational. Rather abstractions like ‘nature’ should be considered shorthand reminders that help us retell the story of how and why God created the universe—they are, that is, pragmatic tools that help the community reconstitute the larger narrative. Abstract concepts like ‘nature’ and ‘grace,’ by their nature, ‘require narrative display for their intelligibility.’ ” (150)

⁹In response to a question whether his more recent philosophical positions conceal a reassertion of Christianity, MacIntyre says, “It is false, both biographically and with respect to the structure of my beliefs. What I now believe philosophically I came to believe very largely before I reacknowledged the truth of Catholic Christianity. And I was only able to respond to the teachings of the Church because I had already learned from Aristotelianism both the nature of the mistakes involved in my earlier rejection of Christianity, and how to understand aright the relation of philosophical argument to theological inquiry. My philosophy, like many other Aristotelians, is theistic; but it is as secular in its content as any other.” *The MacIntyre Reader*, ed. Kelvin Knight (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998) 265-66. I must confess that I am not sure what MacIntyre means by describing the content of his philosophy as secular. I assume he means that his philosophical arguments in no way assume “theism” as necessary for their validity. In his early book, *Secularization and Moral Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), MacIntyre used “secularization” to mean transition from beliefs, activities, and institutions presuming beliefs of a Christian

No philosopher, moreover, has been more important to me than Aristotle. Of course it may be a mistake to identify Aristotle as a representative of a “secular intellectual world.” To say that Aristotle represents the secular is no more informative than the claim he was a pagan. I assume both designations mean he was not a Christian. He obviously was not a Christian, but then that turns out not to be very interesting.

Which raises the complex problem of what “secular” might mean in the description “secular intellectual world.” As much as possible I hope only to touch on the controversies surrounding the secularization thesis in order to address the assigned topic. In general I do think that the process of differentiation for the development of modern societies is extremely important for understanding the world in which we live, but I have no idea if it is helpful to call that process “secularization” because the developments associated with a rationalized and differentiated society means such social orders are no longer enchanted.¹⁰ It is by no means clear, moreover, why Christians would have a stake in an “enchanted world.” As Charles Taylor observes the “secular” is itself a Christian term used to designate

the time of ordinary historical succession, which the human race lives through the Fall and the Parousia. This time was interwoven with higher times, different modes of what is sometimes called “eternity,” the time of Ideas, or of the Origin, or of God. Human beings were seen as living in all these times, but certain acts, or lives, or institutions, or social forms could be seen as more thoroughly directed, towards one or another. Government was more “in the saeculum” by contrast with the Church, for instance. The state was the “secular arm.” A similar point could be expressed by contrasting the “temporal” and the “spiritual” or, in another context, ordinary parish clergy, ministering to people who were very much embedded in the

kind to beliefs, activities, and institutions of an atheistic kind (7-8). MacIntyre argues in *Secularization and Moral Change* that the secularization of English society was not due to the decline of religion, but rather lay in the development of urbanization and institutionalization that made Christianity unintelligible to itself.

¹⁰For an extremely clear and informative account of the debate surrounding the secularization theories see, Christian Smith’s introduction to the volume he edited, *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) 1-96. Smith argues quite convincingly that “secularization” was not an inevitable process, but rather the determined result of elites who wished to free themselves and the world in which they found themselves from religious authority. Clearly the often-made claim that secularization means a decline of religious belief seems empirically false, but the “belief” that continues to flourish may not recognize that it has been secularized just to the extent it is now “belief.” Saba Mahmood explains, “to say that a society is secular does not mean that ‘religion’ is banished from its politics, law, and forms of association. Rather, religion is admitted into these domains on the condition that it take particular forms; when it departs from these forms it confronts a set of regulatory barriers. The banning of the veil as the proper form of attire for girls and women in Turkey and France is a case in point.” “Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on Egyptian Islamic Revival,” *Cultural Anthropology* 16/2 (2001): 226. Of course one of the “forms” is that each tradition must understand itself as a “religion.”

world and history, were called “secular” to distinguish them from the religious orders or “regular clergy.”¹¹

In short, Christians created a differentiated world, to be sure one quite different than the one in which we now live, but nonetheless a world that bears some relation to its origin in Christianity.

John Milbank’s famous line, “once, there was no ‘secular’ ” has led some to attribute to him a completely negative judgment about the “secular.”¹² But Milbank quite clearly assumes Taylor is right to remind us that there is a meaning of the secular that Christians think is intrinsic to our understanding of God. The “secular” Milbank thinks once did not exist, the secular he thinks has had such disastrous consequences, is one he associates with the displacement of the Christian secular by a quite different secular in service to modern state power.¹³ As will become clear I am sympathetic with many of Milbank’s criticisms of the “new science of politics,” but I believe Christians have no reason to mourn the loss of Constantinianism. Indeed that loss has made it possible for Christians to reclaim theology as a free science in service to a free church.

By secular I mean the name given to that time, and the correlative politics, in which time is no longer, as Taylor suggests, interwoven with a higher time. I will try to show how such a time has been given a form of inevitability by the development of the modern state. The agent of legitimation of such a time and politics, however, has been the university and, in particular, the knowledges that constitute the curriculums of the university. That universities are formed to legitimate secular state power I think is true irrespective of whether the university is Christian or secular. Indeed I think that Christian theology may be more freely practiced in secular institutions. I loved teaching at the University of Notre Dame but I now realize I am more free to be a theologian at Duke, a very secular institution, than I was at Notre Dame. No one at Duke imagines that theology is a crucial subject for the future of

¹¹Charles Taylor, “Modes of Secularism,” in *Secularism and its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) 32. Robert Marcus argues that only Christianity could produce an understanding of the “secular” by which he means what Christians can share with non-Christians. *Christianity and the Secular* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006) 6. I regret Marcus’s book was available to me only after I finished this paper. I am grateful, however, that he ends his book suggesting the positions I (and Yoder) hold Augustine might well support.

¹²John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006) 9.

¹³Milbank provides a wonderfully clear account of the difference between the Christian secular and the secular of the modern in his “The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority,” *New Blackfriars* 85, no. 996 (March 2004): 212-38. Milbank argues against Pierre Manent that the church never assumed the secular was not open to the Christian shaping seeking to infuse secular practices of warfare, punishment, and trade with the exercise of mercy and forbearance (216). Milbank thinks the development of modern secularization was the result of the theological failure to maintain that all existence is borrowed, that is, a gift. As a result a positivist and formulist theology of divine power invented liberalism—a secular lacking any extrahuman or extranatural norm.

the university or the society the university serves. At Notre Dame I was part of a mini-Constantinian establishment which made it hard to avoid the thought that theology was the critical discipline for the future of civilization—a very constraining assumption.

At least at Duke I am not part of a Constantinian project that is Christian, but that does not mean Duke does not represent a form of Constantinianism: a remark I must now try to explain by suggesting how the secular in our time has assumed a Constantinian form. By developing that claim I hope to show how the danger presented by the secular intellectual disciplines in the modern university lies in their power to produce and reproduce the knowledges that make the way things are seem inevitable. This is not a problem, moreover, only for nontheological disciplines, because I hope to show that theology in modernity is also a secular discipline. So the danger is not “out there” in the secular disciplines but is internal to theology itself. Just to the extent theology allowed itself to be one discipline among the disciplines we lost the resource necessary to challenge the legitimating function of secular knowledges in service to the state.

2. THE SECULAR AS STATE FORMATION

What could I possibly mean by suggesting that the secular has become a form of Constantinianism in modernity? To answer that question I will draw on the work of John Howard Yoder, Charles Taylor, Talal Asad, and Gavin D’Costa. By putting them into conversation I hope to show the secular names an account of time crucial for the legitimation of the modern state. Just to the extent Christians have confused our time, church time, with state time we have failed to provide an alternative to a world, and the knowledges that are constitutive of that world, that is increasingly unable to make sense of itself.

In an extremely important but unfortunately overlooked essay, “Christ, the Hope of the World,” John Howard Yoder develops a fascinating account of different forms of Constantinianism that suggest how the secular has now become a form of Constantinianism. For many the very mention of “Constantinianism” is reason not to take Yoder seriously on the presumption that he is wrong to condemn Constantine’s favoring of Christianity. Yoder, however, is quite well aware of the historical complexities that surrounded the legalization of Christianity in the Roman Empire.¹⁴ For Yoder the primary challenge Constantinianism presented for Christians was theological. Under the spell of Constantine, Christians begin to lose

¹⁴For a good critique of the language of declension to describe Constantine’s support of the church, see Daniel Williams, “Constantine and the ‘Fall’ of the Church” in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric, and Community*, ed. Lewis Ayers and Gareth Jones (London: Routledge, 1998) 117-36. Williams points out that Denny Weaver’s claim that Christians in the post-Constantinian church thought it more important to preserve the empire than to live by the teachings of Jesus is a “fantastic generalization.” The sermons of Augustine on 1 John are sufficient to show Weaver is deeply mistaken (122).

their eschatological conviction that we simultaneously live in two times. To live in two times does not mean, as is often put, that Christians live between times, but rather that we live in two times that can be distinguished only if there is a church whose life is governed by the reality of the new age. For the world to know that the world's time is not the church's time requires that how Christians live and think will be distinctive.¹⁵

These eschatological convictions constitute a politics exemplified, Yoder argues, by the presumption throughout the New Testament that the political task of the church was first and foremost to faithfully witness to the reality of the Lordship of Christ. Through such faithfulness the church understood her role, a deceptively difficult role, to be nothing less than to call the powers to modesty. Modesty requires, however, that Christians resist the temptation to legitimate the structures the New Testament identifies as the "powers."¹⁶ Such powers do not need legitimating. Rather in order to be and remain modest these structures require a people capable of saying "no" when those who rule do so in a manner that goes beyond the limited task they have been given.¹⁷

Constantinianism is the name Yoder gives to the time when Christians confused the time inaugurated by the resurrection of Jesus with the time of the old age. The identification of the church with the world means that the eschatological character of the Gospel is now domesticated in the interest of promoting an ethic that is workable for anyone.¹⁸ Of course the Christian ethic is one Christians rightly think anyone can live by being redeemed, but Christians confused that understanding of the universal ethic with the presumption that Christian way of life is open to anyone even if they are not a member of the church.

Yoder, however, commends the Constantinianism of Rome just to the extent the identification of the church with the Roman Empire gave expression to the appropriate Christian conviction that the God Christians worship is the God of all people. Accordingly the Roman church could think of herself as a servant of all

¹⁵John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Scottsdale PA: Herald Press, 2002) 8-13.

¹⁶John Howard Yoder, "Christ, the Hope of the World," in his *The Original Revolution*, with a new foreword by Mark Thiessen Nation (Scottsdale PA: Herald Press, 2003) 141. The summary of Yoder's account of the various forms of Constantinianism can be found on pp. 141-45.

¹⁷The oft-made criticism that Yoder justifies leaving the state to its own devices ignores Yoder's argument that the "church knows why the state exists—knows, in fact, better than the state itself—and this understanding provides both the justification for her speaking and the standards which she will apply in evaluating the way in which the authorities exercise their function." *The Christian Witness to the State* (Newton KS: Faith and Life Press, 1964) 16.

¹⁸John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Newton KS; Faith and Life Press, 1964) 28. That Christian ethics is for Christians does not mean that Christians believe that how they live is not a possibility for anyone. Rather it means that the possibility to live as a disciple of Christ requires the work of the Holy Spirit, but that work is not restricted to the church.

humankind.¹⁹ However with the breakup of the Roman Empire a new phase of unity of the church and world developed, a neo-Constantinianism, in which the church understood herself no longer to be a servant of all people but was now concerned with maintaining the unity of a particular society.

The political revolutions that swept the world from 1776 to 1848 inaugurated a “secularization” in which the identification of the church with a particular society could no longer be taken for granted. Yoder notes this development could take quite diverse forms exemplified by the contrast between America and Sweden. In America there was a legal separation between church and state, but the people remained convinced there exists a close connection between church and society. In Sweden the secularization process took the form of state support of the church without the popular support of the people. Different though they are these arrangements have in common the secularization of the Constantinian dream that the church can give her blessing to the nation in a manner that church and government mutually support one another.

Yoder calls this stage neo-neo-Constantinianism to indicate that this development represents the further weakening of the church in relation to the world just to the extent the church becomes subservient to a state. Soon some thinkers come forward, however, explicitly opposed to any religious support of culture or state. In response religious thinkers, anxious that the church not lose her influence, argued that Christians must make common cause with “secular” governments preferring structured neutrality to any religious preference the nation might choose. They often did so appealing to natural law grounds as a basis to secure a common morality to legitimate government coercion. Yoder calls the alliance of the church with postreligious secularism neo-neo-neo-Constantinianism.

This brings us to the present in which the church tries to apply the habits of Constantinianism to the future. Convinced that the future is to be identified with some particular cause or system, Christians seek to take sides with the new before the old order collapses. Thus Christians identify with political revolutions in the hope they will be on the winning side of history. Yoder calls the attempt to approve an order before it exists, neo-neo-neo-neo-Constantinianism. This last development makes explicit what all these efforts to defend the cause of the church before the bar of secular reason have in common: that the true meaning of history, the locus of salvation, is in the cosmos and only in the church to the extent the church’s identity

¹⁹Of course that is not quite true just to the extent that Christians now thought it more important to kill the barbarians rather than convert them. Yoder observes that “Constantine did not really rule the entire world” which means it was necessary to write off any enemies the known neighbors to the north, east, and south to say nothing of the rest of the world. *The Original Revolution*, 149. Yoder notes, however, that the church even in the Middle Ages still was able to take a critical stance toward those in power. “The ecclesiastical hierarchy had a power base and a self-understanding which enabled independent moral judgment. An emperor or a prince could really be forced to listen by the ban or interdict.” *The Original Revolution*, 150.

is absorbed by the wider world.²⁰ Constantinianism is, therefore, to be identified by the convictions that the meaning of history lies outside the church whose agent is now the state. The eschatological tension between the two aeons is subordinated to a progressive view of history for which the only time available is that produced by state agency.

Yoder's narrative, a narrative that obviously begs for detailed development and qualification, has the great virtue of helping us see that how Christians understand and evaluate the development of the secular, and in particular the secular state, depends on their ecclesiology. His account, moreover, of the mutations of Constantinianism suggests that it may well be that the most determinative forms of Constantinianism in our day are secular just to the extent that secular ideologies now legitimate state formation. The habits that now constitute the secular imagination are so imbedded in how Christians understand the world we no longer have the ability to recognize the power they have over us.²¹

That power, I think, is exemplified by the assumption that time qua time names a duration that precedes the Gospel. As a result time is ontologically presumed to name the ground on which the Christian narrative of redemption occurs. Yet, as Jonathan Tran argues, Christians "conceptualize time through the narrative called 'Gospel;' for Christians 'time' is another way of saying 'the story goes this way.'" There is no time qua time—no past, present, future as such—but rather temporal existence emanating from our narrational habits. We talk about past, present, future because our lives as stories are timeful; in other words, our stories become stories as they unfold within the larger story of God's redemption of all things.²² Secular names the displacement of that story by the story of the state.

Taylor provides an account of the secular that substantiates this understanding of the secular as a form of Constantinianism. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's account of the development of the modern nation-state as an "imagined community," Taylor argues that the inescapability of secularism "flows from the nature of the modern state. More particularly the nature of the democratic state."²³ According

²⁰For Yoder "the ultimate meaning of history is to be found in the work of the church. The victory of the Lamb through His death seals the victory of the church." *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale PA: Herald Press, 1971) 64. Therefore Yoder claims in *The Christian Witness to the State*, "the church is not fundamentally a source of moral stimulus to encourage the development of a better society—though a faithful church should also have this effect—it is for the sake of the church's own work that society continues to function" (13).

²¹Asad observes that "because the secular is so much part of our modern life, it is not easy to grasp it directly. I think it is best pursued through its shadows, as it were." *Formations of the Secular*, 16. See, e.g., Asad's account of the unstable character of "the religious" and "the secular" in *Power of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors*, ed. David Scott and Charles Hirschkind (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2006) 297-99.

²²Jonathan Tran, "In the Far Country: Time, Eternity, and Memory after the Vietnam War" (Ph.D. Diss., Duke University, Durham NC, 2006) 4.

²³Taylor, "The Secular Imperative," 38.

to Taylor there are two important features to this modern imaginary. The first involves a shift from a hierarchal mediated society to a horizontally understood society in which citizens are assumed to have direct access to those in power. Thus people conceive of themselves as participating directly in nationwide discussions as well as entering contractual relations in market economies on an equal footing.²⁴

The second crucial feature of the modern imaginary, in contrast to the premodern state, is that attempt to legitimate translocal entities is no longer thought to require grounding in anything higher than common action in secular time. Taylor associates this development with social contract theories of the political which create the fiction that a people can be created out of a state of nature in which an appeal to a founding moment is no longer thought necessary. Now the “idea is invoked that a people, or as it was also called at the time, a ‘nation,’ can exist prior to and independently of its political Constitution, so that this people can give itself its own Constitution by its own free action in secular time.”²⁵

Talal Asad, commenting on Taylor’s account of the development of the modern state, observes that such states have to make citizenship the primary principle of identity in order to transcend the differences of class, gender, and religion by replacing conflicting perspectives with a unifying experience. According to Asad,

in an important sense, this transcendent mediation is secularism. Secularism is not simply an intellectual answer to a question about enduring social peace and toleration. It is an enactment by which a political medium (representation of citizenship) redefines and transcends particular and differentiating practices of the self that are articulated through class, gender, and religion.²⁶

Asad argues that the secular state enacts a quite particular understanding of time. Such states depend on a homogenized time so that state bureaucracies and market dealings can be administered efficiently. Through homogeneous time speed

²⁴Taylor, “The Secular Imperative,” 39-40. Taylor observes that these modes of imagined direct access are linked to modern equality and individualism through creating uniformity. Once the necessity of mediation is reduced the individual has a growing self-consciousness as an individual. But to be an individual does not mean ceasing to belong, but rather “imagining oneself as belonging to ever wider and more impersonal entities: the state, the movement, the community of humankind” (40).

²⁵Taylor, “The Secular Imperative,” 41.

²⁶Talal Asad, *Formation of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, and Modernity*, 5. Asad argues 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. It is this assumption that allows us to think of religion as ‘infecting’ the secular domain or as replicating within it the structure of theological concepts. The concept of ‘the secular’ today is part of a doctrine called secularism. Secularism doesn’t simply insist that religious practice and belief be confined to a space where they cannot threaten political stability or the liberties of ‘free-thinking’ citizens. Secularism builds on a particular conception of the world (‘natural’ and ‘social’) and of the problems generated by that world” (191-92). In like manner William Connolly argues that Kant’s rational religion shares much with the “dogmatic” ecclesiology it sought to displace in his *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) 32.

and direction can be plotted with the precision necessary to legitimate the state as the guarantor of services.²⁷ Given this view of time what it means to be human is to be a

self-conscious maker of History (in which calendrical time provides a measure and direction for human events) and as the unshakable foundation of universally valid knowledge about nature and society. The human agent is now responsible—answerable—not only for acts he or she has performed (or refrained) from performing. Responsibility is now held for events he or she was unaware of—or falsely conscious of. . . . Chance is not considered to be tamable. The world is disenchanting.²⁸

A political ethic peculiar to this sense of space and time is also required. Such an ethic, which Taylor thinks exemplified by Rawls's understanding of the necessity of overlapping consensus, does not try to exhaust the common identity by which people are held together.²⁹ But a distinction is required between private and public reason that demands that "religion" be placed in the former because the secular is identified by the public.³⁰ Accordingly Taylor argues that Rawls's

²⁷Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 5. In a response to Connolly's article, "Europe: A Minor Tradition," in *Power of the Secular Modern*, Asad observes in *Formation* "I stressed that people, even in modern societies, live in multiple temporalities, and that a central aspect of secularism as a commanding doctrine is precisely its attempt to transcend such pluralities through the homogenous time of capital" (223).

²⁸Asad, *The Formation of the Secular*, 192-93. For an account of how such a view of agency must be questioned in order to understand an Islamic women's movement in Egypt, see Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). It is often assumed that liberal accounts of agency are incompatible with the need of the modern democratic state to create a common identity through encouraging the growth of patriotism. Yet Taylor suggests that the willingness to sacrifice oneself for the state is made all the more powerful just to the extent the citizen is said to make such a commitment freely. "Modes of Secularization," 44. Asad's use of "disenchanted" does not mean he accepts Weber's understanding of secularization. Rather he understands, as the quotation above suggests, that secularism itself is a form of enchantment. In like manner, those who appeal to the staying power of religion to counter the thesis that religion will disappear given the development of secular societies fail to see that the "religion" that seems so vital has been transformed by the secular. Milbank notes that the "recrudescence of intolerant religion . . . is not a problem that liberalism can resolve, but rather a problem that liberalism tends to engender." "The Gifts of Ruling," 235.

²⁹Taylor, "The Secular Imperative," 48-53.

³⁰Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 8. William Connolly puts this well in his "Europe: A Minor Tradition," noting that "the inner connection between Christianity and Europe today is not that all Christians demand common belief in Christianity as a condition of citizenship—though too many still do; rather it resides in the demand, growing out of the Christian Enlightenment, to disconnect the expression of religious belief from participation in embodied practices, so that it becomes possible to imagine a world in which everyone is a citizen because religious belief is relegated to the private realm and the interior of the self." In *Powers of the Secular Modern*, 78. Saba Mahmood argues that "contrary to the normative understanding of secularism today, its force seems to reside not in neutralizing the space of politics from religion but in producing a particular kind of religious subject who is

account of overlapping consensus represents, in spite of Rawls's disavowal of secularism, a commitment to an independent ethic of autonomy that has no place for religious convictions.³¹ Yet Taylor also suggests that Rawls's conception of overlapping consensus properly modified, that is, freed from Rawls's underlying justifications, is the best alternative we have.³²

Jeffrey Stout's account of secular reason seems to be exactly the kind of modification of secular reason Taylor suggests we need. According to Stout the mark of secularization is, "the fact that participants in a given discursive practice are not in a position to take for granted that their interlocutors are making the same assumptions they are."³³ Stout's understanding of public reason, therefore, seems more capacious than Rawls's "Proviso," but given Taylor's and Asad's account of the secular, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that even Stout's modest understanding of secular reason can slide inexorably towards service to the state. For example Stout says that he invites his readers to adopt the point of view of a citizen who is

someone who accepts some measure of responsibility for the condition of society and, in particular, for the political arrangements it makes for itself. To adopt this point of view is to participate in a living moral tradition of one's people, understood as a civic nation. It is the task of public philosophy, as I understand it, to articulate the ethical inheritance of the people for the people while subjecting it to critical scrutiny.³⁴

compatible with the rationality and exercise of liberal political rule. In the current moment of empire, this aspect of secularism is most evident in the ambitious campaign the U.S. government has undertaken to reform and reshape Islam." "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation," in *Political Culture* 18/2 (Spring 2006): 323.

³¹Taylor argues that the origin of the modern notion of secularism was to find an alternative to the wars of religion. Some rules of peace needed to be found. Two primary strategies were developed. The first was a common-ground strategy in which an ethic of peaceful coexistence was maintained based on doctrines common to all Christians. The common-ground strategy was still theistic. The second strategy was to develop an independent ethic abstracted from all religious beliefs. Taylor believes that Rawls remains wedded to the second strategy. "The Secular Imperative," 33-34 and 51. It is not clear to me if Taylor has accepted the mistaken narrative that the rise of the secular state was necessary to save us from the religious wars, but even if he has I think he is right to see the secular as a correlative of modern state formation. For the critique of the myth of the state as savior see William Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* (London: T.&T. Clark, 2002).

³²Taylor, "The Secular Imperative," 49-53.

³³Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 97.

³⁴Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 5. Stout's focus on the civic nation, I think, is the reason the problem of "dirty hands" is so important to him. Thus his claim that "holders of high office are in some respects unique. They are unlike the rest of us in being officially responsible for the exercise of coercive power on behalf of the people's survival and well-being. By virtue of their office they have powers and responsibilities the rest of us do not have. Their responsibilities can give rise to hard choices. These choices invite them to exercise power in ways that leave their hands dirty" (190). This may be true, but it is unclear to me why Stout thinks such considerations are the first order of business for explicating "democratic norms" unless you think that democracy names state formation. To be sure, Stout may not mean by citizen what Rawls means, suggesting that the citizen should think

(Stout, to be sure, does not recommend “we become preoccupied with our identities as members of a civic nation.”³⁵ I am, moreover, very sympathetic with his stress on the importance of reason giving as constitutive of the kind of conversations he thinks crucial to democratic life. Stout’s account in principle does not require that Christians (or other traditions) abandon their self-understanding in order to participate in Stout’s democracy. Which is but to say that there are possibilities in Stout’s account that are not yet fully worked out.)

If Taylor and Asad are right that the secular is the necessary legitimating discourse for the development of the modern state then, as odd as it may seem, I think, given Yoder’s account of the mutations of Constantinianism, we can now see that Rawls and, possibly, Stout represent a form of Constantinianism. That they do so, moreover, is extremely important if we are to understand the promise and dangers of secular intellectual disciplines. Putting Yoder, Taylor, and Asad in conversation hopefully helps us see that the secular, even a secular that seems as innocent as Stout’s, asks Christians to subordinate our understanding of the way things are in the interest of a “peace” that serves the nation.

Of course even if I am right that the secular has become Constantinian in modernity it may well be asked, why is this is such a problem? It is a problem, I think not only for those who think Constantinianism is a strategy that results in the invisibility of the church, but also for those who think some form of Constantinianism is inevitable if not desirable. When the secular becomes Constantinian the church cannot help but be politically marginalized and relegated to the private and, as a result, assumes the state’s time is the church’s time. Asad is surely right when he says, “If secularism as a doctrine requires the distinction between private reason and public principle, it also demands the placing of the ‘religious’ in the former by ‘the secular.’”³⁶

Even more troubling, when the secular becomes Constantinian, Christians, long schooled by Constantinian habits, can forget we live in two times. All time is assumed to be homogenized; that is, all we know is the time that is but deviation. That there might be another time determined by a reality other than secular time is as unthinkable as the belief in miracles. As a result, Christians begin to think we must live impatiently because we do not have the time to live justly or nonviolently in a world with no time but secular time. The problem, quite simply, is that secular time results in the attempt to secure peace without eschatology.³⁷

of himself or herself as a legislator or judge, but Stout’s appeal to citizenship nonetheless indicates that his account of reason is in the interest of civic formation. Rawls’s account of citizenship as legislator or judge can be found in “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited,” in *The Law of Peoples*, 135 and 168.

³⁵Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 297.

³⁶Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 8.

³⁷Thus, Yoder argues, “‘Peace’ is not an accurate description of what has generally happened to nonresistant Christians throughout history, nor of the way the conscientious objector is treated in most countries today. Not does Christian pacifism guarantee a warless

Universities, whether private or public, have been the crucial institutions for developing the knowledges to legitimate this understanding of the secular.³⁸ In effect the state and the university reflect the symbiotic relationship that once pertained between the university and the church. In the Middle Ages the university was used to produce clerks for church and state. Now the university is expected to produce people educated to serve the bureaucracies of modernity in which it is assumed the state is crucial for an ordered world. That the university serves this function should not surprise us given the fact that the modern university and the modern state developed together.³⁹

The disciplines that constitute the knowledges that shape the curriculums of the modern university, moreover, reflect the presumptions of homogenized time described by Asad. Accordingly the account of the world produced and reproduced by those disciplines make it impossible for us to consider another time than secular time exists. How disciplines such as history, political science, English literature, economics, the various sciences serve to make the time of the modern state seem inevitable would require detailed display, but I do not think it hard to see how the very divisions in our curriculums function to produce the kind of intelligence necessary to sustain the “secular.”

For example, why is it assumed that Dante is literature rather than an essential text in theology? Wendell Berry is reported to have said, “Not only should we not read the Bible as literature; we shouldn’t even read literature as ‘literature.’ ” That we read literature as literature might be an appropriate division of labor for a community to enhance memory, but too often distinctions between literature and theology reflect the homogenous time Asad identifies. Dante becomes literature in the interest of creating a discipline that does not require the church exist as an alternative to the state.

world. ‘Peace’ describes the pacifist goal, the goal in the light of which he acts, the character of his actions, the ultimate divine certainty which lets his position make sense; it does not describe the external appearance or observable results of his behavior. This is what is meant by eschatology: a hope which, defying present frustration, defines a present position in terms of the yet unseen goal which gives it meaning.” *The Original Revolution*, p. 53. For Yoder the problem of defending nonviolence as a secular alternative, that is, to be for peace without eschatology, is that a peace without eschatology invites its obverse—war without limit.

³⁸If this needs confirmation, C. John Sommerville has provided it in his article, “The Exhaustion of Secularism,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 52/40 (9 June 2006): B6-B7. Sommerville, as his title suggests, argues it is time to let religious arguments back into the university, but he does so assuming such arguments bear the burden of truth.

³⁹In *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1998) James Scott argues that the modernist ambition to refashion social habits through reason often exemplified by scientific abstraction is inherently a statist enterprise. Moreover, such an enterprise presumes a break must be made from the past insofar as it is assumed “rational thought and scientific laws [can] provide a single answer to every empirical question” (93). Scott substantiates these claims by concrete studies from city planning, third-world development, and agriculture.

I believe the same kind of analysis works to explain the character of the social sciences in the modern university.⁴⁰ History interestingly enough is seldom taught so that students learn that the discipline of history has a history.⁴¹ The ideological character of history and the social sciences is seldom brought to the students' attention. For example, the triumph of rational choice methodologies in the social sciences now underwrites accounts of efficiency necessary to legitimate the "expert" in the interest of making politics but an extension of economic rationality.⁴²

Please note I am not suggesting that there is not much to be learned from the disciplines as currently practiced in the university. Yet Constantinianism, even secular Constantinianism, and the intellectual formations shaped by its understanding of time, tempts Christians to believe that the way things are is the way things have to be. There is no question that if we are to be faithful to the task of theology we must know what is represented by "the secular intellectual world." We must know that world for no other reason than it is so good at producing critiques of itself.⁴³ But we must also rediscover how theology itself can recover from its

⁴⁰Sheldon Wolin observes that "most of the intellectual disciplines that study society, such as economics, political science, social psychology, and (more ambivalently) sociology, have become or always were antihistorical in outlook; when they were not, they were reductionist, that is, they sought to translate historical categories into social-scientific ones and to replace narrative by demonstration. In response, historians have tried to find legitimacy in a postmnemonic society by borrowing the methods and categories of the social sciences." *The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and the Constitution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 33. Robert Pogue Harrison makes a similar point in his extraordinary book, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Harrison, in his chapter on the Enlightenment, notes that the post-Christian era is broadly defined here in terms of "historical detachment from the past. The new Cartesian distinction between the *res cogitans*, of the thinking self, and the *res extensa*, or embodied substance, set up the terms for the objectivity of science and the abstraction from history, location, nature, and culture" (107).

⁴¹The nationalistic character of the discipline of history has, however, been recently challenged by Thomas Bender. See his "No Borders: Beyond the Nation State," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 52/31 (7 April 2006): B6-B8.

⁴²Wolin rightly sees the development of rational choice accounts of political behavior as the extension of the liberal political paradigms designed ironically to take the politics out of politics. See his *Politics and Vision*, expanded edition (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004) 570-75. Wolin notes "the conception of theory that informs the academic study of politics has come to reflect the highly bureaucratized character of contemporary governance and of a politics in which corporate influences and state action are inextricably mixed. It represents the desperate effort of a modernist politics—elitist, science-inspired, rationalistic in an economic vein—struggling to 'govern' an amorphous, unanchored citizenry that is unable to express its unsurveyed self except fitfully in anxiety, fear, anger, and irritation, a citizenry that is still attached to democracy, if tenuously and only sentimentally, but increasingly dependent on electronic media for its very con-/instruction" (574-75).

⁴³The kind of critique like that represented by Michel Foucault in his *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 1991) and *Society*

secularization if we are to serve the church as well as make a contribution to the secular world.

3. PRAYER AS A FORM OF RESISTANCE

I am not suggesting that the modern university or the knowledges characteristic of the university are explicitly subservient to the secular state. Obviously many universities and disciplines within the university assume a stance of indifference or take a quite critical position toward the secular state. I am, however, suggesting that the structure of the knowledges, even knowledges shaped in opposition to the state, are structured in a manner to reproduce secular habits about time necessary to justify and legitimate state formation. By “structure” I mean that they reproduce the practices of the secular and in the process make invisible to Christians the alternative we should be in a world that denies there is any other world.

In his extremely important book, *Theology in the Public Square: Church, Academy, and Nation*, Gavin D’Costa argues that the modern university, and the Christian university in particular, has been secularized.⁴⁴ He associates secularization with the loss of any connection between worship and the practices of everyday life exemplified by the triumph of money.⁴⁵ The latter development, D’Costa thinks, explains the loss of any attempt to maintain a coherent relation between different disciplines. Without any common understanding of the good or the true the university becomes subject to what sells.⁴⁶

D’Costa agrees with Phillip Gleason and James Burtchaell’s account of the loss of Christian identity by universities in Britain and America, but his primary interest is what has happened to theology. Influenced by Leclercq’s analysis in *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, D’Costa argues that the shift of theology from the cathedral schools to the university may have prepared the way for the separation of theology from those practices that are essential for the work of theology. The division of knowledge represented by the University of Paris was the beginning of the fragmentation of theological knowledge which made theology ill-prepared to

Must be Defended (New York: Picador, 2003).

⁴⁴Gavin D’Costa, *Theology in the Public Square: Church, Academy, and Nation*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

⁴⁵The relation of time and money was a consistent theme in the work of Peter Maurin. In his “In the Light of History” Maurin under the heading of “1600-Banker” observed: “Before Calvin people were not allowed to lend money at interest. John Calvin decided to legalize lending at interest in spite of the teaching of the Prophets of Israel and the Fathers of the church. Protestant countries tried to keep up with John Calvin and money lending at interest became the general practice. And money ceased to be a means of exchange and began to be a means to make money. So people lent money on time and began to think of time in terms of money and said to each other, ‘Time is money.’” *Easy Essays* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, repr. 1977; ²1961; ¹1949) 78-83. Maurin attributed the working out of “time is money” to the “Totalitarian Economists,” Smith and Ricardo, who thought that everybody should try to sell what he has to the highest bidder.

⁴⁶D’Costa, *Theology in the Public Square*, 2-3.

confront the challenges of the world created by the Reformation and the development of the natural sciences in the seventeenth century.⁴⁷

Drawing on the work of Hans Frei, D'Costa argues that theology was subjected to the "great reversal," that is, the only way to make sense of scripture was and is to make the biblical story fit into the presupposition of the secular world.⁴⁸ The site of that transformation was the University of Berlin in which, under the direction of Schleiermacher, theology became a university subject because it was assumed, like law and medicine, that theology was necessary for the training of agents of the state who just happened to be ministers. Frei observes as a result "ministerial training was under the complete control of state authority, which delegated it to an educational institution whose basic intellectual and educational assumptions might well be completely at variance with those of the institution for the service of which the students were to be trained."⁴⁹

D'Costa acknowledges that the genealogy of theology he develops is extremely complicated, but he draws two main conclusions from it. First, that institutionalized theology characteristic of the modern university bears the marks of the secularization process just to the extent that theology was transformed into a discipline acceptable to the Enlightenment university. Secondly, the significance of this transformation of theology means the very character of the university must be rethought. The subservience of the university to market economies and bureaucratic state formations designed to serve the market have resulted in a crisis in the humanities which only compounds the fragile status of theology.⁵⁰

D'Costa's genealogy of what he calls "the Babylonian Captivity of theology" is, I believe, a correlative of the Constantinian identification of the church with the

⁴⁷D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square*, 15-18.

⁴⁸The institutionalization of the "great reversal" is the separation of the study of the Bible from theology. Much good has come from the historical/critical study of the Bible, but too often the disciplinary division between scripture and theology has hidden how that division makes the study of the Bible mirror (and legitimate) the liberal state. Jon Leveson has clearly seen this in his book, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993) 106-26.

⁴⁹Hans Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger and William Placher (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1992) 101-102. Concerning the paradoxical character of the achievement of freedom of education in Germany, Frei quotes the German constitutional historian, Rudolf Huber, who observed that "the century which achieved freedom of education, research, and doctrine created at the same time the greatest extreme in state direction and administration of school organization. But one can note the identical duality of nineteenth-century institutions in almost all areas; the epoch of the individual's highest freedom from the state was simultaneously the epoch of statism's greatest efficiency" (100).

⁵⁰Of course we need to remember that the "humanities" are a modern invention that was a response to the "felt need for some secular substitute for the religion-based moral education that had heretofore been a central ideological charge of institutions of higher education." Steven Marcus, "Humanities from Classics to Cultural Studies: Notes toward the History of an Idea," *Daedalus* 135/2 (Spring 2006): 16.

world. That is why his recommendation for the renewal of theology has a distinct anti-Constantinian form. For D'Costa suggests that if theology is to escape from captivity to the secular, that if theology is to reclaim time not determined by the market and the state, it can do so only if theologians "learn to pray as part of their vocation as theologians."⁵¹ According to D'Costa theology can be done with intellectual rigor only in the context of a love affair with God and God's community, the Church. And the one cultivated habit of the greatest lovers, that is, the best theologians of the church, is prayer.⁵² In particular he calls attention to the 1990 document, *Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian*, from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which said:

Since the object of theology is the Truth which is the living God and His plan for salvation revealed in Jesus Christ, the theologian is called to deepen his own life of faith and continuously unite his scientific research with prayer. In this way, he will become more open to the "supernatural sense of faith" upon which he depends, and it will appear to him as a sure rule for guiding his reflections and helping him assess the correctness of his conclusions.⁵³

Prayer, moreover, presupposes a time that cannot help but challenge secular time. Prayer takes place in liturgical time and thereby challenges the presumption that there exists no other time but the time of historical succession. To pray means there is another time known through liturgical repetition that is made possible and necessary by the reality of the Kingdom of God. Accordingly, liturgical time is the necessary condition for the redescription of the world to challenge the presumption of secular disciplines that are aimed to make us believe the way things are is the way things have to be.⁵⁴

D'Costa rejects any presumption that this account of theology makes theology unique among the disciplines of the university. For theology, like other disciplines, requires that students "inhabit" a tradition of enquiry "characterized by various dogmas and practices that facilitate a structured and disciplined cohabitation with the object of study, appropriate to that object."⁵⁵ Secondly, theology like other disciplines depends on "virtuoso" lives, that is, skilled and able practitioners whose heart and intellect have made possible extensions of the discipline not otherwise possible.⁵⁶

D'Costa's argument for the recovery of prayer for theology is not a pious gesture, but rather his attempt to name the condition necessary for theology to be

⁵¹D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square*, 112.

⁵²D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square*, 112-14.

⁵³Quoted by D'Costa, *Theology and the Public Square*, 115.

⁵⁴I was able to make this observation only because of Randi Rashkoner's remarkable account of Rosenzweig in her book, *Revelation and Theopolitics: Barth, Rosenzweig, and the Politics of Praise* (London: T.&T. Clark, 2005) 100-106.

⁵⁵D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square*, 117.

⁵⁶D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square*, 123.

recognized as knowledge.⁵⁷ To recover prayer as the heart of theology involves a massive metaphysical claim that has extraordinary political implications. Sam Wells, for example, in a wonderful essay describing his ministry at St. Elizabeth's, Norwich, makes clear the difference prayer makes politically. St. Elizabeth's was a poor church on an English estate, but they became part of a renewal grant sponsored by the government entitled "New Deal for communities." Wells notes that the starkest difference between church meetings and New Deal meetings is that church meetings started with prayer. Wells observes:

For church regulars saying a prayer at the start of a meeting may have become a habit given scant consideration. But at a New Deal meeting, sensing something curiously missing which one has elsewhere taken for granted, one becomes slowly aware that this gathering is taking upon itself an enormous task—and is seeking to perform it in its own strength alone. How awesome is the sight! The spectacles that discern this are those given by the habit of corporate prayer.⁵⁸

The significance of prayer for making it possible for St. Elizabeth's parish to sustain work in New Deal provides a helpful analogy for D'Costa's understanding of the recovery of prayer for theology. St. Elizabeth's habitual formation in prayer made participation in the New Deal possible. Those from St. Elizabeth's did not have to take over the New Deal but rather brought creative energy to the New Deal that would have otherwise been absent. In like manner, a theology shaped by prayer has no reason to deny the importance of the university disciplines that comprise its curriculum, but a theology shaped by prayer can engage nontheological disciplines to illuminate their possibilities and limitations.

D'Costa is, of course, well aware that his understanding of the inseparability of prayer and theology may make it even more unlikely that theology can be acknowledged as a legitimate subject in the university. Yet he suggests that theologians, if they can reclaim the time presupposed by prayer, the time constitutive of the theologian's work, may find they occupy the discipline capable of integrating the seemingly unconnected disciplines that constitute the university. "Put bluntly," D'Costa argues,

the purpose of the university is to find love at the heart of all things, for love is the cause of the world. This does not mean that the study of atoms is going to show that love rather than neutrons and protons are to be found. Rather, once the atomic struc-

⁵⁷In an extremely important article, "The 'Naked' University: What If Theology Is Knowledge, Not Belief?" *Theology Today* 62 (January 2006), John Stoner argues that "if the university wants to preserve or, in some instances, recover its claim to be the seat of reason, it must again treat theology as an authentic form of knowledge, constituted by reasoning about God" (525).

⁵⁸Sam Wells, "No Abiding Inner City: A New Deal for the Church," in *Faithfulness and Fortitude: In Conversations with Stanley Hauerwas* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 2000) 136-37. For a parallel story of the role of prayer in community organizing in which prayer made all the difference for the organization see Mark Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize America* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001) 117-18.

ture has been explicated the question of how such ordering analogically facilitates the possibilities of love, harmony, beauty, and truth is vital, and is another way of recognizing the ethical and methodological dimensions of the disciplines.⁵⁹

I do not believe what D'Costa is proposing is utopian, but it does place the responsibility on those of us who are theologians to do theology as if it mattered. Moreover, in a world we no longer control we are free to do theology freely. At the very least this should mean the disciplinary divisions that invite theologians to say, "I cannot comment on X or Y because scripture is not my field" must come to an end.⁶⁰ Indeed the attempt to make theology "objective" through the transformation of theology into a historical discipline must be seen for what it is, namely, a way to separate theology from its source which is the praise of God. Of course none of us are capable of knowing all we need to know to do the work of theology, but we must not forget that we know all we need to know to make the work of theology compelling—we know "God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead, having before raised Israel from Egypt."⁶¹

D'Costa's call, therefore, for theology to rediscover prayer as the center of its life is anything but a call for theology to retreat from engagement with secular disciplines. Indeed, it is clear, he rightly thinks theology has much to learn from secular disciplines including religious studies and the sciences. Yet if theology is to be a subject capable of engaging as well as challenging the presuppositions of the disciplines that constitute the knowledges of the modern university, D'Costa rightly thinks we must recover the practice of theology as prayer. Which quite simply means that theology only makes sense as a discipline of the church.

As a discipline of the church it may well mean that how Christians do history, literature, politics, economics, physics, biology—or even whether those will be recognizable disciplines for a theological perspective—may be different than how those disciplines are recognized or practiced by those who are not shaped by a life of prayer.⁶² What is clear, however, is if theologians learn again to do their work as

⁵⁹D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square*, 190. For a similar argument dealing with Darwinism, see Michael Hanby, "Reclaiming Creation in a Darwinian World," *Theology Today* 62 (January 2006): 476-83.

⁶⁰In a yet-unpublished paper, "The Ethics of Doing Theology: Towards the Recovery of a Withering Practice," Bernd Wannewetsch argues that theologians betray their subject just to the extent they have allowed the discipline of theology to become theological disciplines.

⁶¹Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 63.

⁶²Linell Cady argues that the inability of the liberal academy to understand radical Islamic views of the United States is the result of the myopia created by the disciplinary divisions of the modern university. Because theology has been relegated to divinity schools, disciplines in arts and sciences, such as philosophy, history, and political science, have failed to engage the cultural dimensions of religious convictions. See Cady's "Categories, Conflicts, and Conundrums: Ethics and the Religious/Secular Divide," in *War and Border Crossings: Ethics When Cultures Clash*, ed. Peter French and Jason Short (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005) 153-54. Put more directly, the problem we now confront is that

prayer we may at least make clear to the world, a world shaped by the presupposition of the secular state, that what we believe is not “mere belief.”⁶³

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representatives of secular disciplines have become so stupid about what they do not believe they cannot begin to understand strong religious traditions.

⁶³Dennis O’Brien, in a wonderful response to this paper, suggests his understanding of history as drama, in contrast to history as cyclical, linear, or fragmentary time, is quite close to my understanding of eschatological time. (O’Brien develops this understanding of history in his forthcoming book, *The Catholic Church Losing Its Voice*.) Cyclical time is antithetical to the Christian understanding of history; linear time devalues the past; and fragmentary time (deconstructionist) can make no sense of the Christian claim that the calling of Israel and the life of Jesus determines the very meaning of time. In contrast to these alternatives O’Brien argues history as drama, precisely because it presumes an author who creates individual characters in an ensemble, is able to honor the uniqueness of the past, and honors what may come to be of greatest significance. O’Brien observes this understanding of history is closer to the deconstructionist because the characters in the drama are conscious they are in the midst of history and there is no purchase outside the Christian’s claiming something happened in history that makes a difference for how one plays one’s part in the history we have been given. Christians, with deconstructionists, believe its Truth is submersed in the historical, but they differ from the deconstructionist because they believe there is a world-play.

As a result O’Brien suggests that Christian theology does not fit the modern university’s understanding shaped by an ahistorical epistemology. The sense of being in an Authored World-Play—and there can be no World-Play without an Author—means when Christians “speak Christian” they do not stand outside the play but “on the boards.” Moreover they know the play is a comedy and that is why they can pray.

O’Brien concludes, observing that the voice of the modern university is secular in the clear sense because it can make no sense of an Authored World-Play. As a result, too often Mother Nature, the Great G-- Cyclic history of Progress is substituted for the Author. Which leads to the second sense of the secular, that is, that if there is no Author then we must become self-authoring. Unfortunately self-authoring without an Author ends in destruction.

O’Brien’s understanding of history as drama is quite similar to Samuel Wells’s account in *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004). Wells’s account is informed by Von Balthasar’s expansive theological vision. Wells suggests that the play has five acts: Creation, Israel, Jesus, Church, Eschaton. I am sure there are five acts, but the acts, as Wells implicitly suggests, are at once sequential but interpenetrable. Apocalyptic is the name that suggests how each of the acts are not complete in themselves which means the characters must always be ready to be surprised. That the drama is apocalyptic is also the reason the deconstructionist narrative shares much with the Christian story.