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The grace of equality

the Spirit of Truth whom the world can never receive (Jn 14:17)

Abstract

The Grace of equality as opposed to Human Rights as 'Secular Religion'?

In the second half of the twentieth century, local and international solidarity over any form of significant injustice has become common. This moral unity has been celebrated as the emergence of a 'civil society', itself the expression of a rising awareness of human rights. Today the adjective 'civil' has more prestige than 'civilized' (as in 'European civilization') and certainly more than 'Christian', which many are taking pains to forget entirely. 'Civil' has the disadvantage of remaining wedded to the domain of politics, largely co-opted by politicians of all persuasions. If the affirmation of equality suffices to prove the dignity of man and the 'universality' of that common foundation of humanity, nevertheless the rights of the individual are a political value, guaranteed primarily by citizenship. Obviously, one's likelihood of realizing those rights depends on where one is a citizen. Human rights are so dependent on the political context that it can be reasonably doubted whether individual rights per se are ever fully defended. Indeed, many politicians are only too happy to tell us

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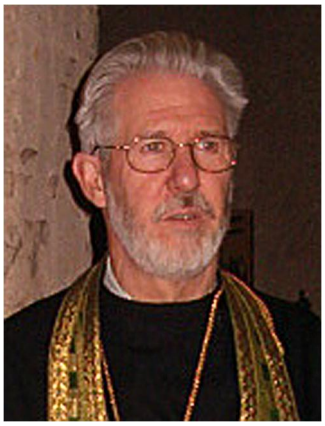

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Keywords

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1. Are Human Rights a 'Secular Religion'?

In the second half of the twentieth century, local and international solidarity over any form of significant injustice has become common. This moral unity has been celebrated as the emergence of a 'civil society', itself the expression of a rising awareness of human rights. Today the adjective 'civil' has more prestige than 'civilized' (as in 'European civilization') and certainly more than 'Christian', which many are taking pains to forget entirely. 'Civil' has the disadvantage of remaining wedded to the domain of politics, largely co-opted by politicians of all persuasions. If the affirmation of equality suffices to prove the dignity of man and the 'universality' of that common foundation of humanity, nevertheless the rights of the individual are a political value, guaranteed primarily by citizenship. Obviously, one's likelihood of realizing those rights depends on where one is a citizen. Human rights are so dependent on the political context that it can be reasonably doubted whether individual rights *per se* are ever defended. Indeed, many politicians are only too happy to tell us that what they are defending is democracy – the only genuine, humanitarian form of government.

So this typically 'democratic' affirmation of equality refers to a value shared purportedly by all of humanity. Because they are ultimately based on democratic social institutions, declarations of human rights are backed by a kind of political coercion that is linked to a rational understanding of the human person. As has been claimed many times since the French Revolution, *laïcité* risks deifying reason itself. This represents a danger. The Greek Metropolitan Yannoulatos points out that 'intrinsic' human rights do not save humanity from egotism; morality, democracy, and personality are ambiguous concepts forged in the hope of fitting a multi-religious society somewhere between equality and liberty.[1] If one separates individual rights from personal obligations (of the kind inherent in a Christian's relationship to the Trinity), one destroys the fundamental reciprocity (personal rights *versus* social obligations) that characterizes

[1] Anastasios Yannoulatos, Fa*cing the World: Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns* (New York, 2003), p. 56.

the human bond called social exchange. Guaranteeing human rights through virtual legal coercion is always weak; there is more substance in the way laws are practiced than in the way they are written.For Christians, as in many traditional societies,[2] the reciprocity founded by social exchange is set in motion by the un-repayable gift of life that man receives from God. This existence is the highest value, the ranking and hierarchizing all others. It is encompassed by an ultimate whole, a totality benefiting everyone, because it expresses His ability to engender communion between unique human beings created by Him for cohabitation in His kingdom. In St. Paul's vision, 'one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all, and in you all' (Eph 4:6). Although created in the likeness of God (Gen 3:5), mankind should refuse the proposition of Satan, who tempts us with self–deification.

St. Gregory of Nyssa wrote in *On the Soul and Resurrection*: 'Freedom means being one's own master and ruling oneself; this is the gift that God granted us from the beginning'.[3] Having lost the mystery of the theocentric universe responsible for the very notion of a humanity created out of love and freedom, where will mankind finds its unity and integrity? The freedom with which God creates mankind and then restores him to His own image by sending His Son, the Messiah, to suffer the mortality with which mankind was afflicted, is the source of all of the forms that human freedom may take. Without this victory over human mortality, over the bondage of death, all the other forms of freedom are compromised.

People of varying worldviews are able to agree that a person only exists through and by his relationships. These relationships in their best form I will call communion. But if we are all part of this relational fabric, is it basically limited to individual and political networks? Could it not be bound up with altogether different sets of meanings, values very different from those of a democratic state? Throughout history this usually has been so. Totemic clans, initiation societies, artisan guilds, etc., have all been important. The international economies incarnate the ideology of individualism on which it is dependent.

Men expect equal treatment before God, who encompasses their complementary differences because ultimately it is He who gave them their diversity. Leaving *patria* aside, men and women belong to a non-political 'kingdom' which is not of this world. Such a social body, Christ's Church, is elective in both senses: we choose to belong to it and we are chosen by God's desire to bring us into it. The chosen people, the 'new Israel', bridges by faith the gap between the *hic et nunc* and eternity. The

2 Maurice Godelier, *L'énigme du don* (Paris, 1996).
3 Cf. Yannoulatos, *Facing the World*, p. 61, note 9.

promise of the kingdom is the horizon of the future, which is explicitly here–and–now not a vision of incremental progress, moral or technological.

Although a citizen 'belongs' to the nation–state, as was until recently the case in western Europe, Marcel Gauchet argues that today democracy generates a narcissism that denies the very citizenship it originally engendered.[4] Subtract the *patria* and this leaves us with the recent expression of a universal community, the abstract notion of humanity characterized by shared human rights, *fundamental and universal*, supposedly guaranteed by international law. In this world without borders, the rule of law has become more virtual than real, indicating the weakness of the state to enforce treaties outside its own borders. These treaties and conventions invariably contain escape clauses allowing their signatories to ignore them when 'necessary'. In his book on human rights, the lawyer Mourgeon warns that 'rights are drawn more from speculation and illusion than from reality or efficacy…rights are easily conceived and rarely found'. The deficiency of state power is manifested in the default of the judiciary because 'the devolution of rights make of the person their virtual beneficiary, who cannot only accomplish their effect use once the diverse complementary conditions are reunited for their recognition…They originate from the initiative, even the caprice of those in power … '.[5]

Fundamental human rights express respect for and demand defence of the individual person, but how is this done? Assembling a concept of humanity on the basis of virtues selectively drawn from the Judeo–Christian tradition (mainly the Ten Commandments given on Sinai and the Beatitudes), European political philosophers of the 18th century linked human rights to citizenship, denying them any basis in revelation. Thus were they repossessed, and then defended, by the new whole known as the nation–state. To marginalize the transcendent social whole represented by the Christian faith, God had to be ushered off stage through respectful agnosticism. By separating the Church and State, the new bourgeois social body enabled itself to replace the community of the Church. It thereby participated in the political life of the nation–state, not only proclaiming human rights but even enforcing them through its courts of law.[6] The legality of human rights became ever more essential, even 'fundamental' to the nation; the functioning of any state required that it alone be identified with society. When, in the post-colonial world, tightly

4 Marcel Gauchet, *La démocratie contre elle-même* (Paris, 2002).
5 Jacques Mourgeon, *Les droits de l'homme*, 8th edn (Paris, 2003), pp. 3–4 and pp. 80–84.
6 Jean-Claude Monod, *La querelle de la sécularisation* (Paris, 2002), pp. 121–57.

knit by international trade, it became obvious that human beings belong to diverse wholes much larger than the nation state, these rights were declared 'universal' and included in the package of 'modernization'. Although the rights are defended by international treaties (usually promoted by influential countries), signatories choose to violate them in the name of their national interests, as egregiously demonstrated by the United States in recent years. The contradiction is revealing; operating at the scale of the nation state, politicians have difficulty delineating a horizon of universality with any consistency.

Non obstant, the basic question remains unresolved: to what whole does humanity belong? Its own? Is there no higher order of being than contemporary man? If one accepts the reply 'none', then the individual is encompassed by no higher value than his fellow humans. In this case, individualism is or becomes the basis of all solidarity. Although solidarity is indeed the cement behind human rights, it comes in many different levels. The sacrifices it requires cannot be asked of everyone.

By focusing national law and, since the second half of the 20th century, international law on specific geopolitical conflicts, the Euro-American ideology has shown an increasing preoccupation with the universal manifestation of human worth. Local values and visions are not in favour, especially not religious ones. In this pursuit, they are certainly guided by their 'democratic' ideology (elective representation, social contract, etc.), namely the viewpoint that rational economic choice and political power is the only values structuring society. After the end of the Cold War, religious authority retreated in the face of this push to impose political power over the authority of any religious experience. Globalization is trying to relativize religious values in light of religious distinctions.

Political pundits describe a 'birthright' that began with the very restrictive notion of citizenship implemented after the French Revolution.[7] Expanded to include all mankind during the second half of the 20th century, the definitions and declarations of human rights often lacked serious guarantees. In Western Europe, the institutions of meaning from which such definitions arise, namely the nation state and its ideology of citizenship, may reassure some. Elsewhere however, where the state is weaker, other institutions and ideologies must be relied upon to articulate social morphology. Therefore, it is only reasonable to assume a form of solidarity upstream from both individualism and the state, because solidarity did not await the appearance of the nation state to manifest itself. Clearly it is not the rational choices of individualism but human

7 Simon Shama, Citizens. *The Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London, 1989).

compassion that gives strength to these pre-existing units of relational solidarity. Compassion arises out of dismay at injustice and its concomitant inequality, which are engendered and tolerated by indifference. It is inside this domain that equality is found, at the opposite end of this emotional spectrum from inequality.

As André Itéanu has pointed out, successfully managed equality has never been achieved in any society, so one cannot compare societies meaningfully on the basis of so-called equality or inequality; one can only compare the competing ideologies of equality and hierarchy. What then is a hierarchy of values?

> …hierarchy as encompassment was distinct from politically created inequality such as is usually defined by social science…The contrast between political power and hierarchy is not only a matter of the content of the two notions, but principally of form. As stated earlier, hierarchy is a social form, or rather an ideological form, which depends on the recognition, within the same social system, of different values. In hierarchy, a higher value encompasses a lower one.[8]

Understood this way, a religious hierarchy of values is not incompatible with tolerance; rather it is evaluative indifference that is the enemy of tolerance. Establishing a hierarchy of values is, in fact, one way to articulate diversity.

2. Are Human Rights only Social?

Yannoulatos writes convincingly that the most fundamental human right, the one that encompasses all the others, is to love and be loved. For this to be true, religious freedom must be the prerequisite of all other freedoms, as was proclaimed in Amsterdam in 1948. A recent question that has traversed most western democracies concerns their component subgroups. In any given society do groups have *collective* rights? Or are rights only for defending an individual's niche in society? Can we still "trust in God" and say that rights are God–given? Or is it now better to view them as bestowed to citizens by the force of law, and only so in 'just' nation–states? There is no simple answer here. If we are willing to inquire into how political power refuses the typically religious pretension to faith (i.e., the integrity of a person created in the image of God), then we need to understand how one's view of human rights is influenced by where and when one lives.

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[8] André Itéanu, *On Hierarchy in Comparative Light*, unpublished manuscript, p. 6.

Human rights movements differ widely in approach. Individualism, the bedrock of democratic ideologies, does not exist everywhere. Even in nineteenth–century Western Europe where, for instance, Nietzsche affirmed 'Only what is personal is eternally irrefutable', the notion of 'personalism' eventually came to be interpreted in many different ways[9]. When the Helsinki agreement received the status of an international treaty and led to the founding of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), it was due to the prestige of the Russian dissident movement. Their efforts to create a less violent society behind the Iron Curtain coincided with certain international interests.

In non-Indo-European languages, the concept of 'civil rights' does not necessarily imply adherence to Western European individualism; in fact, there are as many conceptualizations as there are cultures.[10] The doctrine of fundamental human rights seemed to triumph in the fall of the Iron Curtain and the constitutional debates over the future of the European Union, but the danger of co-optation of civil rights by globalization is ever present. It has never been more important to be lucid in this regard and to understand that most peoples outside Europe still believe that God has rights over man and the society he lives in. One's understanding of personhood determines one's concept of society. And it is very difficult to invent new concepts of society.'

(a) The secularized person *versus* realized personhood in the Beatitudes

These social realities have been discussed in various ways for centuries. Due to their complexity, they evade tight synthesis. This article is limited in scope and focuses on one elementary issue: to explain from a Christian perspective why the difference between secularized fundamental human rights and the Beatitudes proclaimed by Christ in his Sermon on the Mount (Mt 3:3–12) needs to be taken seriously by all Christians.

The various declarations of human rights from the period of the French Revolution[11] down to the present are not formally comparable to the eight

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[9] Jean-Claude Larchet; *Personne et Nature. Le Trinité – le Christ – l'homme*.(Paris, Le Cerf, 2011) 4è partie, pp; 201-396.

[10] Marcel Gauchet, *Un monde désenchanté* rev edn (Paris, 2004).

[11] These were almost immediately contested by those who did not find these rights inclusive enough: women, citizens from the Antilles who wanted independence from France but did not want to give any rights to their black slaves. (Schama, *Citizens*, pp. 498–9). When Lafayette first proposed a Declaration of Rights to the Assembly on 11th July 1789, he had an American model in mind. Thomas Jefferson, then ambassador to France, read Lafayette's different drafts throughout the summer and added his remarks to them, but Lafayette was unable to get his mentor President George

beatitudes (or the four in Lk 6:20–49) because they are expressed in different forms of discourse and authorization. As Christ said to the father of the epileptic child, the only "power" is faith. According to the Gospels of Christ, God's sovereignty over His people had been lost due to the sins of Israel, but was restored by the coming of the Messiah who revealed God's righteousness[12] and proclaimed the good news of the mercy of His kingdom to the poor and the meek of this world: 'The Lord offers mercy and judgement to all who are wronged' (Ps 102:6). In the form of a call to those 'who have ears to hear', these judgements function as laws within the kingdom of grace. To understand one's own wrong, whether it is of one's own doing or by another, is already a gift, a grace, an expression of God's mercy for mankind. Yannoulatos argues that, for Christians, the highest right is the grace to become what we were created for, to conquer the sin in and around us, to vanquish death, and to be sanctified and deified by the presence of God in our midst.[13]

In St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, we can see what law came to mean in the Christian faith. Not only is St. Paul unconcerned about Roman civil law in this epistle, he even questions the Jewish holy law given by Moses. To do so, St. Paul enumerates six different kinds of law. First, the 'natural' law (Rom 2:14–15), written by God in our hearts, in the voice of conscience. Second, the 'law of sin' (7:25; 8:2), which concerns passions that hold an unnatural dominion over the body. This law is firmly opposed by a third kind, the 'Mosaic law' (2:12–13) given to the Israelites by Moses at Sinai. Although this third law reveals the righteousness of God, it rarely manages to overcome the 'law of sin' because the fourth law, the 'law of works' (3:27) or our effort to keep to the natural and Mosaic laws, only reveals our weakness and sin. What St. Paul sees as replacing the Mosaic law is the fifth law, the 'law of faith' (3:27). Man is not justified by faith alone, because both the natural and Mosaic laws have gradually revealed a chrismation called the 'law of the spirit' (8:2). This sixth law is also described as the law of Christ (Gal 6:2), or the 'law of liberty' by St. James, the brother of the Lord (epistle of James 1:25; 2:12).

The Holy Spirit activates man's faith by taking the form of grace, which transforms inwardly. Henceforth it is the law of the spirit and not that of

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Washington, to comment on them. As we know the influence of Britain, visible in the arguments of the French constitutional monarchists, was not to carry the day. The dominant trend was holist, in the tradition of Rousseau who saw the nation as an indvisible whole expressing a General Will (Ibid., pp. 442–4).

12 Originally humanism was based on intellectual freedom and morality, but even there the Christian message that one must sacrifice oneself to find oneself (Mt 16:24) goes way beyond legal codes of human rights. Cf. the understanding of the word justice (*dikaiomata*) in Psalm 119.

13 Yannoulatos, *Facing the World*, p. 75.

sin which orients us towards God: 'But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed…' (Rom 3:21). St. Paul insists that Abraham's faithful response to God's call preceded his circumcision (Rom 4 *passim*). However, it is only in Christ that the righteousness of God is fully revealed; by faith in Christ, by His grace, we become filled with His faith in us, making us righteous through cooperation with God. This new life is found in baptism and chrismation. How many citizens of today's Europe understand something of this Christian concept of society?

(b) The search for equality of person in Europe today

In a recent report, Metropolitan Kyrill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad (Moscow Patriarchate) evoked the need for historical reflection on this issue.[14] The threshold of the third millennium presented the inhabitants of the European Union (EU) with a quasi return to the boundaries of the Christian Church in 1054: the moment of schism between the Eastern Orthodox and Western Catholic Church.[15.]

What changed since then? At the beginning of the second millennium, the estrangement of the Holy Roman Empire from the Byzantine Empire had taken the form of separation and occasional hostility (e.g. the fourth Crusade, which sacked Constantinople in 1204). At the end of the twentieth century, another kind of distrust is felt by Orthodox living in the east half of Christendom. In this eastern part, the beginning of the third millennium witnessed a fracture: the ravages of some 70 years of communist domination ended in poverty and the importation of a new kind of secularization from Western Europe. In the western part, 'liberalization' (i.e. the secularization of the public ethos away from Christian revelation) has been accompanied by wealth. Capitalism has long since parted ways with the Protestant ethic. The current simplified and reformed version of the EU's constitutional treaty deliberately distances itself from any Christian heritage. Christians, both Orthodox and Catholic, in Eastern Europe are being encouraged to reform their societies on this Western European model. To them, this model is far from being an obvious choice.

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[14] Report by Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, Chairman of the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate at the International Ecclesiological–Scientific Conference, 'Orthodox Byzantium and the Latin West', dedicated to the 950th Anniversary of the Church Schism and the 800th Anniversary of the Capture of Constantinople by the Crusaders, 26–27 Moscow May 2004.

[15] After the Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon in 451, Pope Leo I affirmed the primacy of the Roman Sea. For an Orthodox view on this primacy, see John Meyendorff *et al.*, *The Primacy of Peter* (Bedford, 1963).

Are we to build a political and cultural model, asks Metropolitan Kyrill, based on submission to the on-going and eventually total laicization of our formerly Christian countries, or on a reconciliation of secular humanism with a Christian vision of fundamental human values?[16] First, one should ask about what made Western Europe become Christian. For some historians, the answer lies in the political ideology of Western Europe (consummated in the so-called 'two bodies' of the king).[17] Since the Protestant Reformation, the major socio-cultural undertaking of Western civilization has been the construction of nation states. What transformed these Christian kingdoms into nation states was a new notion of totality, borrowed from the Christian experience of transcendental wholeness of God, the Lord of All. The whole, namely God's relationship with his creation and creatures, initially contracted with a vision of the 'divine right' of the Holy Roman Empire, which marked the beginning of secularization. It is helpful to recall a few of the main historical dates.

Before the recognition of Christianity under Constantine, St. Paul in the first century and the Apologist Justin Martyr in the second century used the argument that any Christians who were Roman citizens and persecuted for their faith had the right to appeal to the laws of Rome for justice. However, after Christianity became completely distinct from Judaism, the laws that had protected Jews in Roman cities since the time of Julius Caesar could no longer protect Christians. Even after the Edict of Milan (313), when Constantine and Licinius decided to tolerate this new faith, the role of martyrdom in defining Church–State relations remained. Augustine's vision of the *City of God* was occasioned by the fall of 'old' Rome to Alaric in 410; in other words, by the disappearance of the Roman Empire. However, the recognition of the Church's autonomy did not solve the problem. A saint like Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (374–397), stepped in to defend the right of the Church to freely define its faith and the frontiers of its metropolia. According to Ambrose, the emperor's highest honour should be to consider himself a 'son of the Church'. The absence of an empire after 410 made Western European Caesero-Papism a serious option; the only measure of authority was God's universal sovereignty. A thousand years later the pendulum in the West would begin to swing back to total separation of Church and State, but taking the notion of total sovereignty with it.

In the Byzantine Empire on the other hand, the gradual transition from a Roman empire to a Balkan cultural–religious commonwealth was one of

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16 See, *supra*, note 13.

17 Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, 1957).

the major consequences of the adoption of Christian monotheism.[18] Paradoxically, the state's responsibility for its churches produced a form of protectionism which, though not always healthy for the Church, maintained for it the possibility of acting in the general interest and, at the risk of one's episcopal throne, standing up to the emperors. In Eastern Europe, where authority unconsecrated by God was not readily recognized, the emergence of a civil society did not really occur until the 20th century. The welfare and well–being of citizens, guaranteed by a state, that is separate from religious authority, is an altogether modern notion.

At this point a few landmarks are helpful. Christianity had set aside the Dionysian cosmological totality in the 7th century, in favour of St. Maximus' vision of a full and perfect personhood modelled on Christ.[19] By the Middle Ages, the exploits of the martyrs of the first three centuries had long since been recast into the vocational diversity of the different orders of Western monasticism. Yet the ascetical vision developed by St. Maximus in his Christology survived here and there. Meister Eckhart (1260–1327) presents ascetics as a concern for they demonstrate the need to maintain an epistemological simplicity that perceives the whole in the heart: 'If your eye sees all things, your ear hears all things and your heart remembers all things, in truth in all things your soul is destroyed'. However, with the political philosophy, as developed by Hobbes' *Leviathan*, the careful construction of subtotals was already considered of greater importance than the construction of totalities.[20] The reflections of such political philosophers on the concept of a person as a citizen are examples of the focus being on the part (i.e. the individual) rather than the totality. Nevertheless until the 20th century, political philosophies that refused the notion of totality in any form were rare. Nietzsche, ever the prophet, wrote: 'One must shatter the whole and unlearn respect for the whole' (Fragment 7, 62). In the nineteenth and the twentieth century, there emerged a search for a non-transcendental totality. Although only in the twentieth century did linguistic analytical philosophy and

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18 Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth. Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993); Aristeides Papadakis, *The Christian East and the Rise of the Papacy*. New York, 1994); Meyendorff et al., *The Primacy of Peter*; Yannoulatos, *Facing the World*, pp. 63–8.

19 Cf. Stephen C. Headley, 'If all things were equal nothing would exist': From Cosmos to Hierarchy in Dionysius the Areopagaite & Maximus the Confessor. in La coherence des societies : Mélanges en homage à Daniel de Coppet. by André Iteanu and Collectif. Paris: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2010. pp. 580–662.

20 Cf. Christian Godin, *La Totalité, prologue. Pour une philosophie de la totalité* (Seyssel, 1997), p. 47.

deconstructionism deprive the relationship between the part and the whole of any value.

As a counter-current, I would contend that one cannot legitimately universalize the Western European experience of individualism, nor equate the separation of Church and State with its secularization of political life. There are as many versions of secularization and disenchantment from religious traditions as there are societies and cultures. *Entzauberung* ('enchantment' in Weberian terms) related to the magical and hence esthetic fascination with the European world that its rationality promised to sanitize of its dangerous superstitions. In the context of Russia, the main institution of ethical meaning was the Orthodox Church, which experienced the domination of atheistic 'humanism' for the first time under the totalitarian utopian Communist state. The result was the destruction of a Christian vision of humanity by a monolithic vision of a "new" society based on terror.

Nonetheless after 1988, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) began to be negatively evaluated by the international human rights movement, which measured it by their own secular yardstick.[21] In general, and not just in Russia (where culture, motherland, and religion still intertwine, for better and for worse), secular nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have tried to assume the moral high ground. Although the original defenders of human rights in the Soviet Union came from every imaginable social horizon, the liberty of conscience has been promoted as an anti-religious weapon.[22] Secularizing the message of respect and peace for all mankind implies assuming that all monotheist revelations are exclusivist and therefore dangerous for humanity's future because they preclude coexistence.

This negative genealogy of the defence of the dignity of man obscures the relationship of human rights to the Beatitudes.[23] Many earlier historical studies considered that during the 19th century there existed a 'convergence', a Christian influence on certain tenets of socialism.[24] However the genealogy I explore here is more radical, even if the very notion of the human person in Europe not only grew out of the Christian faith, but can also be maintained only through faith in or respect for Christ.

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21 See, e.g., Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: Triumphalism and Defensiveness* (London: 1996).

22 Paul Valadier, *L'Eglise en procès. Catholicisme et société moderne* (Paris, 1987), p. 179.

23 Cf. Talal Asad, *Genealgoies of Religion. Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, 1993); *Formations of the Secular. Christianity, Islam, and Modernity* (Stanford, 2003).

24 Cf. Bernard Häring, *Christian Renewal in a Changing World* (Garden City, 1968), pp. 304–36.

The foundation of the human person is located in his resemblance to his Creator, and his unique God, not in the obvious difference from all other the other human beings created and loved equally by God. Ultimately, without the gift to all people of this 'light of Christ', there are no human rights.

Let me explain. As claimed repeatedly above, human rights in the secular worldview are based on a notion of individuality. It is assumed that humanity must be treated with equality due to membership in our single species. But is equality before the law for every citizen a sufficient yardstick for our diversity and the complexity of overlapping suffering that mankind endures? The vision of mankind that Christ reveals to us is based on diversity being bridged by communion, by love and eventual union that affirm a variety of ways of being human.

Citizenship, as it appears in the late eighteenth century,[25] is a much diminished version of what it means to be a Christian. Of course, there never existed any intention to fit into the category of citizen everything that existed in the experience of Christians; the citizen was only that small fragment of each person that the state was trying to administer.[26] Governmental administration has little to do with God's love and grace bestowed through the Son and the Spirit on His creation; it could hardly rival such a divine economy, except by refusing it credence. This is what makes the form of agnosticism that I call here 'evaluative indifference' become the contemporary handmaiden of democracy. In fact, democracy is a construction of the totality that is called society, but it never seems to possess the social relations needed to keep it from unravelling. It is in this context that the issue of secularized human rights is raised.

3. 'Europe' as the Context of Personhood

The future of European society will not be guaranteed by the European Union. The hierarchy of values that people live by and transmit will ultimately guarantee the European society we will leave to future generations. Needless to say, a society run by market values alone is not viable. Contractual exchange is diametrically opposed to the kind of reciprocal recognition (or 'gift exchange' in the language of Marcel Mauss) that creates human relations. As Marcel Hénaff writes, 'The sphere of recognition cannot replace or be replaced by the sphere of the

25 Cf. Schama, *Citizens*….

26 Cf. James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State. How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed* (New Haven, 1998).And David Graeber, *Towards an Anthropological Theory of Value. The false coin of our own dreams* (New York, 2001).

marketplace'.[27] The theoretical framework for rationalizing economic life has become a utilitarian ideology, replacing the medieval doctrine of grace that was a gift–giving relationship which bound men to each other and their Creator.

The EU is a bureaucracy, not a nation–state with an identity of the type that began with the divine right kings and later matured in modern states. The kingdoms that preceded nation states in Europe claimed to represent a totality, which led them to take the place of that totality.[28] The pretension to be a reflection of the kingdom of God was first revealed by St. Augustine's *City of God*. Today a secular polity is not a 'who' but a 'which', inevitably corrupted by the lust for power it engenders. In spite of what 18th century sceptics said, the case for the separation of God's Church and the state's society on earth is based not on the endless struggles for power made by clerics who "ruling" God's Church, but rather on the lust for power to control the church, which originated in political life. Cardinal Richelieu (1585–1642), the faithful chief minister of Louis XIII, is a notorious example of a cardinal for whom 'the first foundation of the happiness of the State is the establishment of the reign of God' and for whom the state's *raison d'être* is the exercise of the divine will on earth'.

On the debris of two world wars, Europe has protected its prosperity by using an ambient evaluative indifference, made possible in the shambles of the Christian faith.[29] This newly re-conceptualized Europe, a 'union' forged with great difficulty during the second half of the 20th century, tried to avoid ideological controversy by being based exclusively on the ideology of individualism. But is such a social ideology capable of attributing a permanent status to 'others' (immigrant workers, refugees, etc.) who often choose to maintain strong ties to their culture of origin?

In fine some social scientists in Europe realized that the very notion of society, that mirror image of the 'whole' nation state, the *topos* of democracies, was a pseudo whole.[30] The force that binds its citizens together is becoming less and less nationalism, and more and more a highly fragmenting self–interest. Rational action theory began to present ethical disorders. In these nation states, many people related to others in a wide variety of societal networks, more or less intimate, more or less

27 Marcel Hénaff, *Le prix de la vérité. Le don, l'argent, la philosophie* (Paris, 2002), p. 296.

28 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*. *Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford, 1990). The most comprehensive recent exploration of philosophies of totality is by Christian Godin (7 vols, Paris, 1997–2000).

29 *Offensive des Religions* (Manière de Voir No. 48), published by *Le Monde Diplomatique*, November–December 1999, especially 'L'Europe sanctifiée de Jean Paul II' by Jacques Decornoy,.pp. 10–12.

30 Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, 'Society', in *Encyclopaedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, eds Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer (London, 1996), pp. 514–22.

ephemeral. However, they lacked a long–lasting societal linkage that could support a belief in progress, which is so necessary to a clear completion of the democratic project.[31] Even that building block of society, the family, was increasingly seen as a temporary arrangement, 'decomposable' and not to be subject to any contractual obligation, be it civil or religious.

This is truly problematic. Recent cultural theories and ideologies have been 'holophobic'.[32] They avoid comparing the morphologies of social wholes and total social anatomies. As television news shows regularly, society is often seen only through the eyes of the individual, the proverbial "man in the street". The last major effort to compare traditional holistic and modern individualistic social morphologies in terms of exchange theory was made by Louis Dumont.[33] His study is relevant to our analysis because – though European democracies justify their existence on the basis of their ability to guarantee individual citizens their 'human rights' – some consensus is necessary to make laws. Traditional societies do not pose the question of consensus, they simply reinforce it constantly at a subliminal level. By means of a hierarchy of values that is held in common, a tradition is transmitted by assigning rank and status, implying a full cycle of exchange between heaven and earth, the ancestors and their descendents, elites and commoners. Thus they avoid compartmentalization of their customs into law, economics, kinship, religion, and politics.

Semitic monotheism, however, moved the goalposts of these traditional holistic visions of man's place in his universe. The interior man became a token of the whole man. Conversion and resurrection narratives – found throughout the Torah, and later refined by the Prophetic tradition – prepared the ground for a further revelation of the nature of creation and of man's relationship to his Creator. Traditional societies had insisted on ortho-praxis, but Judeo-Christian traditions increasingly stressed a highly internalized orthodoxy. The space for social bonds between a man and other men, as well as between God and man, lies in their diversity as willed by God. St. Augustine expressed this pithily in a six–word Latin aphorism: 'If all things were equal, nothing would exist'.[34]

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31 Cf. Gauchet, *La démocratie contre elle-même*, pp. 1–26; 326–85.

32 Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London, 2003).

33 Louis Dumont, *Essais sur l'individualisme. Une perspective anthropologique sur l'idéologie moderne* (Paris, 1983); *Homo Aequalis I. Genèse et Epanouissement de l'idéologie économique* (Paris, 1977); *Homo Aequalis II. L'idéologie allemande. France-Allemagne et retour* (Paris, 1997).

34 *«non essent omnia, si essent aequalia»*, in St. Augustine, *De diuersis questionibus octoginta tribus*, question 41.

Not only is the chasm between Creator and creature beneficial for mankind, but so is the tremendous diversity displayed by individuals and their cultures, religions, and personal genius. This implies that forms of worship will be varied even though God is one. The social bond between human beings is the space for a communion in which they become true persons, entering into a land of the living. A shared proximity with God and the experience of others enriches me with components of a shared tradition. Recently, Muslims across the world working in various truth and reconciliation movements have stressed the importance of this *al'ikhtilaf* (difference) as willed by Allah when He conceived his creatures (*makluk*).[35] So difference, diversity, and a certain distance between persons are a permanent feature of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic revelations, not a sign of alienation.

Moreover, if relationships destroyed by torture or assassination leave the survivors with scars for which there is no apparent cure, a universal programme of human rights is unrealistic in its application, for it means that all of society's victims are rendered somewhat less than human by the injustices committed against them. If, as stated in the European Charter, human rights are to be defended by political power, what does the mobilization of this political power depend upon? Media exposure of abuses? Shared ethical values? Geopolitical priorities, but if so, whose? The dissidents of the Soviet Union during the decades from 1960 to 1990 gained credibility from the sacrifices they had the courage to take on. Their heroism generated sympathy abroad, but more importantly, it discredited communism domestically.

Western Europe would have us believe that modern political ideology contains a universal truth. This begs our question: What relationships exist between these modern values and the older, religious ones in any given society? Is it not reasonable to answer 'none'? Doubtless most people find *prima facie* the defence of fundamental human rights self–evident; some people sense that they are an improvement on the Beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus Christ because human rights do not depend on transcendence and Christian 'idealism'.

When one asks who is ready to defend these civil values and how they will do so, the self–evident coherence of the fundamental human rights' discourse begins to show signs of weakness. The values it proposes are not hierarchical – they are all arranged on the same level – so we do not know which one we need to defend first or whether we must we defend all of them at once.

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35 Cf. Stephen Headley, *Durga's Mosque. Cosmology, Conversion and Community in central Javanese Islam*. (Singapore, 2003), chap. 12 and 14.

If we cannot, or cannot yet, defend all human rights, are some values more urgent to defend in certain localities than in others? Or are we committing an injustice here by creating a hierarchy of values? If so, on what basis should we avoid it? Sooner or later we will have to admit that one cannot define human rights in terms of themselves because doing so is tautological. At that point, we may admit that the rights do not tell us what is 'human' about them.

We then come to the question of the integrity of the human person, which is essential for these fundamental rights to cohere and be universal. There is a necessary relationship in this ethic between unity (of the human person) and universality (of fundamental human rights); otherwise the rights will remain largely unfulfilled.

4. The Pivot of Grace

Fundamental human rights are usually formulated strictly in terms of the individual. While Christianity has no problem with programmes of human rights, it cannot share the vision of individualism that lies behind them. Societies also have rights, as do cultures, ethnic traditions, in short collective ways of life that deserve defence as part of the ecology preserving human freedom of association. The problem of their mutual interaction is fundamental and ancient. Democracies usually get around this issue by reducing humanity to the isolated individual. Christianity has recently experienced the difficulty but also the possibility of surviving under the most hostile forms of governance. Since, as is well known,[36] the first individualism was a Christian one, what changed the goal posts?

From a Christian outlook, there are two causes of social disintegration: evil and the human personality. How does the Christian experience of the person account for evil and death? Clearly alterity, interpersonal relationship, is not only the social space of communion, but also the occasion of hate and violence. These are potentially destructive results of the freedom that mankind exercises in his fallen state. Difference (*diaphorá*), the God–given diversity of personalities and talents, can be perverted into divisions (*diaírisis*); then the distance (*diástasis*) that normally permits communion can widen, resulting in decomposition (*diáspasis*) and death.[37] The freedom which man possesses always risks becoming perverted, to miss its aim. As was stated above, for the Christian man is never as human as when standing before his God. John Zizioulas (Metropolitan of Pergamon) has thus refuted an atomistic, Aristotelian

[36] Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual*, 1050–1200 (London, 1972).
[37] John Zizioulas, *Communion et Alterité* in *S.O.P.* 184/26 (1994).

basis for Christian individualism by showing that a Christian individualism cannot be based on indivisible membership in the human species. Rather, Christian personhood is founded on a communion with one's Creator and fellow humans. Difference is good; it provides that diversity of mankind which makes such a communion possible.[38]

No society can be totally individualistic. This is evident in western Europe today in the 'holistic intentions' of the ecological movement, as well as the lively spirit of associations in contemporary European life; individualism cannot be carried out to its solipsistic conclusion. Non-Christian Europeans imagine that the Church has lost its vitality. Their belief created a Christological amnesia in the younger generation. To them no faith was passed on and most youth find grace a hollow word. All that remains in France, for instance, is suspicion of Christianity, and only rare intuitions of its purity and its capacity for conversion and resurrection of the human heart. This scepticism must be the starting point for any reconciliation of religious values with those of secular humanism. This heritage of apostasy from Christ, of supplanting God by oneself (or by one's society), has characterised atheistic humanism and has been repeatedly explored by various writers, including Compte, Marx and Nietzsche.[39]

So how could the beatitudes as values find a place into a post-Christian society? Why speak of experiencing grace in a world which cannot receive the Spirit of Truth? There are those such as Marcel Gauchet who say that Christianity's historical mission in Western Europe was to be the religion that inspired taking leave of religion – of Christianity – and thus it has *successfully* self–destructed. To Gauchet's surprise, this post-Christian vision of man gave him such freedom that he was able to refuse not only Christianity, but also, in the same vein, society's effort to structure him, thus leading many to reject any rule or norm coming from outside himself.[40]

The limitations of such a social evolution are obvious; the very nature of humanity is to share experiences in a common social space. Eastern Europe of course did not experience this development. Because of the violence of their atheistic governments, Eastern European Churches often fought for their own survival in the context of the Christian faith. However, in Western Europe during the same post-world war period, indifference and *anomie* (a very different form of apostasy from Communism) slowly

38 John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York, 1985).
39 Henri de Lubac, *Le drame de l'humanisme athée* (Paris, 1944).
40 Valadier, *L'Eglise en procès*, p. 111.

anesthetized many citizens of these democracies to the religious dimensions of social life.

During the twenty–first century a new generation of youth, who have grown up after the secularization of Western Europe, are likely to be more open to the kind of life proposed by Christ. Even if it is never novel, the conversion and resurrection of the human person in his Creator is always fresh. To reflect on this transcendence from the outside is to depersonalize the I–Thou relationship and render it less, rather than more, transparent. The uniqueness of every person's relationship to God can only be understood in terms of the ineffable experience that has changed them. In this section, I will show how this started, how Jesus's care for his disciples appears as a transposition of Christ's relationship to his Father.

Transcending the self, participation in the divine uncreated energies proposed in the Beatitudes is decisive, for if man remains separated from God – as creature from Creator – the cosmological dimension of society is lost. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward date the progressive loss of the experience of life in the world as gift to the late thirteenth century: 'the loss after Scotus of the idea that existence coincides with 'being created' eventually ushers in the notion of being–as–object which exists primarily for a knowing or commanding subject'.[41] Man has finally been 'objectified'. The loss of connectivity here is immense. Alexei Nesteruk, writing on humanity as the microcosm of the university, argues that that 'it is through this hypostatic mode of existence that human beings are capable of gratitude to God for creation and can offer the world back to the Creator in thanksgiving, contemplating thus, through their eucharistic function, the meaning of the whole world as God's good creation'.[42] Although today some people in Western Europe are conscious of this malaise caused by this objectification of mankind, the rediscovery of the Christian vision of a eucharistic, 'thankful' society is still rare.[43] At the present time, the ideology of individualism continues to sap society of its capacity to construct, through a hierarchy of exchange, commonly held values.

If grace, the divine energy of God, is what qualifies communion, its reception is conditional on man's intense concentration on the inner movements of his own heart. The same is true of any meaningful conversation; inner silence is necessary to feel the weight of the interlocutor's personhood. The anthropology of prayer as it appears in

41 John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, 'Introduction', in J. Milbank *et al*. (eds), *Radical Orthodoxoy*. *A new theology* (London, 1999), p. 8.
42 Alexei V. Nesteruk, *Light from the East* (Minneapolis, 2003), p. 195.
43 Nicolas Afanassieff, *L'Eglise du Saint Esprit* (Paris, 1975).

Christ's prayer to his Father (John 17) is the best example of how grace passes from god to human nature. It is to this that we must now turn.

This excursus into the gospel of St. John (Jn 13–18) is necessary to show how men's prayer to their Creator is capable of setting into motion a hierarchy of values that engages them with the grace of equality. In St. John's presentation of the Lord's departure from this world, Christ's dialogue with his disciples is patterned on Psalms 42–43 ('As the doe longs for running streams, so longs my soul for you, my God'). The spirit of truth and the grace of God's coming into the human soul takes the form of a dialogue with his disciples prolonged by a prayer to his Father. This is what is known as Christ's priest's prayer (Jn 17) and indeed is a sacramental moment for its prolongs that institution of meaning we call the divine supper.

The Christian claim to participate in the life of God requires such an excursion into the Bible. Otherwise communion, exchange in all its diverse forms, in daily life, about which we all know a great deal, would not have a parallel communal work in the invisible kingdom anticipate by the Eucharist. The ultimate example of Christ's dialogue with humanity is his parting words to his Apostles at the last supper (Jn 14–17). There he answers questions posed to him by Thomas, Philip, and Judas. The need of the Apostles to remain in communion with Christ is answered when Jesus teaches them how to continue to be close to him through their internal conviction, their faith. In the dialogue between Christ and his disciples, one can see how extensive the relationships between God and man become. The relationships that human beings establish with the three persons of the Holy Trinity involve them in a intra-Trinitarian communion. The Apostles, through their interaction with Christ, lay the foundation for a Christian life to which the word 'society' is truly, fully applicable. And it is this profound sociability that characterizes the bonds that bring believers together.

In his farewell to his disciples (Jn 14:1–3), Christ begins by his asking them to trust in the Father in whose house there are many rooms which Jesus is going ahead to prepare for them. He says that, by telling them what will happen to him before it takes place, he hopes they might believe in him (verse 29). Christ does what his Father commands; thus the world knows that he loves the Father. Christ through his passion will pass through the collective horror of the human condition so that men might be freed from death. The Church is the locus of that bond between God and man, not by political enforcement (e.g. the power of imprisonment and capital punishment), but by a loving hierarchy linking us to the one who revealed to mortals that we have a future and an eternal end: 'I will come to you again. I will take you to myself and where I am you may be also'. Christ, by

these words, is encompassing his disciples to participate in the relationship which he holds with his Father. The Beatitudes are built on just such a dimension: God becomes known to man as the creator of the world and also 'the one who is to come again', the one who will prepare for them a room in the kingdom.

It is Thomas among the disciples who poses the first question (Jn 14:5): 'Lord, we do not know where you are going and how can we know the way?'. To this, Christ replies, 'I am the way, the truth and the life … If you had known me, you would have known my Father also' (14:6). To this Philip retorts, 'Lord, show us the Father'. Again Christ presents the paternity of the Father as an encompassing relationship: 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me… I do not speak on my own authority but the Father who dwells in me does the works' (14:10).

This relationship is the greatest value; the contextual subordination of man to God has a value superior to any other notion of ranking, for 'He who believes in me will also do the works I do' (14:12). Christ is the servant of God, of his Father's creatures: 'Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son' (14:12). Human notions of equality and inequality are surpassed here in the self–abasement, the *kenosis* of the Son of God. *Herein lays the grace of equality, that is to say Christ taking on of the human condition in his incarnation.* The hierarchy of Creator–creature is thereby subject to an inversion; the Word of God is incarnate in the servant of the Lord, a creature whose purpose is deliver mankind's salvation through an indescribable death and descent into hell. The bond that links persons to persons was initiated by the bond to human beings forged by God their creator.

After the last supper, Christ leaves his disciples together. Pending their seeing Christ again, the world is rejoicing over the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth and the Apostles are weeping. The moment is indeed critical, judgmental, because, as Christ dies on the cross, he puts a distance between himself and the world. Crucifying the Word of God leads to a great silence. 'I shall not talk to you any longer … but the world must know that I love the Father … come let us go now' (Jn 14:30–31). Then Christ says, 'I came from the Father and have come into the world and now I leave the world to go to the Father' (16:28).

Judas, not the Iscariot, questions his Lord over this return and asks whether Christ plans to show himself only to his disciples and not to the world. This question is critical to the revelation of God to man. The coming of God in the Messiah reveals the love of the Father (Jn 14:22–3). This occurs if the disciples are able to keep Christ's words. This exchange of love is triadic; Christ says that any one who loves him and keeps his words will be loved by the Father and then they will both come and make their

home in that person. Christ now tells the disciples of his departure so that when it happens they will not be afraid (14:27) nor feel abandoned like orphans. Indeed, Christ's returning to his Father should fill the disciples with joy for the Father is 'greater than I'.

'Unless I go, the Advocate will not come to you': through these exchanges between the Apostles and Christ, the Father is presented in the third person, until suddenly (Jn 17) Jesus raises his eyes to heaven and speaks to his Father, at which point he speaks of the disciples in the third person. The dialogue has moved elsewhere: onto a higher level encompassing the earlier dialogue between Christ and his disciples into one between Christ and his Father. The *grace of equality* consists in precisely this capacity of uplifting from one level to another by a broader and higher contextualization of our prayer to God. In short, when God incarnated humanity in His son, He made our humanity into a family of brothers and sisters.

5. Secular Values Seen in the Light of the Gospel of Christ

Truly, being a creature standing before one's Creator makes a great difference in one's experience of humanity. After attempting in the late 18th century to abandon the Christian notion of a person created in the image of God, France (the first fully secular state) felt the need to proclaim universal human rights in 1789, in the name of which they conducted a revolution to implement the 'general will'. Nevertheless, some people continued to proclaim that only God could make man human. This was expressed by continuing the Latin Church's Easter vigil, which thanked God for the light of his grace while singing *Lumen Christi* and replying *Deo Gratias*. For what were they so thankful? Victory over death, a light brighter than the gloom of our mortality. They felt it was only realistic to admit that death rules mankind even in those rare moments when blatant injustice is not regularly committed.

Religious teleology unfolds the horizon of providence and exposes a destiny, a coherent whole, in time as well as space. Modern societies are by definition open–ended in the sense that they do not envisage their finalities and thus the long–term meaning of their rationales is unknown. Although religions are potentially free to make a contribution to the construction of 'society', this is in fact not the case in at least two fields. Secularization is often presented by anthropologists as a process of differentiation and social specialization,[44] so religion devolves to the

[44] Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of Modern Times*, trans. R.M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA, 1983).

private, personal domain, and no longer serves as the ethical backbone of society at large. And for political scientists, separation of Church and State is a transposition onto the state of many functions (education, health care, etc.) that were formerly assumed by the Church. Until the religious wars of the 16th century in Western Europe, the public presence of Christianity implied public peace as envisioned by Augustine. Following the Hundred Years' war, the public expression of faiths was considered potentially violent for the polities of Western Europe.

In the nineteenth century, 'hard' science became the queen of knowledge. Theology was no longer solicited to integrate all other fields of knowledge, because the rationalization of all that is 'real' had provoked a fragmentation, instead of an integrated 'science of man'. The study of the whole person was left to odd anthropologists like Marcel Mauss,[45] who studied non-European and non-Christian cultures. In his discipline, at least the possibility of symbolic efficacy and ritual exchange were tolerated as dimensions of the totalization of sociability.

The disillusionment has now been generalized. Although few Europeans, even Christians, understand anymore that evil is a personal force, within much of Europe there is a growing awareness that democracy has not fulfilled its promise of modernity and stabilityneither here nor in most of the rest of the world. After the First World War, democracy was touted as the renaissance (*nadha*) of the countries of the former Ottoman Empire, but the flowering never came to pass. Following the Second World War, Islamic fundamentalism disappointed two generations of Arab Muslims through its unhealthy mix of politics and religion,[46] but just as quickly the American democratic dream also lost its lustre in the Middle East

Now that the ideology of democracy has begun to lose its credibility, will people recommence believing in the omnipotence of God? What happened to the social dimension of the medieval Christian totality that we described above? What kind of union is it possible to seek nowadays? Is a social space structured by individual rights that are enforced by political power our highest ideal? The sacrificial love of God's Word continues to show the capacity of bringing together that which was lost, hurt, and traumatized. St. Paul expressed this "re-membering" of the social body in his letter to the Ephesians 'But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the Blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made both one, and broken down the middle wall of separation' (Eph 2:13–18).

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45 Bruno Karsenti, *L'homme total* (Paris, 1997). A few exceptions to this exist, such as Simon Frank, *The Spiritual Foundations of Society* (Ohio, 1987).

46 Gilles Kepel, *Fitna. Guerre au coeur de l'islam* (Paris, 2004).

'My kingship is not of this world' (Jn 18:36) is often cited because the awareness of transcendence makes it possible for Christians to survive under any sort of government, even the harshest. The kingship that Christ had proposed in the territory of his kingdom was radically other. Having one Lord and a common faith is the basis of Christian fraternity, as St. Paul wrote to the Galatians: 'For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:27–8).

These 'fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God … in whom you are also built into it for a dwelling place of God and the Spirit' (Eph 2:18–22) divided themselves, by the end of the Middle Ages, into warring nation states where national identities mattered more than any shared faith. Agnostic affirmation of the declaration of fundamental human rights (whose bicentennial France celebrated in 1989) was an effort to compensate for this loss of human solidarity. The basis of this new fraternity, liberty, and equality, was attributed to the individual citizen; it became a kind of sociological barrier erected as part of the boundaries between nation–states that did and did not grant these kinds of rights. But in the Church, those who died in the faith, the martyrs of all countries, are seeking another homeland.

The Christian revolution of social space, the creation of the Church of God on earth, could not have been more novel in the context of the eastern end of Mediterranean, but it had to appropriate the vocabulary of the times in which Jesus of Nazareth appeared. The key to this revelation was not equality but grace. Why was this term so crucial? Hénaff has shown how Plato had the intuition that reciprocal needs were not sufficient to unite the members of the Greek city–state.[47] As the influence of the clan (*gené*) declined, the bonding force devolved to grace (*χάρις)* in order to 'unite the citizens in the worship of beauty that transcends them all and is given to all'. According to Hénaff, this collective gift was the civic link. The notion of *ch'aris* developed significantly with the advent of the Judeo-Christian notion of alliance (*berith* in Hebrew) in which grace (*hén* in Hebrew) is an un-repayable gift from the totally beyond, from God.

Citing Clavero's study on the Catholic ethic and the spirit of non-capitalism,[48] Hénaff shows that Catholic theologians in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain believed that it is God's grace which characterizes all social relations. That is 'natural' in the sense of being

[47] Hénaff, *Le prix de la vérité*, pp. 310–321.
[48] Bartolomé Clavero, Antidora. *Antropologia católica de la economia moderna* (Milano, 1991).

willed by God's love for those whom He has created: 'There is community among men only because there exists between them the same type of relations God has established towards them'.[49] For Clavero, this is typified by the generous reciprocity captured by the Renaissance term αντιδωρεά ('a gift in return'). It escaped Clavero's attention that the same term in Byzantine Greek during that period designated the sharing of blessed bread by the faithful after having partaken of the communion in the Body of Christ at the altar.

Sections 1 and 3 of this paper provided a glimpse of the genealogy of the separation of Christianity from the current social ethos of Western Europe. In what ways can we distinguish between the Christian understanding of witness/martyrdom and the agnostic non-transcendental witness (which also often leads to martyrdom) of defenders of fundamental human rights? Without attempting to prove that one ethos is superior than the other, these distinctions are useful. Indeed, it is Christ himself who says that there is no greater love than to give one's life for another. My purpose here is to uncover in the light of the Gospels the nature of the gift of one's life for another's and what enables a person to make such a gift. It is herein that one finds the expression of the *grace of equality*.

Christ tells his disciples (Jn 14) that he has overcome the world. To be part of that victory, the Apostle James insists that 'whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God' (Jas 4:4). Animated by the conviction that 'we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world' (1 Tim 6:7), because they see that the form of this world is passing away (1 Cor 7:31), Christians can afford to admit that the 'whole world is in the power of the evil one' (1 Jn 5:19). Thus, all that is pure, true, and beautiful in the world is passing towards the heavenly kingdom. This implies that we travel light: 'Owe no one anything, except to love one another' (Rom 13:8). Likewise, 'He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness still' (1 Jn 2:9). The experience of martyrdom expresses the love of God through one's love of those for whom one makes such a great sacrifice.

The Christian's attempts to protect the fundamental rights of others is rooted in Christ's faith in us. One is imitating, in the sense of reproducing, God's confidence in His creation, in all mankind. There can be no greater universalism than that of God's bond of love with each and every person He has created. When atheistic humanists campaign about crimes against humanity while refusing any theistic vision of totality, they paradoxically aspire to the Christian's breadth of vision, a revelation of the

[49] Hénaff, *Le prix de la vérité*, p. 317.

righteousness that stands above all of mankind's crimes. Such righteousness is a permanent 'eternal' value that makes it possible for mankind to fight against our own inhumanity.

For Christians, *χάρις* (grace and love) flows downward from God to his creatures, before flowing outward from them to each other. That the initiative for human connectivity belongs to Christ, offered as the lamb of God, makes it possible to the love of enemies. This is the most poignant case of this reciprocity, αντιδωρεά: 'remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift' (Mt 5:23-24). In the experience of men and women searching for a better life (Heb 11:25), everyone is implicated and intimidated by the violence that riddles human lives in all eras. God's mercies for His creatures who are dying under the weight of their needs, is expressed in his commandment 'Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful' (Lk 6:36).

Bishop Nicholas of Ochrid said he heard this message from God after experiencing the abyss of the Nazi concentration camps: 'The Father looks down from heaven and sees me all covered with wounds from the injustice of men and says: 'Take no revenge''.[50] As psychologists now tell us, even if one survives, a part of oneself never leaves such prisons but dies there with fellow prisoners. The absurdity of violence cannot be conquered by rationalization about the democratic rights of fellow citizens. The Metropolitan of Mount Lebanon, George Khodr wrote that 'all sins tend to murder, and none stand so close to murder as anger'. Why should revenge be equivalent to blasphemy? The Metropolitan continues, 'God becomes an idol if one kills for His sake and when the individual believes himself to be God's agent in a collective murder'.[51]

This brings us to the threshold of issues and experiences that do not bear speaking about aloud: self–sacrifice and the liminal zone between extinction and resurrection.[52] The intensity of the moment forces one's inner faculties to adopt a degree of honesty rarely experienced in other situations, except perhaps years of imprisonment in a *gulag*, intense monastic asceticism, or social service of the most dedicated nature.[53] Thus, in Russia, the *lieux de mémoire* for the period of communist rule are her martyrs' tombs, both known and unknown.

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50 Nicolas Vélimirovitch, *Prières sur le Lac* (Lausanne, 2004).
51 George Khodr, 'Exorcising War', in Hildo Bos and Jim Forest (eds), *For the Peace from Above* (Bialystok, 1999), p. 155.
52 Varlam Chamalov, *Récits de la Kolyma* (Paris, 2003).
53 See, for example, *Father Arsenii 1893-1973. Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father* (New York, 1999); Maria Skobtsova, *Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, 2003).

The decline of religious belief in public space and institutions has been said to indicate a "liberation" of belief from the structures provided by religious institutions, rather than an end to belief itself. Whether this generalization holds or not, Shmuel Eisenstadt said in 1984 that secularization cannot be subsumed into a narrative of multiple modernities. A sociologist like Peter Burger long considered secularization to be 'processes by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols'.[54] So secularization is taken as the differentiation between the secular sphere, political norms, and religious institutions, rather than as a decline in religious belief. More radically, Peter van der Veer, stepping off from de Tocqueville's dichotomy of 'the spirit of liberty and the spirit of religion',[55] says modernity makes it impossible to separate religious fanaticism and secular emancipation.

With reference to the Indian subcontinent, Assayag has argued that worldwide these new freedoms and servitudes lead to unprecedented forms of peace and violence.[56] The human rights movement participates in this unravelling by trying to use the remote control of media exposure to protect people under inhumane regimes. The extent to which such exposure educates consciences is a moot point, because it is almost impossible not to have a political slant on the abuses that determines those one chooses to highlight and protest against. This is the acme of relativism.

Juridical confrontation between the viewpoints of participants in a trial may well momentarily rank values as higher or lower, but as soon as these are evaluated or situated differentially, such a hierarchy is relativized. In a 2003 colloquium in Sofia, Jacques Derrida highlighted the difficulty of finding a basis for a legal or political ethic outside of the onto-theological traditional foundations of the both the State and philosophy. Sovereignty is as invasive as political power is indivisible; it is an inevitable totalisation, encompassing the irreducible transcendence of the other. Is this appropriate? Derrida's well–known interest in deconstruction stems in part from a need for displacement, the opening provided by difference; this would lead to a full exercise of law without referring to sovereignty, a sort of politics outside of and beyond the state.[57] Derrida qualifies the quest as a search for the future, the unrepresentable, which he describes

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54 Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy. Element of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, 1967); P. Berger, *The National Interest*, 46 (Winter 1996/97).

55 Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton, NJ, 2001).

56 Jackie Assayag, 'Spectral Secularism. Religion, Politics and Democracy in India', in *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, 44/3 (2004): 327.

57 Jacques Derrida, 'La voix de Jacques Derrida', in *Diviniatio*, 19 (2004): 223.

as a 'monstrous' difference from the present.[58] As Richard Kearney points out, this is what in most religions is designated by the term 'spirit' or 'soul'.[59]

What would the ethos of a society without a State be? Derrida's reflections link up with various notions of 'society' itself, especially in former colonies where this word was introduced by European colonial governments for the purposes of administering their privileges over the indigenous inhabitants.[60] What allows man to live as a man if not the protective networks of those who share his difficulties and needs? Yet this is not a society as the State conceives it. The totality we are seeking when we speak of the role of *grace in equality* is not an abstract ethos of government, easily turned away from its declared purpose, but a fabric of relationships that unites men to men and man to God.

Conclusion: The role of *grace in equality*

In what will seem to many to be an inadmissible return to a transcendental totality, I have briefly tried to examine the contemporary Western European belief in human rights from an Orthodox Christian perspective. This involves two major criticisms: theological and cosmological. Western Europe is consummating its divorce from Christianity by adopting a new secular "religion" of human rights. However, Troeltsch warned in 1897 that 'all our thoughts and feelings are impregnated with Christian motives and Christian predispositions; and, conversely, our whole Christianity is indissolubly bound up with elements of the ancient and modern civilizations of Europe'.[61]

For post-communist eastern Europe, secularization is present but not yet widely accepted. In this respect, Russia, despite the massive impact of Petrine reforms, has remained more Eurasian than European. The Eastern European experience is often denigrated as much less important because 'Christendom qua Europe constitutes a well-bounded totality'.[62] Like many non-Western thinkers today, Masuzawa claims that the discourse of world

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58 The horror of the difficulty is subsumed for Derrida in the difference between the two Greek verbs: *thamazein* (which means astonishment as a disposition of the philosophical mind faced with totality) and *traumazein* (which means stupefaction when faced with events whose character does not allow any total apprehension).

59 Richard Kearney, 'Transfiguring God', in Graham Ward (ed.), *Postmodern Theology* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 369–93, here p. 371.

60 Headley, *Durga's Mosque*.

61 Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Church* (Louisville, 1957), pp. 53-54.

62 Tomoko Masuzawa, 'From Theology to World Religion: Ernst Troeltsch and the Making of Religiongeschichte', in Tim Jensen and Mikael Rothstein (eds), *Secular Theories of Religion. Current Perspectives* (Copenhagen, 2000), pp. 161, 164.

religions came into being as a substitute for, and a solution to, the particular difficulty that confounded Christianity, namely 'imperial Europe claimed Christianity for itself at the end of the nineteenth century'.[63]

By any calculation, political history has not favored the Orthodox East since its separation from the Roman West in 1054; certainly, the communist shadow over the 20th century continued the trend. But now Orthodox conservatism in matters of religion can be considered a social asset. The context of an economic and political backwater is not enough to explain the Orthodox capacity to be faithful to Christian revelation. On the contrary, it is the Christian tradition itself that presents a whole way of life (*ethos*) for man, a life in the Spirit as conveyed by Christ's words. This renewal of human life is clearly marked as finite in space and time by its personalism. Such a communion of human beings is found only in the Church, only in communion between God and His creatures. Christ's Church has turned out to be *sui generis*.

The universe once existed, and can continue to exist, without humanity. To become part of human history, however, means to enter into a life process that is essential to the natural universe. This process can be viewed as a cosmic liturgy, cherishing human life as God–given. Such a hierarchy of values is not a societal ethic, but an experience of the fullness of life itself, a life without end. It is this truth that makes one free: the truth that a man born into the world bearing the image and resemblance of his Creator is not born in vain; the truth that God always protects mankind by His Cross.

Evaluative indifference has been used for promoting a religious tolerance premised on individuality, but the crucial values of fundamental human rights, *volens nolens*, refer to a higher level. They are, as it were, suspended on the presence of God in our world. The denial of this higher level explains some of the difficulty in exporting secularization from Western Europe or the United States. T.M. Madan coined a phrase that he used in the title of his recent book: 'modern myths, locked minds'.[64] In the postmodern world, we have reached the end of the myth of the Enlightenment. It is up to Christians now to illumine platforms of fundamental human rights with the warmth and courage that arise from the resurrection of life over death, the keystone of our hierarchy of values.

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63 Charles F. Keyes, Laurence Kendall and Helen Hardacre (eds), *Asian Visions of Authority. Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia* (Honolulu, 1994).

64 T.M. Madan, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds. Secularism and Fundamentalism in India* (Oxford, 1997).