

# Religion and Politics in the 21st Century



Religion and Politics in the 21st Century:  
Global and Local Reflections

Edited by

Natalia Vlas and Vasile Boari

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P U B L I S H I N G

Religion and Politics in the 21st Century: Global and Local Reflections,  
Edited by Natalia Vlas and Vasile Boari

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**Gabriel Andreescu** is a Romanian human rights activist and political scientist, one of the few Romanian dissidents who openly opposed Ceaușescu and the Communist regime in Romania. At present, he is associate professor with the Faculty of Political Science at the National University for Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA) in Bucharest, an active member of several Romanian human rights

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The fall of 2011 brought important news for the small team of researchers enrolled in the Centre for Political Analysis, Cluj-Napoca: we had received support and funding for one of our most important projects, namely that of analyzing the relationship between religion and democracy in Europe. Naturally, the idea of an international conference on the topic of religion and politics sprung immediately to our mind and, slowly but surely, this initiative became reality in June 2012, when the Centre for Political Analysis had the privilege to organize a conference under the title “Religion and Politics in the Globalization Era.”

Although we have already thanked everyone involved in making this extraordinary event possible, we would like to reiterate our gratitude towards all the contributors who generously provided us with the written variant of their presentations. Furthermore, we would like to renew our expression of gratitude towards Augusta Sabau, Vlad Jecan and Ionela Danciu, who were involved in different yet essential ways in making the conference possible and efficient.

We would like to thank George Jigla, Managing Director of *Europolis. Journal of Political Analysis and Theory* for enabling us to issue a special volume in December 2012, called “Religion and Democracy,” where a number of the papers presented at the conference in Cluj-Napoca were included.

We would like to thank Stephanie Short for her careful proofreading of most of the articles in the volume and for her competent interventions and remarks. We would also like to thank Simona Sav, the newest member of our research team, for her contribution in proofreading, translating and editing.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APADOR – CH	Association for the Defense of Human Rights in Romania-the Helsinki Committee
AROCS	Association of Romanian Orthodox Christian Students
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
GRP	Greater Romania Party
IMAS	Institute for Marketing and Polls
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NIS	National Institute of Statistics
NLP	National Liberal Party
NPP	National Peasants' Party
NSF	National Salvation Front
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
POB	Public Opinion Barometer
RCP	Romanian Communist Party
RNUP	Romanian National Unity Party
ROC	Romanian Orthodox Church
RSDP	Romanian Social Democratic Party
RCUR	Romanian Church United with Rome
SLP	Socialist Labour Party
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights



# RELIGION AND POLITICS: A SUMMARY OF PERSPECTIVES

SIMONA SAV

With the advent of the twenty-first century, renewed interest is given to the intricate, complex and historically rich relation between religion and politics. However, in the context of well-articulated challenges addressed to the theory of secularization – or to the multiple theories of secularization – the observed global resurgence of religious phenomena leads not only to the study of the interaction between church/synagogue/mosque and state but it also incorporates many aspects of the presence of religion in the public sphere and in politics.

The present volume captures a wide variety of perspectives on contemporary religion and politics, ranging from theoretical approaches to case studies and from analyzing global facets to exploring local situations. This richness of perspectives found an inspired translation in the term “reflections” in the title, as theoretical and slightly more philosophical articles are complemented by local reflections of the relation between religion and politics in a given area. Taking into account the fact that this volume is a fortunate opportunity to publish some of the articles that were presented during the 2012 conference on “Religion and Politics in the Globalization Era” organized by the Centre for Political Analysis in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, and given the need to reflect on the new religious landscape of this post-communist country, little more than twenty years after state-enforced religious persecution ended and a new type of religion-state interaction was necessary, the presence of three articles concerning Romania represents a valuable contribution to further research. For reason of cohesion, these articles take the final section in the volume, while the order of the previous articles, though not altogether arbitrary, is not rigorously categorized, allowing for a thematic diversity.

Leonard Swidler begins from considering the very definition of politics and that of religion seen at first not from the way they interact within the formal context of religion and state, but from the point of view of human nature. This is not to be understood only in the sense of human propensity to

create, crave and sustain communities, but also in the sense of the need for each individual to become “as fully an authentic human being as possible.” Historically regarded as two sides of the same coin, the state and religion have the same purpose - that is “to promote the welfare of each of its members, each human person.” Seeing though that, in the author’s view, freedom is vital for imagination and intellect, Swidler argues that the separation between religion and state is a key element for the thriving of a nation, of a society and, ultimately, of an individual.

The modern European context, with its great diversity, offers ample room to analyze the place of religion, which, as Grace Davie aptly argues, depends on a series of historical, cultural and social factors such as: cultural heritage, the manner in which people approach the legacy of historical churches, the change towards religious consumerism, the levels of immigration, the reaction of Europe’s secular elites to religion in the public life and the realization that, perhaps, Europe is the exception rather than the norm in terms of its patterns of religious life. Three case studies follow: the Republic of Ireland, the former East Germany and Romania; they, as well as other examples, amply exemplify the fact that “the patterns of religious activity vary considerably across Europe.”

What’s more, these patterns do not vary only from country to country, but they are also subject to variation due to changes in the legislation of the same country. Stephen Hunt analyzes this very phenomenon, when looking at the implication of the 2010 Equality Act in the United Kingdom upon the relation between religion and the state. According to Hunt, state’s policies of accommodation and social inclusion have drawn religion into the public space, which in liberal democracies was equated until recently with a more or less secular space.

In his article, Bassam Tibi explores the phenomenon of the politicization of Islam in the form of Islamism, as part of the global process of the return of religion to the public space. Islamism is, according to Tibi, the expression of Islam’s crisis generated by its encounter with modernity and it has two forms: institutional Islamism and jihadist Islamism. Both of them are a challenge to the secular world order, being dedicated to establishing a political order based on shari’a. Tibi argues that political Islam threatens not only secularism, but also “Muslims themselves in their search for a better future within humanity at large with its plurality of religions.” For Tibi, the universality of pluralism and democratic world peace is the better alternative both to institutional and jihadist Islamism, and the condition for the participation of Muslims in democratic peace is for them to “depoliticize their faith by dissociating it from fundamentalism



and its concept of order but also to engage themselves in ‘rethinking Islam’ through religious reforms.”

Radu Murea analyzes the series of momentous events which have engulfed the Arab world since early 2011 in an attempt to move beyond the plethora of perspectives that have become normative in media or scholarly discourse, while arguing that what has been termed the “Arab Spring” represents no less than a major chapter in Islam’s “great debate” with Modernity. Although the main level of analysis makes use of a historical approach, in which diachronic connexions are seen as complementary to cause/effect patterns, the article also tries to accommodate a multi-dimensional mapping of correlative issues which have played a consequential role in the later unfolding of events.

The following two articles – the first by Vasile Boari and Aurel Abrudan and the second by Aurelian Botică – explore, albeit in a significantly different manner, the relation between democracy and the biblical texts. In the first section of their article, Boari and Abrudan set out to highlight a number of Judeo-Christian elements that have “indirectly contributed to the development of modern democracy” such as: a limitation of the power of the rulers, the interpretation of freedom as a divine gift to humankind and an understanding of fraternity. The second section, infused with Biblical references, seeks to identify scriptural passages that could sustain human rights, the most renown consisting of the Genesis narrative of creation that establishes human worth as a consequence of *imago Dei*. In addition to this, the authors explore both New Testament and Old Testament passages that emphasize the equality of all people.

As for Aurelian Botică, he focuses on the way in which the biblical religion shaped democratic consciousness by looking firstly at the way in which it influenced the mentality of ancient Hebrews in an egalitarian direction with regards to social freedom, the institution of kingship and the law. A form of proto-regulation of power was represented by the activity of prophets whose role was to uphold the law and openly criticise the king if he had misjudged the nature of power. Secondly, Botică explores the influence that the Old Testament scriptures played, either directly or through New Testamental echoes, on the political thought of Jean Calvin, Martin Luther, John Locke, John Milton, Edmund Burke and other influential scholars who helped shape democratic consciousness in the Western European and American culture.

In his article, Cornel Constantineanu focuses on the Apostle Paul’s views as expressed in the epistles and prioritizes contextual and historical understanding of first century practice by an analysis of the integration of

religion and politics in the Roman Empire. Constantineanu examines the often indissoluble imposition of the status of divine being upon Roman emperors and proceeds to an analysis of Christ and Caesar in Pauline writings, which, according to the author, have been de-politicized and domesticated to the “power interests of Christians and their own purposes.” Therefore, Constantineanu proceeds to an exploration of the Pauline concept of principalities and powers and of the way Christians should engage with and relate to them, a topic that is increasingly relevant for the contemporary context as well, as author Natalia Vlas also highlights in her article.

Natalia Vlas analyzes two strikingly different approaches to Christian involvement in politics that stem from radically discrepant political theologies: the Christian Reconstructionism dominionist theology and the pacifist project of John Howard Yoder. Vlas underscores the dangers of rendering faith a mere instrument for “advancing a particular political agenda” which seems fraught, among others, with problematic attitudes towards religious otherness and towards democracy. By contrast, the political thought of Yoder envisions Christian community as an alternative *polis*, which, placing Christology at its center, finds its force in the spirit of servanthood, non-violence and the sacramental practices of baptism and the breaking of bread together, seen in their inclusive, economically generous and egalitarian dimension.

As mentioned above, the final part of the volume constitutes a series of case studies on religion and politics in post-communist Romania. Unquestionably, the Romanian religious landscape displays a high number of believers – overwhelmingly Christian and by far predominantly Romanian Orthodox. The striking visibility of the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the privileged position granted to it by the state thus enable detailed evaluations of its post-revolution strategies, its present activity – in terms of its interaction with politics and its social involvement – and perhaps even its future directions as a powerful and influential institution in the state.

Gabriel Andreescu critically examines the ROC’s presence in the public sphere from the point of view of its anti-democratic tendencies which, according to the author, have “a negative impact on the values and institutions and will be a long-term danger to relations between Romania and the European community.” As Andreescu observes, the ROC’s propensity to actively support and promote nationalism and even far right movements in the name of safeguarding national values is both an old recipe for success and a viable way to channel its theocratic tendencies. This issue is particularly stringent since, according to the author, the

wealth of the Romanian Orthodox Church, its influence on public opinion, on political figures and, very importantly, its role in providing religious education in public schools makes it a force whose theocratic tendencies are incompatible with “the type of democracy required by the European Union treaties.”

Sorin Bocancea’s contribution consists in identifying not only the political but also the ideological repositioning and the ascent of the ROC in the past twenty years; for this purpose, the author briefly explores its past collaboration with the communist system, as well as the immediate post-revolution attempts to re-write the past and cast itself as a martyr and a victim of an oppressive regime. “The strategy to fill the empty seat of the communist ideology” that glorified the Romanian nation and give it a spiritual allure by proclaiming the ROC as the depositary of Romanian spirituality and salvation enabled it to gain an unprecedented position and repeatedly claim the status of national church. Though the 2006 Law on Religious Denominations does not recognize the ROC as state-church, the funding system that the state set in motion for religious denominations provides the ROC with substantial financial aid, not only for partial clerical remuneration and restoration of old churches, but also for erecting new ones, the most grandiose project being the Cathedral of the People’s Salvation, a symbol of the ROC’s inability to adapt to the realities of contemporary society.

Another important aspect of the 2006 Romanian Law on Religious Denominations is scrutinized by Iuliana Conovici, namely the legal concept of “social partnership.” The author argues that this partnership between denominations, especially the majority Church, and the state takes a toll on both the public sphere – as now “religious denominations are endowed with a powerful legitimating argument for their presence” – and perhaps even on the Church itself, since “a camouflage of the Church’s transcendent legitimacy ... may act as an internal agent of self-secularisation.” Conovici briefly examines the construction of a social, philanthropic role for the Orthodox Church as a provider of social services in the 90’s before analyzing how the above mentioned law and the ensuing protocols influenced the course of the ambiguous status of social partners between the Church and the state in charity, chaplaincy, medical assistance and education, the final section of the article being dedicated to considering the implications and consequences of this partnership.

Through their varied perspectives and thematic richness, contributors to this present volume have helped paint a picture of the dynamic relation between religion and politics at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What's more, by exploring not only present realities but also historical events and patterns of past interactions, authors have identified possible future directions, and have drawn attention to the need for careful consideration of the relation between religion and politics, both on a local level and on a global one.

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# POLITICS AND RELIGION IN THE AGE OF GLOBAL DIALOGUE

LEONARD SWIDLER

## **What is politics and other basic terms?**

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle wrote that humans are “political beings” (*zoon politikon*) and that “politics is the highest good attainable by action.” The term “politics,” of course, comes from the Greek *polis*, city, community. However, in Aristotle’s mind, it meant much more than we normally mean today, for he said that politics is “the most comprehensive master science.” It is the practical knowledge needed to be able to live well, *euzen*, as a happy human being, and since we cannot become humans alone, but only in a community (starting with the very physical community of our parents), we humans must learn to *euzen en polis*, live well in community. It is worth dwelling a little on this more basic understanding of “politics”, so we can better see what good politics should look like in the contemporary customary sense of the exercise of communal power.

Aristotle stated that “the goal of politics is the good of the human being,” that is, the purpose of the community is to promote the good of its individual members. Of course, there are many situations where promoting the good of some individuals will diminish the good of others, as when imprisoning criminals for the safety of the majority of the community. Then, there are situations where some will voluntarily sacrifice their good for the sake of the larger community, as soldiers fighting and dying in a just war. In fact, Aristotle said that, “The attainment of the good for one person alone is, to be sure, a source of satisfaction; yet to secure it for a nation and for states is nobler and more divine.” Thus, we celebrate heroes who have sacrificed, even died, for the good of others.

Nevertheless, the whole point of the community, the state, is to foster the good of the individual person, not the other way around. Yes, we individually strive for the good of the community, the state - however, not for its own sake, but for the individual persons that compose the community, the state. Ultimately, the community, the state is *for the sake of persons*, not the person for the sake of the community, the state.

The same trajectory of thought applies when we ask the related questions: How should I act? What principles should I follow to determine whether a particular action is good or not? We call this set of reflections leading to actions ethics.<sup>1</sup>

Before answering this fundamental question, we must first ask ourselves what we mean when we use the terms “good and bad.” Broadly speaking, we use the term “good” to mean that a thing exists or acts in a way that leads to what we understand to be its goal. For example, if I say, “this is a good steak,” I have in mind the “purpose” of steak; that it, for example, should taste in a certain way, satisfy my hunger, provide nourishment, etc. To the extent it does not satisfy these goals, I say that it is a bad steak. Similarly, I say that a performance of Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet* is good if it is well acted, entertained the audience, was spoken “trippingly on the tongue,” as Shakespeare has Hamlet instruct the traveling group of players within the play itself—and the performance was bad to the degree that it failed in those goals. A human person, or her individual actions, are said to be good if she lives in a way or acts in a way, we conceive a human being should live and act—and is called bad if she acts contrary to how we think a human should live and behave. To repeat in summary: a thing is said to be good if it leads toward its purpose and bad if it leads away from its purpose. Disagreements, of course, can and do abound about what the purposes of things are—like human beings, for example.

## What is religion?

We humans need to ask ourselves: What is a good human being? However, before we address that question, it is important to explain what religion is, for it is that dimension of humanity that specifically addresses that question. Here is a succinct definition that I developed many years ago:<sup>2</sup> Religion is: “*An explanation of the ultimate meaning of life, and how to live accordingly, based on some notion and experience of the transcendent.*”

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<sup>1</sup> There is no real difference between the terms “ethics” and “morality”, though some try to make a distinction—but it is really a distinction without a difference. The term “ethics” comes to us from the Greek (*ethos*, custom) and “morals” from the Latin (*mos*, *moris*, custom). For some indiscernible reason, the term *moral* is more often, but not always, used in connection with sexual matters, whereas in other matters concerning right behavior the term *ethical* is most often used.

<sup>2</sup> See Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes, *The Study of Religion in an Age of Global Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

Normally, all religions contain the four “C’s”: Creed, Code, Cult, Community-structure, and are based on a notion of the Transcendent.

*Creed* refers to the cognitive aspect of a religion; it is everything that goes into the “explanation” of the ultimate meaning of life.

*Code* of behavior or ethics includes all the rules and customs of action that somehow follow from one aspect or another of the *Creed*.

*Cult* means all the ritual activities that relate the follower to one aspect or other of the Transcendent, either directly or indirectly, prayer being an example of the former and certain formal behavior toward representatives of the Transcendent, like priests, of the latter.

*Community-structure* refers to the relationships among the followers; this can vary widely, from an egalitarian relationship, as with Quakers, through a “republican” structure like Presbyterians have, to a monarchical one, as with some Hasidic Jews vis-a-vis their “Rebbe.”

The *Transcendent*, as the roots of the word indicate, means “that which goes beyond” the everyday, the ordinary, the surface experience of reality. It can refer to spirits, gods, a Personal God, an Impersonal God, Emptiness, etc.

Especially in modern times, there have developed “explanations of the ultimate meaning of life, and how to live accordingly,” which are not based on a notion and experience of the Transcendent, e.g., secular humanism, atheistic Marxism. Although in every respect, these “explanations” function as religions traditionally have in human life, because the Transcendent, however it is understood, plays such a central role in religion, but not in these “explanations”, for the sake of accuracy, it is best to give these “explanations” not based on the Transcendent a separate name; the name often used is: *Ideology*.

Much, though not all, of the following will, *mutatis mutandis*, also apply to Ideology even when the term is not used.

## **What is an authentic human being?**

Let me now return to the questions I began to raise earlier, namely, what is a good human being? What is a good community, a good state? What is a good relationship between the two? I already gave my answer to the last two questions when I argued that the community, the state exists for the person. “Why should that be?” one should then ask. Because of the unique character of humans, of persons. What is unique about humans, about persons, is that each one is infinite, unlimited in a “negative” sense. Here religion long ago already offered some extraordinary insights in this regard. At the fountainhead of both Judaism and Christianity, the first

book of the Bible, Genesis (the Priestly writer, writing in the fifth century B.C.E.—before the “big three” Greek philosophers, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle) in chapter one stated that humanity was created in “God’s image” (*imago Dei*, in St. Jerome’s Latin).

God is thought to be infinite, unlimited, and thus so too is the human person, at least in one dimension. Yes, I am limited in terms of my bodily existence, but in my intellect I am at least quasi-infinite. For example, since the Big Bang 13.7 billion years ago, the universe has been expanding at the speed of light, 186,000 miles per second. Yet, in my intellect, I am there at the expanding edge of that vast space of the universe (and even “multiverses,” if they really exist). There is no conceivable possibility from which I am blocked. As soon as it is thought by my intellect, I am there, no matter how wild the idea. I am open-ended in that I can continue on and on thinking always new thoughts—endlessly, infinitely. So, in this way, I am an *imago Dei*, and so is each of you and every person.

Reflection on this biblical insight led the Rabbis to spell out further some of its implications and claim that, “To whomever saves a single soul it is reckoned as if s/he saved the whole world.... To whomever destroys a single soul it is reckoned as if s/he destroyed the whole world.... From this you learn that one human is worth the whole of creation.” (*Mishnah*: Aboth Rabbi Nathan 31). The Mishnah was published about the year 200 C.E. Over four hundred years later, we find in Muhammad’s Qur’an this statement: “Whoever kills an innocent human being, it shall be as if he has killed all humankind, and whoever saves the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all humankind” (*Qur’an*: 5:32). Regardless of how Muslim believers deal with this seemingly divine repetitive “revelation,” for me as a historian, the causal connections are clear. However, for our purposes, what is startling is the insight and claim from two different religious traditions hundreds years apart that every person has an infinite worth.

This understanding of the human person and the community, the state, means that all the legal and ethical principles and laws that are reflected on and devised should have as their ultimate aim fostering the good of each individual person, for s/he is of infinite value. Put briefly, “Principles are for Persons,” not persons for principles. Rabbi Jesus uttered the equivalent when he said that “The Sabbath is for humans, not humans for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). This insight was apparently found to be so important that a very close paraphrase is also found in an early rabbinic



writing: “The Sabbath is committed to you; you are not committed to the Sabbath” (*Mekilta* 31:13).<sup>3</sup>

I am not advocating rampant individualism in an Ayn Rand fashion. It is absolutely true that we cannot become authentic human beings, persons, except in community, for as noted above from Aristotle, human beings are social, political beings. We not only could not even be brought into existence except by the “communion” of our parents, but would grow to be not humans but some kind of twisted monsters were we, after being born, simply fed and kept clean without any human touch, speaking, loving. This is not a guess on my part, but a scientifically substantiated fact.

### **Love of the other at the core of the authentic human**

Here again religion supplies us with some ancient wisdom, that is, the so-called Golden Rule: “Do unto others what you would have them do unto you,” or as it is in the fifth-century B.C.E. biblical book of Leviticus and repeated by Jesus in the first century: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>4</sup> Implied in this Golden Rule is that because we are human we are oriented to love the other as our self. The fourth-century Confucian scholar Mencius put this insight into the following image: if we saw a child about to fall into a well, we all “automatically” would reach out to prevent it, implying that deep in our psyches, we identify with the falling child, with the Other—unless we have been trained not to!

Thus, all authentic human love starts with self-love, for we “love our neighbor *as* we love ourselves.” As noted above, every human reaches out

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<sup>3</sup> In fact, Rabbi Phillip Sigal argued that, “During his brief ministry Jesus was a proto-rabbi whose views influenced his contemporaries and possibly entered tannaitic literature [teaching of the Rabbis living until the publication of the Mishnah around the year 200] as the views of others.... A classic example of a view enunciated by Jesus, which is attributed to later tanna R. Simon B. Menasia, is the Mekilta statement about the sabbath. Either way, Yeshua [Jesus] in this regard was in the center of the rabbinic tradition—either as being paralleled or plagiarized. [Phillip Sigal, *The Halachah of Jesus of Nazareth according to the Gospel of Matthew* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 159. Quoted in Leonard Swidler, *Yeshua: A Model for Moderns* (Kansas City: Sheed/Ward, 1988; 2nd expanded edition, 1993), 50.]

<sup>4</sup> See Leonard Swidler (ed.), *For All Life. Toward a Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic: An Interreligious Dialogue* (Ashland: White Cloud Press, 1999), where over twenty instances of the Golden Rule are listed, the oldest of which come from Zoroaster and Confucius in the sixth century B.C.E., followed by a score of others through the ages to the present.

in myriad ways to draw to her/himself what s/he perceives as the good. If we do not learn to block our “natural”<sup>5</sup> tendency, we will want the same for the Other (whether the falling child or other). The Other human at the same time naturally reaches out to us and is reenforced in doing so by our reaching out to her, so that there is a “natural” mutual reenforcement of loving each other—again, unless we have been taught to block this natural tendency. Now here is where the community, the state plays an essential role in helping to form good human beings.

Infants and children learn the really important things in life not most of all by being told in words, but by being the recipients and observers of the actions of those around them, especially those closest to them physically and by affection. Thus, the community, starting with the parents and family, either fosters or inhibits the first inborn tendency, to reach out to unite with what is perceived as the good—for example, the mother’s breast—, and the second inborn tendency, in reaching for the good to include the Other—as in the falling child. In fact, in Western languages, we use the Latin term *alter ego* to refer to the most intense object of our love, of our identifying with the Other. *Alter ego*, of course, literally means “other I,” “other self.” Thus, we are saying that my beloved is my “other self,” my other “I.” Jesus referred to this common wisdom when he said: “Greater love than this has no person than to give his life for his friend.” (Jn. 15:13) In that case, my self, my *ego* is even more there in my *alter ego* than in my *primus ego*, my first I. If I had been on the sinking Titanic with my granddaughter Willy, I would not have hesitated to give my life jacket to her if she had none. I ask, which of you would not do the same in similar circumstances? I put it to you, that all in this room or reading these words have in us the inborn tendency to reach out for the falling child, the Other.

But, this inborn tendency is just that, a tendency. Negatively, it must not be blocked as we grow older, and positively, it must be fostered. We must avoid blocking, and, at the same time, encourage this inborn tendency to expand our ego endlessly even striving for the ultimate that Jesus expressed when he said: “Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you.” (Mt. 5: 44) This is the main task of the community from the family up through all civic society to the state and ultimately the global community. Here too is where we find the *raison d’être* of religion, which today is a major part of civic society. Before the Humanitarian Revolution of the eighteenth century, Enlightenment religion was the matrix within

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<sup>5</sup> The term “natural” comes from the Latin *natus*, born. Thus, “natural” means simply the way things come into existence, the way they are “born.”

which all the other elements of the civic society existed. The “dethroning” of religion during the Enlightenment was, along with the “dethroning” of the monarchical state from both of their prior tendencies toward absolutism, a huge advance for humanity, for the Human Person. The initial creation of the state (Hobbes’ Leviathan), some five millennia ago, was a prior massive advance for humanity in that it drastically cut down on violence<sup>6</sup> and thus, fostered subsequent great human accomplishments. The same was also true of the early development of religion, which developed ethical systems and fostered their practice.

However, as Lord Acton noted over a century ago, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely!”<sup>7</sup> Thus, what happened in my adopted city Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1776 and 1787—the signing of the American Declaration of Independence and Constitution, respectively—humanity broke the chains that earlier Jean-Jacques Rousseau spoke of when he proclaimed at the beginning of his famous book *Du Contrat Social ou Principes du Droit Politique* (*The Social Contract*): “*L’homme est né libre et partout il est dans les fers!*” “Humans are born free, and everywhere they are in chains!”

The purpose of both the state and religion is basically the same: to help each human person to be as fully an authentic human being as possible. Historically, religion has been the interior dimension of the state and the state the exterior expression of religion. Thus, in the ancient, and not so ancient, civilizations and states, the state and religion were the two sides of the single coin of humanity. That liberating-confining combination was challenged by the growing divisions inside of religion in the West, leading to that liberating principle of the separation of religion from the power of the state.

## **Union of religion and state all-pervading**

As noted above, in all past civilizations, religion has been an integral, a constitutive element. Religion supplied the ethical basis on which the

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<sup>6</sup> See Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of our Nature. Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking, 2011), who demonstrates massively the decline of human violence. A huge step forward was taken when humans established the state, which John Hobbes referred to as the Leviathan. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment establishment of Reason launched another great leap forward in the decline of violence.

<sup>7</sup> Letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, April 5, 1887, published in *Historical Essays and Studies*, J. N. Figgis and R. V. Laurence, eds. (London: Macmillan, 1907).

authority of the state and law was built. As a result, in all past civilizations, there was a very intimate relationship between religion and state, very often so close that one could speak of the union of religion and state. At times, religion tended to dominate the state, and at other times, the state dominated religion. We have seen both in recent times and still even today. The Soviet state's domination of Orthodox Christianity was an example of the former and the Ayatollahs' and Mullahs' domination of the state in Iran is an example of the latter.

In the early centuries of Christianity in the Greco-Roman world, Christian writers were strongly in favor of religious liberty. After the Constantinian embrace of the Christian religion in the fourth century, however, they quickly switched to the position that the state had the responsibility of seeing that the truth was protected and favored—and, of course, Christianity had the truth. Certainly, in theory, no one was to be forced to accept Christianity, but not infrequently, the theory was not translated into practice.

With the development of medieval Christendom in the western half of the former Roman Empire, almost everyone became Christian, with the exception of the Jews, who, for the most part, were allowed to continue a separate existence, often in ghettos. The history of Islam was not very different: in theory no individual or community was to be forced to embrace Islam. But, in practice, the *Jihad*, in the sense of a Holy War against non-Muslim states, not infrequently, was in fact launched aggressively. Although the *millet* system allowed non-Muslims within a Muslim-conquered state to practice their religion, the non-Muslims were clearly second-class citizens - which doubtlessly encouraged conversion to Islam, and surely not the contrary.

### **Development of the separation of religion and state**

Something unique in human history, however, began to take place in Western Christianity, in Christendom: the gradual, painful move toward the separation of religion and state. Some might trace its beginnings to the Gregorian Reforms when Pope Gregory VII (1021–1085 A.D.) attempted dramatically to separate the Church from the power of the Holy Roman Empire and other civil powers.

Of course, no one at the time promoted the notion of the separation of church and state. Rather, each side attempted to wrest power to its side; witness the thirteenth-century “imperial interregnum” manipulated by the popes (when for fifty years the popes effectively prevented the election of a Holy Roman Emperor), followed soon by the imprisonment of that most

authoritarian of all popes, Boniface VIII, by the king of France, Phillip the Fair, at the beginning of the fourteenth century.

But, it was precisely this mammoth power-struggle that encouraged a weariness with the unquestioned assumption of the union of church and state. The Renaissance with its shifting of interest from the divine to the human provided a further basis for the gradual questioning of the wisdom of the union of church and state. This questioning manifested itself visibly in the so-called left-wing of the sixteenth century Reformation; the Anabaptists and related sects clearly and vigorously rejected the idea of the union of church and state, for which, of course, they were viciously persecuted by both Catholics and mainline Protestants.

In the end, it was the pitting of Catholics and Protestants against each other that magnified the incipient weariness with the consequences of the union of church and state - induced by the earlier struggle between the pope and civil rulers - to the point of the full embrace of the principle of the separation of religion and state during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. The 1787 U.S. Constitution gave, for the first time, a formal national articulation of the idea of separation of church and state. From that time, it spread throughout the West in various juridical expressions and, from there, increasingly around the globe.

## **The unique quality of Western civilization**

When historians like Arnold J. Toynbee survey the total history of humankind, they find that there have been a number of civilizations which have come into existence, flourished, and then declined (Toynbee discerned twenty-one civilizations in human history). Many of them achieved admirable accomplishments, the Greco-Roman civilization being the one best known to Westerners. Its achievements were indeed great, so much so that during the late Renaissance there was a lively debate about whether the Ancients (meaning the Greeks and Romans) or the then Moderns had attained greater cultural heights. But, doubtless, the Greco-Roman accomplishments were in many regards matched, and in some surpassed, by the Chinese, Islamic and other civilizations.

However, it is no cultural hubris to be aware that the rising arc of Western civilization - which is largely a synthesis of 1) the Judeo-Christian tradition, 2) the Greco-Roman tradition, 3) the Germanic tradition, 4) with a significant influence of medieval Islam, and 5) modern science and thought - has reached far beyond where any of the other twenty civilizations have gone, whether in culture, science, politics, economic prosperity, technology, etc. Moreover, Western civilization has

now become a global civilization in a way that had never occurred before, and the process of globalization appears to be intensifying in exponential fashion. This is not to discount Western-Now-Becoming-Global Civilization's defects, blind spots, and seething problems. Some of its most critical problems are largely a result of its very accomplishments, e.g., the population explosion (because of, *inter alia*, medical and agricultural advances), the ecological crisis (because of, *inter alia*, technological advances and the population explosion). But, even that illustrates the main point: Western civilization's greatest problems flow not from its weaknesses but from its even more awesome, unparalleled achievements.

### **The separation of religion and state a vital key**

One of the *essential* elements in the advances of Western civilization in culture, science, politics, economic prosperity and technology, the like of which, as said - for all of its problems, which are correspondingly massive - were never before experienced in human history, is the separation of state and religion. And, religion here includes any "ideology" that functions like a religion, as, for example, atheistic Marxism (it is clear to see today in Eastern Europe and the former USSR what disaster the union of state and the "religion" of Marxism led to).

Christendom, in the Late Middle Ages began reaching the cultural level of the earlier Greek and Roman, and the then contemporary Islamic, civilizations. All historical data strongly suggest that Christendom would have plateaued at approximately that level for a longer or shorter period of time, and then gone into decline - *as had all other civilizations before then*, and as eventually the Islamic civilization did as well.

That did not happen, however. Why? One very fundamental reason was that - starting with the Gregorian Reforms, through the Renaissance, the Reformation and on into the Enlightenment and beyond - religion and the state slowly and very painfully began to be separated. This separation broke the forced quality of religion/ideology and consequently freed the human spirit and mind to pursue its limitless urge to know ever more, to solve every problem it confronts. This resulted in a series of what historians call revolutions in the West: the Commercial Revolution (sixteenth-seventeenth centuries), Scientific Revolution (seventeenth century), Industrial Revolution (eighteenth-nineteenth centuries), Political Revolution (epitomized in the eighteenth century by the American and French Revolutions), and on into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with myriads of revolutions of all sorts occurring at geometrically increasing speed and magnitude.