Post-Secular Faith: Toward a Religion of Service

Fe post-secular: hacia una religión del servicio

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ABSTRACT

Modernity is frequently called the "secular age"; following Max Weber, modernization is equated with secularization. However, recent decades have seen a strong resurgence of religion in many parts of the world. Frequently, this resurgence takes the form of a reactionary "fundamentalism" and anti-modernism, with religious leaders trying to recapture the political power they lost in secular modernity. The paper explores the possibility that religion is indeed returning, but in a new "post-secular" form where, traversing modern secularism, religion is freed from the yearning for mastery and domination. This possibility heralds a new meaning of religious freedom and the prospect of (what I call) a religion of service. The paper also discusses the modern insistence on the "privatization" of religion, that is, the confinement of faith to a strictly inward experience (as formulated by William James). Again the notion of a religion of service rescues faith from solitary inwardness without erecting it into a public power.

Key words: *Secularism, privatization, William James, Charles Taylor, inter-faith relations, legitimacy.*

RESUMEN

La modernidad es frecuentemente llamada como "la era secular"; siguiendo a Max Weber, la modernidad es igualada con la secularización. Sin embargo, en las recientes décadas se ha visto un fuerte resurgimiento de la religión en muchas partes del mundo. Frecuentemente, este resurgimiento toma forma de un fundamentalismo reaccionario y antimodernista, con líderes religiosos tratando de recapturar el poder político perdido en la modernidad secular. Este trabajo explora la posibilidad de que la religión ha retornado, pero en una nueva forma "post-secular" donde, atravesando el secularismo moderno, la religión es libre de las ansias de dominio y dominación. Esta posibilidad anuncia un nuevo significado de libertad religiosa y una proyección de (lo que llamo) una religión del servicio. El artículo también discute la moderna insistencia sobre la "privatización" de la religión, esto es, el confinamiento de la fe en una estricta experiencia interna (como lo formula William James). La noción de la religión de servicio rescata la fe desde una solitaria interiorización sin erigirla en un poder público.

Palabras clave: Secularismo, privatización, William James, Charles Taylor, relaciones interfe, legitimidad.

> But I am among you as one who serves.
> (Luke 22:27)

In its mundane involvement, religion is full of surprises –which, on reflection, should not actually be surprising. If religion means the connection (or re-connection) of human life with the divine, and if the latter can never be fully plumbed, domesticated or exhausted,

then the spirit animating religion is surprise per se. In our time, the big surprise –for many observers– is the return of religion into the political arena, a return which Gilles Kepel has depicted as "the revenge of God".[1] After having been exiled (in Western societies) from the public domain and narrowly confined to the field of private taste, religion in its various guises is suddenly back on the scene, with unsettling and often disruptive consequences.

The return has elicited conflicting responses. For some observers –especially devotees of the modern liberal state– the upsurge of religion constitutes an assault on the basic acquisitions of modernity: principally the neutrality of the state, enlightened rationality, and the principle of religious freedom, that is, the freedom of individuals both for and from religion. For others– chiefly religious traditionalists– the upsurge signals a welcome renewal of the past, coupled with the defeat of modern Enlightenment and secular liberalism. In many contemporary debates, these two positions tend to monopolize the stage. However, there is the possibility– and this is the assumption that guides the following pages– that religion is indeed returning, but in a new or (what may be called) "post-secular" form, a form where religion, traversing modern secularism, is freed from the hierarchical tross of the past.[2] This possibility heralds a new meaning of religious freedom and also the prospect of (what I shall call) a religion of service.

This prospect can be assessed in numerous ways, but also in terms of Max Weber's notion of "legitimacy". As is well known, Weber in his writings presents legitimacy as an "inner justification" which renders a given social and political order meaningful and acceptable in a durable sense. As an historical sociologist, he differentiates several types of such justification– among which I select only two. Pre-modern or traditional societies, in his view, were held together by "traditional legitimacy" anchored in (what he calls) "the authority of the 'eternal yesterday'," that is the mores and religious beliefs sanctified by their age and presumably sacred origin. A dramatic change occurred with the onset of modernity (in the West), a change which sidelined mores and religious beliefs in favor of the pure "legality" of a given regime. At this point, a public order is seen as legitimated– we might say: "thinly" legitimated– by virtue of the "validity of legal statutes," a validity deriving from the assumption that rules are "rationally established by enactment, contract,

1 See Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World*, trans. Alan Braley (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); also Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

2 On the notion "post-secular" compare the comments by Jürgen Habermas: "The expression *post-secular* does not merely acknowledge publicly the functional contribution that religious communities make to the reproduction of desired motives and attitudes. Rather, the public consciousness of post-secular society reflects a normative insight that has consequences for how believing and unbelieving citizens interact with one another politically. In post-secular society, the realization that 'the modernization of public consciousness' takes hold of and reflexively alters religious as well as secular mentalities in staggered phases is gaining acceptance". See his "On the Relations Between the Secular Liberal State and Religion," in Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan, eds., *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), p. 258. See also my "Rethinking Secularism– with Raimon Panikkar," in my *Dialogue Among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 185-200.

or imposition".[3] Broadly speaking, this "legal" kind of justification forms the bedrock of the modern secular "law state" (*Rechtsstaat*), where older mores and beliefs retreat into the privacy of psychic tastes. The question which arises here, and which Weber did not consider, is whether the bifurcation of public and private spheres is viable in the long run– which leads to the further query whether perhaps a new kind of "post-secular" religiosity is emerging making room for a new form of justification or legitimacy.

To explore these questions I proceed in three steps. First, I turn to William James's famous lectures on *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, together with a recent discussion of these lectures by Charles Taylor. As will be seen, the Weberian difference between premodern and modern forms of justification is transposed in Taylor's discussion into a Durheimian vocabulary. In a second step, I introduce a distinction between modes of religious faith which, although indebted to James, moves beyond Jamesian psychology: the distinction between a religion of authority or mastery and a religion of service. By way of conclusion, I reflect on the implications of this distinction for contemporary domestic and global politics.

I. VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

William James presented his Gifford Lectures on "The Varieties of Religious Experience" in Edinburgh over a hundred years ago (in 1901-1902). At that time, psychology had just established itself as a new mode of inquiry and was attracting broad attention among both European and American intellectuals. This background is important for an understanding of the lectures. As a psychologist, albeit a very philosophical psychologist, James regarded religion basically as a mode of psychic experience– or as the name for a variety of psychic experiences– rather than a theological doctrine or official creed. As he confesses in his Preface, a possible title of his lectures– one he later abandoned– was "man's religious appetites". The opening lecture is even more explicit in this respect. Disclaiming any expertise as a theologian or "a scholar learned in the history of religions," James presents psychology as "the only branch of learning in which I am particularly versed"– a competence which suggested as the proper theme of his lectures a "descriptive survey of religious propensities". The second lecture goes a step further by spelling out the meaning of such phrases as "religious propensities" or "religious sentiments" and identifying the latter as particular "states of mind".[4] With these statements and elaborations, James clearly showed himself as a "modernist" concerned mainly with the inwardness of religious feeling rather than its broader social role– although the lectures' overall thrust was to rescue religious sentiment from neglect and to vindicate its general relevance.

3 See Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation" and "The Social Psychology of the World Religions," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 78-79, 294-295. I bypass here the issue of "charismatic" legitimacy.

4 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, 36th impression (London and New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1928), pp. v, 2-3, 27-28. As James insisted, religious emotions are ordinary "human" emotions like others (p. 27): "If there were such a thing as inspiration from a higher realm, it might well be that a neurotic temperament would furnish the chief condition of the requisite receptivity".

The "inward" orientation is underscored and corroborated in subsequent passages of the lectures. Basically, James divides religion, or the phenomena characterizing the "religious field," into two broad branches: "On the one side . . . lies institutional, on the other personal religion"; the former branch keeps "the divinity," the second "man" uppermost in view. In the first branch, James lumps together a host of practices, customs, and formal settings: "worship and sacrifice, procedures for working on the dispositions of the deity, theology and ceremony and ecclesiastical organization"– all features which, in his view, define religion as "an external art, the art of winning the favor of the gods". What James's comments here seem to anticipate, in an uncanny way, is Weber's notion of "traditional legitimacy" predicated on established beliefs and habitual forms of doing things– although his own concerns are far removed from questions of legitimacy. What matters to the psychologist is not the external tross but the domain of privately inward feeling– a domain set free by modernity and the consequences of the Reformation. "In the more personal branch of religion," he writes, "it is on the contrary the inner dispositions of man himself which form the center of interest: his conscience, his deserts, his helplessness, his incompleteness". Stressing further the inward outlook– and sidelining even further questions of public legitimacy– James defines the core of personal religion as involving: "the feeling, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine".[5]

About a hundred years after James's lectures, the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor took up the leads contained in the former's arguments, in an effort to pinpoint their relevance or significance in our own secular or post-secular age. Curiously, the initial impulse was another set of Gifford Lectures presented by Taylor in 1999– in the course of which he encountered anew the work of his predecessor and decided to offer some of his own reflections or afterthoughts (published in 2002 under the title *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited*). As one should note right away, Taylor's reflections are not a pliant *explication de texte*. Although genuinely appreciative of James's work, the point of the "revisitation" is also critical and reconstructive. As the very first page tells us, James had "certain blind spots in his view of religion"– blind spots which are "widespread in the modern world". The main qualm permeating Taylor's entire text is the narrow accent on individual feeling and personal or private inwardness. "James," Taylor writes, "sees religion primarily as something that individuals experience". Hence he makes a sharp divide "between living religious experience, which is that of the individual, and religious life, which is derivative because it is taken over from a community or church". Particularly troubling in this context is the core definition of personal religion (cited above) with its accent on "the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude". Thus, a central facet of the Jamesian approach, Taylor observes, is the role of experience or feeling set over "against the formulations by which people define, justify, rationalize their feelings" (operations frequently undertaken by churches).[6]

5 *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 28-29, 31.

6 Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 3-5, 7. As the text adds, in an intriguing aside, this outlook applies to believers as well as non-believers– as is evident in the "ethics of belief" sponsored by agnostics.

To some readers, Taylor's critical qualms might suggest a nostalgic traditionalism– which would be far off the mark. Although respectful of churches, Taylor is fully aware of the danger of "corporate" or "dogmatic dominion" and strongly in sympathy with the historical trend (in the West) toward individual religious freedom. His text offers a captivating overview of the main manifestations of this trend. As he notes, at least since the late Middle Ages, we can see in Western societies "a steadily increasing emphasis on a religion of personal commitment and devotion over forms centered on collective ritual". Evident initially in devotional movements and associations closely linked with the church, the trend reached a new stage with the Reformation which, by insisting on salvation through faith alone (*sola fide*), had the effect of radically devaluing "ritual and external practices in favor of inward adherence to Christ as Savior". Subsequently, the same tendency was picked up by the Counter-Reformation which spawned devotional movements of its own and proceeded to regulate the lives of believers along higher levels of inward commitment. Viewed against this background, James's "take on religion"– in Taylor's account– appears to be quite "in line with our modern understanding" which stipulates that, to take religion seriously, means "to take it personally, more devotionally, inwardly, more committedly".[7]

In an effort to provide sociological scaffolding to the sketched historical trend, Taylor turns mainly to Emile Durkheim, and especially the latter's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.[8] As he notes, religion for Durkheim was basically a collective undertaking, a "life-form" where religion furnishes society with ultimate meaning by correlating mundane arrangements and sacred significance. In its traditional meaning, religion supported something like an "enchanted world," a world where God was seen as present in society, namely, "in the loci of the sacred". Later periods brought a growing "disenchantment" (in Max Weber's sense). Metaphysically speaking, Taylor observes, "there was a shift from the enchanted world [of the past] to a cosmos conceived in conformity with post-Newtonian science," a cosmos regulated and held together by natural laws. To the extent that it persisted, religious belief– rather than finding the sacred in the world– now construed it as a transcendent principle, relegating God to the role of a distant "designer" or architect of the world. In social and political terms, this change translated into a society of individual designers or entrepreneurs, fashioning social life contractually in accordance with general laws (or the designs of "nature's God"). In large measure, this vision inspired the modern nation-state seen as a "law state" (*Rechtsstaat*) coupling higher norms with individual rights. In more recent times, this precarious "synthesis" gave way to a further loosening of social bonds and to (what Taylor calls) the "new individualism" of late modernity.[9]

7 *Varieties of Religion Today*, pp. 9-11, 13-14. Taylor cites at this point W. K. Clifford, *The Ethics of Belief and Other Essays*, ed. Leslie Stephen and F. Pollock (London: Watts, 1947); and also William James, *The Will to Believe, and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

8 Emile Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, 5th ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires Françaises, 1968); for an English version see *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

9 Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today*, pp. 65-67, 77, 88.

Simplifying his historical account somewhat, Taylor introduces a number of variations on the Durkheimian conception of "religious life". Basically, three such variations are juxtaposed in the manner of ideal types: a "paleo-Durkeimian," a "neo-Durkheimian" and a "post-Durkheimian" dispensation or arrangement. The first type corresponds in essence to the traditionalist understanding of religion as the warrant of an "enchanted" world and emblem of a divinely sanctioned authority structure. The second or "neo-Durkheimian" dispensation refers to the coexistence of religion and society in the modern state where a "neutral" or procedural framework makes room for a variety of churches, denominations, and sects. In this neo-Durkheimian mode, Taylor states, we find "an important step toward the individual and the right of choice. One joins a denomination because it seems right to one"– although there is still a pervasive sense that all choices are somehow held together by a broader, divinely designed architecture. This assumption erodes or vanishes in the "non-" or "post-Durkheimian" setting inaugurated or unleashed by the "new individualism". At this point, the last traces of social "holism" and a unified church structure give way to a radical celebration of private inwardness.[10]

Returning to the lectures of his famous predecessor, Taylor places William James basically in the context of an emerging post-Durkheimian world. Although separated from us by a century, he notes, James is "very close to the spirit of contemporary society" in that he was "already living in his own post-Durkheimian dispensation". The basic question animating Taylor's text can be put in this manner: Has the new individualism really succeeded in erasing all modes of religious or spiritual holism? Differently phrased: Does the accent on "personal religion"– while valuable as a crucial harbinger of religious freedom– really preclude the possibility of shared religious practices in a social and political community? Properly pursued, this question brings into view the contours of a "post-secular" (rather than post-Durkheimian) society and with it the prospect of a post-secular mode of public legitimacy. Without using the latter terminology, Taylor at least gestures in that direction. Although the modern intellectual trajectory, he queries, has a strongly inward or "individualist component," does this necessarily mean or entail that the content of belief will be "individuating"? For Taylor, people cultivating or taking seriously their personal religious life may still find it helpful and even compelling today to participate in shared practices– whether church services, communal prayers, or outreach activities. "Many people are not satisfied with a momentary sense of vow! They want to take it further".[11]

At another point of his text, Taylor ventures still a bit further into the terrain of a post-secular religiosity. Suppose, he argues (I freely paraphrase), that we do not wish to return to the constraints of a "paleo-Durkheimian" collectivism. Suppose we wish to have no truck with the bigotries of "corporate" or "dogmatic dominion" of the past and prefer to celebrate– with James– the modern trend toward inwardness as a gateway to religious freedom: does this attitude really confine us to "experiences of individual men in their solitude"? Does an inwardly cultivated religious commitment not rather stimulate the desire to share our lives with other people and to participate in their joys and agonies?

10 *Varieties of Religion Today*, pp. 93-94, 96.
11 *Varieties of Religion Today*, pp. 111-112, 115-116.

In the Hegelian terminology familiar to James, is there not ample room for transitions, linkages, and mediations? Let us imagine, Taylor continues, that a religious calling– or the demand laid upon us by God– is not so much a call to solitude as rather a call to service? Let us further imagine that what we are asked to do is "to live together in brotherly love, and to radiate outward such love as a community". If we accept this supposition, then the locus of religious life or of our "relation with God" is also– has to be also– "through the community, and not simply in the individual".[12] But if this is so, then the isolating post-Durkheimian setting gives way to a post-secular social setting in which religious belief can be again a resource of social responsibility and ethical legitimacy.

II. TOWARD A RELIGION OF SERVICE

Apart from discussing James's work, Taylor's text points in the direction of a new social religiosity– although his comments remain sketchy and brief. As its happens, he has fleshed out his views a bit more on other occasions; one such occasion was his Marianist Award Lecture of 1996 on the possibility of a "Catholic modernity". The central issue addressed in the Lecture is whether a mode of religious commitment can be preserved in the modern and contemporary context– without succumbing to the "new individualism" or being confined to a privatized inwardness. As in the *Varieties* book, the answer for Taylor cannot be found in a simple return to the past, especially not the "paleo-Durkheimian" dispensation of traditional "Christendom" wedded to corporate or dogmatic dominion over people. The question remains, however, whether modern religion is necessarily limited– with William James– to the feelings of "individual men in their solitude," or whether it can radiate out into social and public life in non-coercive ways, thereby regaining a "holistic" quality. Taylor clearly opts for the second alternative. A new Christian spirituality is emerging, he notes. It can be described "either as a love or compassion that is unconditional . . . or as one based on what you are most profoundly, a being in the image of God". In either case, the love is not predicated on "the worth realized in you just as an individual" or an isolated creature: "Our being in the image of God is also our standing among others in the stream of love"– which demands service to others.[13]

In many ways, Taylor's turn to a religiosity of service was anticipated by the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur in writings penned several decades ago. The starting point of Ricoeur's reflections was precisely the modern move toward privatization and religious inwardness– a move which he both welcomed as a gateway to religious freedom, and criticized as a possible retreat or exodus of faith from the world and social concerns. As he wrote hopefully in an essay of 1958: "After several centuries during which Christians has been preoccupied with the inner life and personal salvation, we are discovering afresh

12 *Varieties of Religion Today*, pp. 23-24.

13 James L. Heft, ed., *A Catholic Modernity? Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 18-19, 35. For a discussion of this text and other writings by Taylor compare my "Global Modernization: Toward Different Modernities," in *Dialogue Among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), esp. pp. 97-100.

what is meant by 'you are the salt of the earth' (Matthew 5:13). We are discovering that the salt is made for salting, the light for illuminating, and that the church exists for the sake of those outside itself". Like Taylor later, Ricoeur was not enamored with the "paleo-Durkheimian" arrangement where church and faith exert a dominant political control in society. Despite the long historical trajectory toward freedom, he noted, the old dispensation still tends to assert or re-assert itself in many guises. There is still widespread illusion that religion can play "a direct political role as an independent political power". But another alternative is possible: "When it emerges from this illusion, the church will be able to give light once more to all men– no longer as a power, but as a prophetic message". Giving light to all men means to serve, guard, and rescue. "Christian love," Ricoeur adds, "consists in seeking out the fresh forms of poverty which occur at any period" (where poverty includes all forms of deprivation, oppression and injustice). Today, in our globalizing age, it must "direct its attention toward the great world problems".[14]

In the meantime, the critique of religious mastery in the paleo-Durkheimian mode has spread from isolated remonstrations to broader intellectual endeavors, including theology, philosophy of religion, and (even) political philosophy. In the theological domain, the critique finds resonance in a current of thought aiming to shift the emphasis from a sovereign (possibly imperial) creator God to the legacy of the "suffering servant" extolled by Deutero-Isaiah, a legacy sometimes linked with the notion of a "co-suffering" of God with the world.[15] In some respects, this shift joins hands with another perspective called "liberation theology" characterized by an accent on "exodus" from unjust power structures and a "preferential" engagement for the poor.[16] Somewhat surprisingly– because of the usual association of politics with power– the critique of the religion of mastery also surfaces today in versions of political theory or philosophy. For purposes of illustration I choose the theorist William Connolly because his writings fully resonate with this critique– and also re-connect us again with the work of William James. In a recent book titled *Pluralism*, Connolly pays tribute to James as the author not only of *Varieties of Religious Experience* but also of *A Pluralistic Universe*– a text penned a few years after his Gifford Lectures. For Connolly, James was a pioneering thinker who, ahead of many others, was able to articulate modern (and perhaps postmodern) sensibilities not by relying on abstract categories but by turning to concretely lived experience. In pursuing this path, he was "a partner of Henri Bergson" and a "precursor" of such later thinkers as Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and

14 Paul Ricoeur, "Ye Ar the Salt of the Earth," in *Political and Social Essays*, ed. David Stewart and Joseph Bien (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1974), pp. 105, 115-117, 123. Compare also my "Religious Freedom: Preserving the Salt of the Earth," in my *In Search of the Good Life: A Pedagogy for Troubled Times* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2007), pp. 205-219. In one of his late writings, Ricoeur returned to the question of religious faith, placing the emphasis strongly on a religion of service in opposition to a religion of domination. See Ricoeur, *Vivant jusqu'à la mort, suivi de Fragments* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2007), especially pp. 89-91.

15 Compare, e.g., Abraham Heschel, "The Theology of Pathos," in *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), vol. 2, pp. 1-11.

16 Among the proponents of this perspective, Gustavo Gutierrez is well known for his defense of Bartolemé de Las Casas and his role as "protector of the Indians" against imperial Spain, which then was the embodiment of paleo-Durkheimian ambitions. See Gustavo Gutierrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993); also his *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. and ed. Sr. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973).

Merleau-Ponty. His turn to concrete experience prompted James to reject the notion of a fully mapped, totally transparent, and rationally intelligible cosmos. As he wrote in *A Pluralistic Universe*: "The substance of reality may never get totally collected, . . . some of it may remain outside of the largest combination of it ever made".[17] The inference Connolly draws from this statement is that "there is no omnipotent, omniscient God outside or above the world who gathers all of the universe together into one system of intelligible relations– though there may be a limited God who participates as one important actor among others in the world".[18]

In the domain of religious faith, Connolly together with James opposes the idea of a sovereign, imperial deity– a stance which leads him also to critique recent attempts to restore paleo-Durkheimian arrangements in the West. Addressing some fellow theorists overly nostalgic of the past, he chides their hankering for a religion of mastery manifest in an "exclusionary, imperious sensibility" favoring the imposition of a uniform creed. In challenging dogmatic uniformity, Connolly does not mean to lend aid and comfort to the simple privatization of faith, to the neo-Durkheimian separation of the neutral state and the private inwardness of belief. As he observes in a striking formulation: defenders of liberal neutrality pretend to identify "a forum entirely above faith through which to regulate diverse faiths"– while ignoring "faith practices themselves". Hence, he adds, "if the nobility of secularism resides in its quest to enable multiple faiths to exist on the same public space, its shallowness resides in the hubris of its distinction between private faith and public reason". By taking religious practices seriously, Connolly's book also departs from *The Varieties of Religious Experience*: by transgressing the feelings of "solitary men" in the direction of shared religious engagements, a shared "post-secular" sensibility conducive to public legitimacy. "Deep pluralism," he writes, "reinstates the link between practice and belief that had been artificially severed by secularism; and it overturns the impossible counsel to bracket your faith when you participate in politics".[19]

17 William James, *A Pluralist Universe* (1909; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. 34.

18 William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 70-71, 74.

19 *Pluralism*, pp. 48, 59, 64. As he adds (p. 65): "The public ethos of pluralism pursued here, solicits the active cultivation of pluralist virtues by each faith and the negotiation of a positive ethos of engagement between them. . . . I am thereby a proponent of civic virtue. But the public virtues embraced are pluralist virtues". Compare also his "Pluralism and Faith," in de Vries and Sullivan, eds., *Political Theologies*, pp. 278-297.

III. MULTIPLE FAITHS IN A SHARED WORLD

Connolly's text is important here not only for its Jamesian sensibilities but also for its attention to multiple faith traditions and the desirability of fostering "generous" relations between them. His notion of a "deep" or "expansive" pluralism gains its acute significance precisely in the context of our globalizing and pluri-cultural world. "The most urgent need today," he writes, "is to mix presumptively generous sensibilities into a variety of theistic and nontheistic creeds, sensibilities attuned to the contemporary need to transfigure relations of antagonism between faiths into relations of agonistic respect". The point here is not to obliterate differences between faiths in a bland ecumenicism, but to forge (in Connolly's words) "a positive ethos of public engagement between alternative faiths".[20] A prominent exemplar fostering such an ethos is Jonathan Sacks, widely renowned as religious leader, intellectual, writer, and peace-maker. Although intensely involved in inter-faith relations, Sacks is not a shallow believer; he is an orthodox Jew and, in fact, the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of Britain and the Commonwealth. Among his numerous writings, particularly relevant in the present context is his book *The Dignity of Difference* (published in 2002). Subtitled *How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*, the book seeks to make a contribution to inter-faith harmony and, through it, to global peace. To advance this goal, Sacks stresses, something more is required than bland coexistence or even shallow tolerance among faiths. "My primary aim," he writes, "has been to suggest a new paradigm for our complex, interconnected world, in such a way that, the more passionately we feel our religious commitment, the more space we make for those who are not like us".[21]

As one should note well, passionately held religious commitment here does not suggest a hankering for political power. Together with Taylor and Connolly, Sacks is not a devotee of paleo-Durkheimian dispositions or a religion of mastery– without at the same time favoring a retreat into privacy. As he states: "Religious leaders should never seek power, but neither may they abdicate their task of being a counter-voice [or a voice resisting oppression and injustice] in the conversation of mankind". In a stunning formulation, Sacks articulates an idea which belongs to the core of a religion of service. Faith communities, he writes, "should encourage its members to do an act of service or kindness to someone or some group of another faith or ethnicity– to extend a hand of help, in other words, *across* the boundaries of difference and thus turn communities outward instead of inward". As a believing Jew, Sacks invites members of other faith communities to join him in prayer– a prayer "for peace in a world in which the risk and cost of war have become too high". But prayer needs to be linked with action and practical engagement on behalf of the marginalized and persecuted. In this respect, his text is again exemplary by counseling

[20] Connolly, *Pluralism*, p. 48.

[21] Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. viii, x-xi. As he adds at another point (p. 13): "Judaism was the first religion to wrestle with the reality of global dispersion. . . . For almost 2,000 years, scattered throughout the world, they continued to see themselves and be seen by others as a single people– the world's first global people". Compare also my "The Dignity of Difference: A Salute to Jonathan Sacks," in my *Small Wonder: Global Power and Its Discontents* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), pp. 209-217.

not mindless activism (in the service of possibly self-aggrandizing agendas), but rather engagement in response to a summons or call. Sacks at this point invokes the great biblical exhortation "*Shema Israel*," where *shema* means "to hear, to understand and to respond, to *listen* in the fullest range of senses"– listen also and especially to the agonies of the suffering and oppressed.[22]

Religiously speaking, Sacks' account of what needs to happen is surely on solid ground. As we know, the central message of the biblical *Shema Israel* was the dual plea addressed to Jews, first, to love God or the divine with all their being, and secondly, to love their fellow-beings in an equal manner (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). This dual plea was taken over almost verbatim in the Christian gospels (Matthew 22:37-40; Luke 10:27-28; Mark 12:29-31). Thus, Sacks in pleading for a religion of loving service speaks from the heart of at least two great faith traditions. But the biblical *Shema* is by no means alien to the Islamic tradition either. First of all, Islam does not cancel, but builds upon the older foundations of Hebrew faith (including the passages in Deuteronomy and Leviticus). Secondly and still more importantly, the *Qur'an* itself resonates fully with the older biblical exhortations. Thus, Sura 3 speaks of the human love for God– a love reciprocated and even anticipated by God's love for humans; and Sura 90 speaks of inter-human love which yields the demand or duty "to free a neck (from the burden of debt and slavery), or to feed in times of famine the orphan near in relationship or the poor in distress".[23] In the Hindu faith tradition, the *Bhagavad Gita* portrays eloquently the vertical relation between humans and the divine as a mode of mutual bonding, stating: "In whatever way humans love me, in that same way they find my love". This bonding, however, is instantly joined with another, more lateral connection taking the form of "consecrated" action or inter-human service: "Let your aim be the good of all (*lokasamgraha*), and thus carry on your task in life". One hardly needs to make special mention here of the central role of compassion and ethical-spiritual service in Buddhism, a tradition exhorting its followers to strive for the awakening and "liberation" of all sentient creatures "however innumerable they may be".[24]

Sacred scriptures and holy texts, of course, are dead letters unless they are taken up by real-life people and translated into appropriate action in a concrete time and place. In our

22 Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, pp. viii, xi, 13, 18-19. Together with George Soros, Sacks challenges the reigning "market fundamentalism," the idea that we can leave the market entirely to its own devices. As he notes (pp. 15, 28-29), global capitalism today is "a system of immense power, from which it has become increasingly difficult for nations to dissociate themselves". Although benefiting some segments of the population, its social effects in terms of maldistribution constitute "a scar on the face of humanity". Entering into specifics, Sacks reports that the average North American today consumes "five times more than a Mexican, ten times more than a Chinese, thirty times more than an Indian". While nearly one-fourth of the world's population lives beneath the poverty line, almost one billion people are malnourished and without access to medical care.

23 *Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation*, by Ahmed Ali (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 54 (Sura 3:31), 537 (Sura 90:13-16). Compare also this *Hadith*: "When the Prophet was asked which form of Islam was best, he replied: 'To feed the people and extend greetings of peace to them– be they of your acquaintance or not'". See *Words of the Prophet Muhammad: Selections from the Hadith*, ed. Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (Delhi: Al-Risala Books, 1996), p. 57.

24 See *The Bhagavad Gita*, trans. Juan Mascaró (London: Penguin Books, 1962), pp. 56-58, 62 (Book 3:7, 20; Book 4:11), and compare *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace*, ed. David W. Chappell (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1999).

own time, the concrete context is marked by globalization including global militarism and world-wide "terror wars". Given the dominant view that in politics– especially international politics– power and security always trump ethics and religion, faith-based traditions face an uphill struggle in trying to make their voices heard. Fortunately, even today there are courageous people able and willing to "speak truth (especially religious truth) to power"; among them I want to lift up for consideration Richard Falk, well known for his work on international politics. In a recent essay on "religious resurgence" in our "era of globalization," Falk soberly but hopefully assesses the prospect of a faith-based transformation of prevailing political practices in the world. As his text makes abundantly clear, his trust is not placed in revivalist triumphalism or any paleo-Durkheimian arrangements. "In many occasions," he acknowledges, "the religious establishment of the day defends the status quo, and is itself part of the oppressive social and political order". Too often, established religious institutions find the visions of reformers unsettling and disruptive and hence "tend to marginalize their impact". As against this Durkheimian model, Falk joins James and Taylor in embracing a more inward and personal mode of religiosity practiced in everyday life: "Religion is understood here as encompassing not only the teachings, beliefs, and practices of organized religious but all spiritual outlooks that interpret the meaning of life by reference to faith"; in this sense, religion includes "belief in God and gods, but does not depend on theistic convictions, or for that matter, theological dogma of any kind".[25]

However, as in the case of Taylor and Ricoeur, cultivation of personal religiosity for Falk does not signal retreat into solitude but rather radiates out into the world. In an eloquent formulation which captures the gist of (what I have called) a religion of service, Falk writes: "A belief in the transformative capacities of an idea that is sustained by spiritual energy lends itself to nonviolent forms of struggle and sacrifice, thereby challenging most secular views of human history as shaped primarily by governing elites, warfare, and a command over innovative military technology". Despite certain differences of emphasis, Falk's outlook in this respect resonates fully with Jonathan Sacks' construal of religion as a response to a divine *Shema* or exhortation: the call to justice. Looking at our contemporary global situation, Falk finds abundant evidence of the need for transformative liberation from injustice or oppression. In all domains of social life today, he observes, one finds an immense concentration of privilege: the privilege of wealth, power, and expertise. To redress this imbalance is a religious and ethical demand– but one requiring sustained effort. Soberly assessed, transformation today "will occur only as the outcome of human struggle" which in this sense is "similar to past efforts to overcome slavery, colonialism, and apartheid". The greatest stumbling block for transformation resides in a renewed imperialist agenda, the attempt to erect a uniform super-Leviathan governing the world. "Only the great world religions," Falk concludes (and I full concur), "have the credibility and *legitimacy* to identify and reject the idolatry that seems to lie at the core of this project of

[25] Richard Falk, "A Worldwide Religious Resurgence in an Era of Globalization," in Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopoulos, eds., *Religion in International Affairs: The Return from Exile* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 186, 194-195.

planetary domination".[26] What surfaces here is the prospect of a new, no longer Weberian mode of legitimation– what one may call a "post-secular" legitimacy.

[26] Falk, "A Worldwide Religious Resurgence," pp. 198-199, 202, 205. Compare also his book *Religion and Human Global Governance* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

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