

*Commencement Address delivered to the faculty and student body of
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The Challenge of Living in a Post-Christian World*

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I. On Your Way to the Culture Wars¹

You, the members of the graduating class, have successfully completed your most important intellectual challenge: you have finished your seminary education. Now you take what you have learned from St. Herman's Seminary, from the Church, from your family into the world. You go with a justified sense of accomplishment, having been educated in a wide range of subjects and, most importantly, you have been supported in the development of an ascetic religious life. You have also begun to learn what it is to be an Orthodox clergyman. Let me now remind you how hard it is to be an Orthodox Christian in a post-Christian world. You have placed yourself in the middle of the most significant conflict of the 21st century. This is no overstatement. It is no exaggeration. No matter how challenging your seminary education may have been, you are about to face your greatest challenge. You will soon enter a struggle that will define you now and for eternity. You will be in the heart of the culture wars. The battles of the culture wars are about your heart and your soul. They are about the heart and soul of every Orthodox Christian.

This commencement address explores the geography of these conflicts. As a commencement address, it is about what you are about to commence. My presentation offers a map of the culture wars. These culture wars are struggles between different ways of understanding ourselves, our Church, our families, and the whole world around us. The culture wars concern the ideas, the language, the feelings, the commitments that shape our lives. If you do not know where you are in this struggle, you will find your views of reality

altered in ways you cannot now anticipate. If you do not understand where you are in this conflict, all those around you will be very much the worse off, because you will not be able to defend them in these culture wars.

The conflict is primarily between a secular, post-traditional, post-Christian, post-orthodox culture on the one hand, and the culture,² the phronema, the mind of the Apostles and the Fathers on the other. The culture we confront is post-traditional: it seeks to set aside, or at least transform, traditional structures such as the family. It is a post-Christian culture: it seeks not just to disestablish the Christianity publicly recognized since St. Constantine the Great in A.D. 321.³ It is directed to marginalizing and deconstructing Christianity. It is post-orthodox: it wishes to deny all claims that there is a right way to believe and worship. It is against recognizing that there is an Orthodoxy, an objectively right way to turn to God in belief and worship. This post-traditional, post-Christian, post-orthodox culture wishes to deconstruct you and your Church. You will today commence a battle to protect yourself and those around you.

II. Surrounded by a Post-Traditional, Post-Christian, Post-Orthodox Culture

That the culture around us is post-traditional should be obvious. The traditional legal and public understandings of the family in North America and Western Europe are under attack, if not in collapse. The very sense of what it is to have a marriage, to be a husband, to be a wife, to be a parent, to be a child, to have a family are all being radically criticized and recast. Taken-for-granted social structures publically normative since St. Constantine the Great, or at least since the emperor St. Justinian I, are being brought into question, deconstructed, and torn apart.⁴ Consider, for example, (1) the move in secular society to establish homosexual marriage,⁵ (2) the move within the Episcopalian church to ordain priestesses,⁶ and (3) the general failure to recognize the headship of Adam in both the family and the Church.⁷ Not only are traditional structures being undermined, but the sense of

Tradition with a capital T is being set aside. These changes alter the geography of social expectations in the dominant culture. When you talk to people about the priesthood, about marriage, about what it is to be a husband or a wife, you will do so from a culture that is a counter-culture to the dominant secular culture. You will be the representatives of a culture that the dominant secular culture will hope to marginalize radically.

The culture into which you are entering as graduates from St. Herman's Seminary is, as I noted, becoming robustly post-Christian. A hundred years ago, no one would have thought it odd to engage in Christian prayer in public schools. No one would have thought it odd to have "In God we trust" on our currency.⁸ No one would have thought it out of place to have Christian prayer at public high school graduations. Now all of this has changed. Two important elements of this change, one legal and the other cultural, must be underscored. As to the first, until the mid-1950's, the United States was not simply *de facto* but indeed *de jure* (i.e., by law) a Christian country.⁹ As a matter of law, Christianity (read here Protestant Christianity) was the established civil religion of the United States. There were places where there were exceptions; one might think of the preponderance of Roman Catholicism in southern Louisiana. Some special regional qualifications aside, it was simply the case that Christianity was normative in the United States. Christianity was also accepted by the Supreme Court of the United States as forming the substance of American common law.¹⁰ The United States was *de jure* a Christian country. Religion was not established, in the sense that preference was not given to any particular Christian religion (i.e., precedence was not given to Episcopalians over Baptists and Methodists). But there was no separation of church and state as we are now made to think of it. After all, the First Amendment required only that the federal government not establish a particular religion nationally.¹¹ Americans were a Christian people. Christianity was in a real sense the established religion of America. Not

only has this legal establishment been set aside,¹² but most importantly, there has been a second profound change. Christianity has been disestablished culturally.¹³

This second cultural change deserves special emphasis. The dominant secular culture requires that religion in general and Christianity in particular be private. Religion is not to be a public matter. When in the public space, when in the public forum, when in public meetings, when in public discussions, there is to be no authentically Christian prayer. It is not just that the proclamation of Christian belief and of Christian moral commitments is banished from the public forum. In addition, all Christian belief and all Christian moral understandings are in public to be translated into the language of the secular culture and public morality.¹⁴ All Christian religious devotions, all Christian religious prayer, all Christian religious rituals, if they are brought into the public space, are expected to be rendered robustly ecumenical, that is, religiously anonymous. One is asked to act as if to deny the world-shattering truth that Christ is the Messiah of Israel, Who died for our sins, rose from the dead, and established an unbroken Church that still exists today, not as some sliver or as a branch, but as the whole truth of it, here and now, intact even in Alaska.

Last but not least, the United States, in fact all of the West, from Poland to Argentina, from Chile to Alaska, is entering a post-orthodox age. By post-orthodox I mean that the dominant culture opposes any claim that there is a right or orthodox way to believe and worship. Rightness and wrongness are not supposed to apply to worship or to belief. This radical rupture involves a change in how to talk about religion. The reality of right worship is denied, the reality of right belief is hidden. It is often obscured by being placed in the language of narrative and tradition. Right worship, right belief, and the right understanding of religious morality are turned into a mere story so it becomes one story among many others. Consider: I have my story and my traditions, I am a Texan; you have your story and your traditions, you-all are Alaskans. I have my native Texan and German dishes, you have

your native Alaskan dishes. Each of us has his own story, traditions, and cuisine. Each of us has his own customs and preferences. Just as we might decide that there is nothing serious and enduring to dispute about in all of this (different strokes for different folks, so to speak), so, too, all issues of religion are to be regarded as matters of taste, as different elements of the richness of human life. The dominant culture wants us to think of Orthodox Christianity as merely a tradition, a mere religious preference, a mere cultural particularity. Here tradition has a very small t. It does not carry the theological weight of tradition as that has been authoritatively passed on to us as normative.¹⁵ Tradition is instead used in the weak sense of mere customs. The goal is to obscure the truth that the choice of religion is a matter of utmost and enduring importance.

III. The Historical Roots of the Secular Culture

How did all this happen? It is a complicated story. Here it is enough to indicate that our present difficulties go deep in the very roots of Western culture.¹⁶ Western culture and its religious identity emerged in the second millennium through a marriage of faith and reason.¹⁷ There was not just a commitment to Christian faith, but to the ability of philosophical reflection and analysis to lay out the deep structure of being and the character of appropriate moral conduct. With this marriage of faith and reason, the first step was unwittingly taken toward reducing the religious to the philosophically rational. When the Renaissance and the Reformation in intricate ways led to the bloody religious wars of the 17th century, the British Civil War (1642-1647) and the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), a further momentous change occurred. These wars induced the Western European dominant culture to step back from its faith in faith and instead to embrace a faith in reason. One might see this turning point with the Pax Westfalica that ended the Thirty Years' War in 1648,¹⁸ or perhaps with the British Bill of Rights in 1689.¹⁹ It is not so important to establish an exact date as to recognize that Western culture came through the Enlightenment to have a robust faith in

reason, science, technology, progress, and autonomy. It also came to develop a suspicion of faith and especially a critical regard of established churches.²⁰ With time, this faith in reason itself came to be questioned.²¹ Faith in reason did not lead to perpetual peace.²² Faith in reason led to the French Revolution's bloody Reign of Terror.²³ The 19th century's faith in reason and progress²⁴ did not lead to an enduring harmony among peoples, but to the bloodshed of the First World War.²⁵ The First World War was not the war to end all wars, but the preface to a century of unparalleled brutality in which tens of millions of people were killed in the secular pursuit of justice, fairness, equality, progress, and humanism.²⁶

The train of tragedies that defined the 20th century forced thinkers to face a truth recognized by Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 155-220)²⁷: one is only able to derive from discursive rational reflection what one agrees to at the beginning. Everything depends on first premises and the rules of evidence from which one starts.²⁸ Philosophy in general, and secular reason in particular, turned out unable to give the moral and metaphysical guidance promised.²⁹ They were not able to pull the truth out of their philosophical reflections like a rabbit from the magic hat of secular philosophical argument. The secular culture has not been able to deliver the goods. The secular culture and secular philosophical reflection failed to produce a substitute for Christianity.³⁰

This failure has not stopped the passionate pursuit of a secular heaven on earth. The goal has now become the establishment of a cultural space defined by alternative traditions, narratives, and beliefs. Everything has been placed inside the horizon of the finite and the immanent. Cut off from any recognition that God exists, nothing makes ultimate sense. Cut off from any recognition of the Creation, Incarnation, and Redemption, the three greatest events in cosmic history, mankind is lost in the cosmos.³¹ The secular culture has decided to live as if there were no God or ultimate purpose to the cosmos, with the result that the secular culture attempts to undermine traditional social structures, to marginalize authentic

religious commitments, and to discount claims of right worship and right belief. The effect of all this has been a comprehensive change in the dominant culture, leading to the culture wars in which we live. It took until the middle of the 20th century to feel the full force of these changes in the United States culture.³² They now robustly face us.

IV. The Cultural Geography of Conflict

This is a disturbing picture. This is a frightening picture. This is a picture that is so very challenging that the first reaction may be to say that it cannot be as bad as I have described it. And yet, it is in fact far worse than this brief presentation can sketch.

Here I can only quickly summarize the terrain of these culture wars around three battlefronts, three major ways in which the global secular culture wages ideological war against you and all those around you.

1. The first battlefront of the culture wars concerns the public presumption of God's non-existence – in public, you will be asked to act and to speak as if there were no God,³³ as if the universe came from nowhere, went to nowhere, and for no ultimate purpose.³⁴ This agnostic principle is at its heart a principle of ultimate disorientation, so that traditional social structures (e.g., heterosexual marriage) lose their objective significance. Social structures are whatever people peaceably want to make of them.
2. The second battlefront of the culture wars concerns the secular ecumenical religious presumption – if you are allowed to pray in public, then you will be expected to make no reference to Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel and the Son of the living God. You will be encouraged instead to speak in a post-Christian fashion, to address moral issues, but never authentically religious or theological issues. You and all Orthodox congregations will be told that it does not matter to what religion you belong, as long as you live a good life,³⁵ thus denying the first of the two great commandments, that one must love God rightly, with all one's heart, soul, and mind

(Matt 22:35-40). You and all Orthodox Christians will be invited to be blind to the cosmic truth that the holy is more important than the good, that the holy anchors the substance and the meaning of the right and the good.

3. The last battlefield of the culture wars concerns the cultural reduction of theology: the dominant culture forbids any claims of right worship and right belief. Instead, the public culture offers you and all Orthodox congregations a language that hides our Church's highly politically-incorrect proclamation, namely, that we are the Orthodox Church, the Church of right belief and right worship. We are not simply a tradition. We are not simply Eastern Orthodox. We are not just Greek, Russian, or American Orthodox. We have the pearl of great price (Matt 13:45-46). We are that unique assembly in right worship and right belief. We are the Orthodox! However, the last thing you will ever be allowed to suggest in public is this truth: our religion is in fact Orthodox in this cardinal sense. To speak in this way would be to take religion as seriously as the things the dominant culture takes seriously, such as medicine. For example, in the dominant culture one may lovingly, patiently, and respectfully, but nevertheless firmly, explain to someone that his medical treatment is poor and his physician is ill-trained, though the patient and the physician may be well-meaning. However, in our contemporary culture one is never to suggest, no matter how lovingly, patiently, and respectfully, that another person's religion is inadequate, though the person and his religious teachers may be very well-meaning. It is for such statements that the ancient pagan world tortured and executed Christians and Jews.³⁶ It is for this commitment that Orthodox Christians will be despised in the 21st century.

So where do we find ourselves? Here at the beginning of the 21st century, we find ourselves at the very heart of the battles of the culture wars. It is a battle for the heart and soul of every

human. It is a battle about how we should think, talk, and feel. It is a battle not only outside in the secular world, but one waged for and in our very hearts, and for the hearts of all the people whom we love and for whom we care. Here with this commencement, you commence being in the heart of this conflict.

V. Let us Enter the Struggle

We who are Orthodox Christians carry into the world a truth of unqualified political incorrectness, a truth that most people are embarrassed to state in public. We know Who Christ is. We are willing to state the truth openly. We know Christ is the Messiah of Israel; like the myrrh-bearing women, we know He is the Son of the living God Who rose from the dead, Who established His Church, our Church. We find ourselves in that one Church that, despite the best efforts of sinners like me and like you to betray that Church, has nevertheless with God's grace remained Orthodox from the time of the Apostles.³⁷

Having completed your studies at St. Herman's, you have committed yourself to a morality that our secular culture will understand as its anti-morality. This secular culture will surely consider you a religious fundamentalist. Remember, the term fundamentalist was first introduced to identify Christians who still believe that Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, that Christ died for our sins, that Christ rose from the dead, that Christ will come again, and that the Scriptures give us God's truth, which is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow (Heb 13:8).³⁸ If you believe the core articles of faith recited in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, then you are a fundamentalist. If you believe these things, which I surely hope you do, if you recognize this faith as the pearl of great price, then you are a fundamentalist in this enduring and very important sense.³⁹ You are counter-cultural.

We go into the world. We go into this struggle like the meek but brave, loving but firm St. Herman of Alaska,⁴⁰ my patron and the patron of this seminary. Like him, we have the

two great weapons of the Church, love and the holiness of the saints. May God preserve you and give us all strength for this struggle.

Notes

A note on the Notes: This presentation, like most commencement addresses, speaks in broad generalities. Yet, it is important to carry away something of the substance that makes these generalities plausible. Hence, the written text of this commencement address is provided with footnotes as explanations of why the generalities are justified.

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¹ The culture wars were described by James Davison Hunter, who focused primarily on America, though the issues he raises apply globally. See *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

² “Culture” and “cultural framework” are used to identify world-views, comprehensive thought-styles, social paradigms, within which, by which, and through which a community regards and appreciates morality, reality, and God. The etymology of culture ties tilling the soil with worshipping God. The Latin *cultus* involves both agricultural cultivation and religious reverence, as does the noun *cultor*. By the time of Cicero, *cultura* had come to compass agricultural cultivation as well as that refinement exemplified by philosophy and manners at court. A culture frames and sustains an appreciation of reality. There can be, and there often is, more than one culture competing for dominance in a single geographical area.

³ In A.D. 321, St. Constantine the Great, Equal-to-the-Apostles, established Sunday as an official holy day for the Empire, thus marking the dawn of Christendom, of Christianity as socially and legally established.

⁴ The emperor St. Justinian I established a legal code and a digest of laws that framed Christian political understanding until Napoleon. For an overview of the development of the Justinian Code, see an account of the chairman of his second legal commission, Tribonian. Tony Honoré, *Tribonian* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

⁵ There are important causal connections between the emergence of the dominant secular culture and its affirmation of the satisfaction of sexual urges in immoral and perverse circumstances. The contemporary culture is a culture “after chastity”, a hyper-eroticized world-view in which traditional Christian understandings of chastity are largely incomprehensible, if not considered offensive. See E. Michael Jones, *Degenerate Moderns: Modernity as Rationalized Sexual Misbehavior* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993). A range of legal developments mark this profound recasting of the cultural presuppositions regarding sexuality and reproduction, including the acceptance at law of homosexual relations (see, for example, *Lawrence v. Texas*, 2002 U.S. LEXIS 8680 [U.S. Dec. 2, 2002]; *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health*, 309 [2003] [Mass. Sup Ct]), and the move to treat homosexual liaisons as if they were marriages (see, for example, *In the matter of Section 53 of the Supreme Court Act*, R.S.C. 1985, Chap. S-26; And *in the matter of a Reference by the Governor in Council concerning the Proposal for an Act respecting certain aspects of legal capacity for marriage for civil purposes, as set*

out in *Order in Council P.C. 2003-1055*, dated the 16 day of July, 2003). The attempt to establish homosexual marriages at law is a cardinal example of a fundamental shift in moral perception tied to the loss of an understanding of right worship. As St. Paul recognizes, when one ceases to worship God the Creator rightly and instead worships creatures (including immanent moral concerns as if they were God), then one's moral sense becomes perverted (Rom 1:22-28).

⁶ St. Paul underscores the ontologically grounded relation of man and woman, recognizing them as equals in a taxis. "For [man] is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man" (I Cor 11:7-9). Each has a particular relation to the other in the order of creation and being, which ontological distinction between men and women is noted in Genesis (Gen 1:27; Gen 12:18) and affirmed by Christ Himself when He quotes Genesis in emphasizing "at the beginning, the Creator made them male and female" (Matt 19:4). Because men and women are in a hierarchy, as the New Testament underscores, the president of the Liturgy, the priest, cannot be a woman, for women, like Eve, are under the one who has Adam's authority. The priest, as the icon of the Second Adam, presents in the Liturgy this order rightly restored. See, in particular, I Cor 11:3-16, I Cor 14:34, and I Tim 2:11-15.

⁷ The headship of the man is emphasized in numerous New Testament passages. See, for example, Eph 5:22-33, Col 3:18, Tit 2:4-5, and I Pet 3:1-6.

⁸ The United States Congress on April 22, 1864, authorized the motto "In God we trust" on American coinage. *The Congressional Globe*, p. 144. It appeared for the first time on the two-cent coin in that year. The Coinage Act of February 12, 1873, states that "the Director of the Mint, with the approval of the Secretary of the Treasury, may cause the motto 'In God we trust' to be inscribed upon such coins as shall admit of such motto...." Appendix to the *Congressional Globe*, February 12, 1873, Chap. CXXXI, Sec. 18, p. 237. On July 30, 1956, the 84th Congress passed a law stating that "The national motto of the United States is declared to be In God We Trust" (P.L. 84-140), Law 36 U.S.C. 186.

⁹ "Evidence that Protestant Christianity [was] the functional common religion of [American] society would overwhelm us if we sought it out." John Wilson, "Common Religion in American Society," in Leroy S. Rounner, ed., *Civil Religion and Political Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 113.

¹⁰ The Supreme Court noted with approval a Pennsylvania state court case holding [*Updegraph v. The Commonwealth*, 11 S & R 394, 400] that "Christianity, general Christianity, is, and always has been, a part of the common law of Pennsylvania; ... not Christianity with an established church, and tithes, and spiritual courts; but Christianity with liberty of conscience to all men." *Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States*, 143 US 457 (1892) at 470. Even in the 1930's, the Supreme Court could state "We are a Christian people, according to one another the equal right of religious freedom, and acknowledging with reverence the duty of obedience to the will of God." *United States v. Macintosh*, 283 US 605 (1931), at 625. As late as 1951, the Supreme Court could speak of Americans as a religious people, albeit not as a Christian people. "We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being." *Zorach v. Clauson*, 343 U.S. 306 (1952) at 313.

¹¹ The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States reads "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." As written, it only applies to federal actions.

¹² The 1950's and early 1960's brought a radical recasting of U.S. constitutional presumptions regarding the place of religion in public life. This involved decisions that applied the First Amendment of the American Constitution to the states, so as not merely to forbid a preference of a particular religion (in that sense, its establishment), but to require what became a strict separation of church and state. For examples of the steps in this transformation, see *Torcaso v. Watkins*, 367 U.S. 488 (1961), where the Supreme Court held that Maryland could not require a state officeholder (in this case, a notary public) to declare his belief in God. In *Abington School District v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963), the Supreme Court forbade public schools to require that passages be read from the Bible or that the Lord's Prayer be recited. This shift developed further in U.S. Supreme Court decisions that altered law and public policy bearing on sexuality and reproduction. One might think in particular of the holdings in *Griswold v. Connecticut* 381 U.S. 479 (1965), which forbade restricting access to contraceptives for married couples, *Eisenstadt v. Baird* 405 U.S. 438 (1972), which gave unmarried persons access to contraceptives, and *Roe v. Wade* 410 U.S. 113 (1973) that required the legalization of abortion.

¹³ The contemporary dominant secular global culture requires that debate in the public forum occur without mention of God, much less of Christ as the Messiah of Israel and the son of God. In this way, all discourse in the public forum is made to conform to the project of fundamentally deconstructing the remnants of Christian culture in the service of a thoroughlygoingly secular moral-metaphysical world-view.

¹⁴ Confronted with the inability of secular moral reflection adequately to guide public policy regarding human germ-line genetic engineering and the human control of the human evolutionary future, Jürgen Habermas turns to religious imagery. In doing so, he recasts authentic religious insights in terms of secular moral presuppositions. See, for example, Jürgen Habermas, "Glauben und Wissen," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (October 15, 2001), 9. Habermas, for example, holds that

Those moral feelings which only religious language has as yet been able to give a sufficiently differentiated expression may find universal resonance once a salvaging formulation turns up for something almost forgotten, but explicitly missed. The mode for nondestructive secularization is translation.

The Future of Human Nature, trans. Hella Beister and Max Pensky (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), p. 114.

Of course, the secular translation of the religious reduces the religious to the secular by severing its necessary bond with the transcendent.

¹⁵ St. Basil the Great, among others, identifies a sense of tradition as the passing on in the Holy Spirit of customs and traditions that constitute the substance of the Christian life and that are therefore not merely customs or merely traditions in a secular sense of cultural peculiarities.

Of the beliefs and practices whether generally accepted or publicly enjoined which are preserved in the Church some we possess derived from written teaching; others we have received delivered to us "in a mystery" by the tradition of the apostles; and both of these in relation to true religion have the same force. And these no one will gainsay; - no one, at all events, who is even moderately versed in the institutions of the Church. For were we to attempt to reject such customs as have no written authority, on the ground that the importance they possess is small, we should unintentionally injure the Gospel in its very vitals; or, rather, should make our public definition a mere phrase and nothing more.

St. Basil, "On the Spirit," in *Basil: Letters and Select Works*, vol. 8 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), pp. 40-41.

In this, St. Basil simply restates St. Paul when the Apostle commands, "So, then, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions (*paradoseis*) which you were taught either by word of mouth or by our letter" (2 Thess 2:13).

¹⁶ Michael Buckley, S.J., *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

¹⁷ It is rare that one can say with justification that a particular action on a particular day changed the history of the world. However, such is true about the coronation of Charles the Great (Charlemagne) by Pope Leo III after the third Mass on Christmas, 800. With this act, a Western empire came into existence over against the Christian empire alive and well in New Rome. Around this new empire developed a new theological and philosophical mentality and in the end a new religion. See François Ganshof, *The Imperial Coronation of Charlemagne* (Glasgow: Jackson, 1949) and Robert Folz, *Le couronnement impérial de Charlemagne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964). With time, these developments led to Western Christianity's novel fusion of faith and reason. After Constantinople V, the 9th Ecumenical Council (1341, 1347, 1351), it was clear that the church of the West had become a novum.

¹⁸ Christendom fell into ruins in stages. A crucial step occurred in 1648. "The Treaties of Westphalia finally sealed the relinquishment by statesmen of a noble and ancient concept, a concept which had dominated the Middle Ages: that there existed among the baptized people of Europe a bond stronger than all their motives for wrangling—a spiritual bond, the concept of Christendom. Since the fourteenth century, and especially during the fifteenth, this concept has been steadily disintegrating.... The Thirty Years' War proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that the last states to defend the idea of a united Christian Europe were invoking that principle while in fact they aimed at maintaining or imposing their own supremacy. It was at Münster and Osnabrück that Christendom was buried. The tragedy was that nothing could replace it; and twentieth-century Europe is still bleeding in consequence." Henri Daniel-Rops, *The Church in the Seventeenth Century (Le grand siècle des âmes [1963])*, trans. J. J. Buckingham (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), vol. 1, pp. 200-201.

¹⁹ The period from 1689 to 1789 is often taken roughly to span the Enlightenment. Peter Gay, in his study of the Enlightenment, devotes a considerable space to exploring its commitment to establishing a pagan moral and metaphysical vision. As Gay observes, "The philosophes' experience [involved] a dialectical struggle for autonomy, an attempt to assimilate the two pasts they had inherited—Christian and pagan—to pit them against one another and thus to secure their independence. The Enlightenment may be summed up in two words: criticism and power. ... I see the philosophes' rebellion succeeding in both of its aims: theirs was a paganism directed against their Christian inheritance and dependent upon the paganism of classical antiquity but it was also a *modern* paganism, emancipated from classical thought as much as from Christian dogma" (Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), p. xi.).

²⁰ Jerome Schneewind argues that the primary thrust of the Enlightenment was not so much against religion, as against clericism. J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). He underestimates the animus of the Enlightenment against traditional Christianity. As an indication of the Enlightenment's anti-Christian character, one might consider how David Hume used Christianity as a term of derision. For instance, in his letter to the Rev. Hugh Blair (April 6, 1765), Hume speaks of the English as "relapsing fast into the deepest stupidity, Christianity, and ignorance." David

Hume, *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), vol. 1, p. 498.

²¹ Post-modernity marks a step away from the Enlightenment hope to establish a single thick rational moral account. Post-modernity is grounded in the loss of faith in reason's capacity to produce a universal account or narrative. The modernist or Enlightenment aspiration to a universal human vision of morality fragments into a polytheism of views, a cacophony of disputing narratives. As Lyotard aptly characterizes this circumstance, "In contemporary society and culture – postindustrial society, postmodern culture – the question of the legitimation of knowledge is formulated in different terms. The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation." Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 37.

²² Immanuel Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1793).

²³ The French Revolution involved a vigorous rejection of Europe's Christian commitments. See Michel Vovelle, *The Revolution Against the Church*, trans. Alan José (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991). Though the French Revolution violated the Enlightenment's hopes for a peaceful future defended by reason, the Revolution was in many ways a culmination of Enlightenment commitments to disestablish traditional Christian structures.

²⁴ By the beginning of the 19th century, a secular cultural perspective gained dominance in Western Europe as much from the Josephism of Joseph II, Emperor of Austria and the Holy Roman Empire (1765-1790), and Napoleon's secularization of central Europe, as from the French Revolution. Napoleon in particular introduced dramatic cultural changes, including the imposition of a new legal framework and the disestablishment of Christianity in many areas of society, especially through the Secularization of 1803 (authorized on August 24, 1802). See "Der Reichsdeputationshauptschluss," in *Quellen zum Verfassungsorganismus des heiligen römischen Reiches deutscher Nation*, ed. H. H. Hofmann (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976), pp. 329-358; Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff, "Über die Folgen von der Aufhebung der Landeshoheit der Bischöfe und der Klöster in Deutschland," in *Werke und Schriften* (Stuttgart: Cotta'sche, 1958), vol. 4, pp. 1133-1184.

²⁵ Prior to the First World War, there was an exuberant expectation that the forces of Enlightenment and secularization would lead to an ever-expanding sphere of liberation and to the security of Kant's longed-for perpetual peace.

But the world is growing better. And in the Future—in the long, long ages to come—IT WILL BE REDEEMED! The same spirit of sympathy and fraternity that broke the black man's manacles and is today melting the white woman's chains will tomorrow emancipate the working man and the ox; and, as the ages bloom and the great wheels of the centuries grind on, the same spirit shall banish Selfishness from the earth, and convert the planet finally into one unbroken and unparalleled spectacle of PEACE, JUSTICE, and SOLIDARITY.

J. Howard Moore, *The Universal Kinship* (London: George Bell, 1906), pp. 328-9.

Of course, this is not how things worked out for the 20th century, as Auschwitz and the Soviet Gulag attest.

²⁶ For Communists, the inhumanity of the terror employed was justified by the promise of a restoration of supposedly truly human relationships, the achievement of a true humanism. Thus, Merleau-Ponty argues that "it is certain that neither Bukharin nor Trotsky nor Stalin regarded Terror as intrinsically valuable. Each one imagined he was using it to

realize a genuinely human history which had not yet started but which provides the justification for revolutionary violence. In other words, as Marxists, all three confess that there is a meaning to such violence—that it is possible to understand it, to read into it a rational development and to draw from it a humane future.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror*, trans. John O’Neill (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 97. The Soviet view of history and that of Communists in general aimed at a future utopia that justified the violence undertaken in the present. Jerome M. Gilison, *The Soviet Image of Utopia* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).

²⁷ Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 155-220) recognized that all philosophy requires the concession of basic premises and rules of evidence. Once these are agreed upon, all else follows. The cardinal question is how to secure these. “Should one say that Knowledge is founded on demonstration by a process of reasoning, let him hear that first principles are incapable of demonstration; for they are known neither by art nor sagacity.” Clement of Alexandria, “The Stromata,” II.4, in *Fathers of the Second Century*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), vol. 2, p. 350.

²⁸ There are five tropoi or modes attributed to the 3rd-century A.D. philosopher Agrippa, who was a Greek skeptic and member of the late Academy, and who recognized that philosophy could not deliver or establish the truth. Through his five tropoi, he demonstrated that it is impossible by sound rational argument to resolve substantive philosophical controversies. The first tropos acknowledges that philosophers after centuries of analysis and argument have failed to produce a general consensus regarding matters of metaphysics and morality, and that therefore there is little hope that they will do so in the future. The second tropos notes that philosophical arguments unavoidably engage an infinite regress. The third tropos emphasizes the contextual character of such arguments: the position taken by any disputant is always nested within his own presuppositions. The fourth tropos underscores that arguments tend to be question-begging, and the fifth tropos recognizes the circular reasoning involved in any substantive argument. Diogenes Laertius (also 3rd century) gives the following summary of the five tropoi: “Agrippa and his school [affirm five] modes, resulting respectively from disagreement, extension *ad infinitum*, relativity, hypothesis and reciprocal inference” (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R.D. Hicks [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931], vol. 2, IX.88, p. 501). Sextus Empiricus (also third century) summarizes the five modes: “the first based on discrepancy, the second on regress *ad infinitum*, the third on relativity, the fourth on hypothesis, the fifth on circular reasoning” (“Outlines of Pyrrhonism,” I.164, in *Sextus Empiricus*, trans. R.G. Bury [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976], vol. 1, p. 95). The only way out of this impasse, as Orthodox Christianity knows, lies in the restoration of the nous through purity of heart. See John Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin*, trans. George S. Gabriel (Ridgewood, NJ: Zephyr Publishing, 2002).

²⁹ H. T. Engelhardt, Jr., *The Foundations of Bioethics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³⁰ Often, the second chapter of St. Paul’s letter to the Romans is misinterpreted as a proof text in favor of the ability of secular reason to establish without grace or reference to God the norms of right conduct. St. Paul states, “for when the Gentiles, not having the law, by nature [*phusei*] practice the things of the law [*nomon*], though they do not have the law, they are a law unto themselves. They show the work [*ergon*] of the law written in their hearts, to which their own conscience [*syneideseos*] also bears witness” (Rom 2:14-15). However, as St. John Chrysostom emphasizes, in this passage St. Paul is speaking of those Gentiles who, though not Jews, worship the true God. “But by Greeks he [St. Paul] here means not them

that worshipped idols, but that adored God, that obeyed the law of nature, that strictly kept all things, save the Jewish observances, which contribute to piety, such as were Melchizedek and his, such as was Job, such as were the Ninevites, such as was Cornelius.... For the conscience and reason doth suffice in the Law's stead" (Chrysostom, Homily V on Romans 1:28, 1994, vol. 11, pp. 363, 365). The second chapter develops further the point made in Romans 1:23-28 that, absent right worship and right conduct, the human conscience will be deformed and perverted.

³¹ The Southern novelist Walker Percy reflected on the disconnection of humans from the deep meaning of the universe in *Lost in the Cosmos* (New York: Noonday Press, 1983).

³² As the secularization of the United States occurred, the faith that secular philosophy can tell us what human life and reality is all about was then itself brought into question. The contemporary state of secular moral reflection is aptly captured by Richard Rorty, who acknowledges the arbitrary character of any attempt to provide a foundational justification for a particular moral view. As a result, morality and one's moral commitment become the contingent product of history. For any group of people, morality is simply what that community endorses, and nothing more.

We can keep the notion of "morality" just insofar as we can cease to think of morality as the voice of the divine part of ourselves and instead think of it as the voice of ourselves as members of a community, speakers of a common language. We can keep the morality-prudence distinction if we think of it not as the difference between an appeal to the unconditioned and an appeal to the conditioned but as the difference between an appeal to the interests of our community and the appeal to our own, possibly conflicting, private interests. The importance of this shift is that it makes it impossible to ask the question "Is ours a moral society?"

Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 59.

Similarly, John Rawls, perhaps the most influential 20th-century moral and political theorist in the English language, affirms the view which, he argues, will in the long run be affirmed. "Such a consensus consists of all the reasonable opposing religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines likely to persist over generations and to gain a sizable body of adherents in a more or less just constitutional regime, a regime in which the criterion of justice is that political conception itself." Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 15. His normative claims regarding the reasonableness of his view of the reasonable turn out to be grounded in an empirical claim regarding the future. Moreover, he reduces the moral to the political.

³³ The current dominant secular ethos is directed by postulates of practical reason incompatible with those affirmed by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Kant is a transition figure between Europe's Christian past and the full secularity of its present. *Pace* Kant, the contemporary secular culture requires its participants to speak and act publicly (1) as if there were no God, and (2) as if there were no afterlife. This constitutes a radical step beyond Kant. In contrast, Kant recognizes that only by affirming God and immortality can practical rationality guarantee the harmony of the good and the right, as well as of the motivation and the justification of morality. As Kant puts it,

Now since we are necessarily constrained by reason to represent ourselves as belonging to such a world [*a corpus mysticum* of rational beings (A808=B836), the kingdom of grace (A812=B840) of Kant's intelligible world], while the senses present to us nothing but a world of appearances, we must assume that moral world to be a consequence of our conduct in the world of sense (in which no such connection between worthiness and happiness is exhibited), and therefore to be for us a future world. Thus God and a future

life are two postulates which, according to the principles of pure reason, are inseparable from the obligation which that same reason imposes upon us. Kant, Immanuel (1964). *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith. St. Martin's Press, New York. (Kant, 1964, p. 639, A811=B829).

For a further exploration of these issues, see H. T. Engelhardt, Jr., *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics* (Lisse, Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger, 2000), chap. 2.

³⁴ Gianni Vattimo captures the fundamental disorientation of post-Christian, post-traditional European and American cultures by noting that even the meaning of humanism has been brought into question. This culture can no longer appreciate what is normative about being human. "We might begin this discussion of humanism by paraphrasing a joke that went around some time ago, pointing out that in the contemporary world 'God is dead, but man isn't doing so well himself.' Although in one sense this is just a joke, it is also something more than that, inasmuch as it captures and conveys the difference between contemporary atheism and the more classic kind of atheism represented by Feuerbach. ... the death of God, which is at once the culmination and conclusion of metaphysics, is also the crisis of humanism." Vattimo, *The End of Modernity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 31, 32-33. It is for this reason that being pro human becomes morally illicit speciesism. See, for example, Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Avon Books, 1990).

³⁵ Kant in *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft* (1793) reduces religion to morality, so that the truth of Christianity's doctrinal content is the inspiration it can give for appropriate moral behavior. For Kant, there is only one true religion.

Pure religious faith alone can found a universal church; for only [such] rational faith can be believed in and shared by everyone, where an historical faith grounded solely on facts, can extend its influence no further than tidings of it can reach, subject to circumstances of time and place and dependent upon the capacity [of men] to judge the credibility of such tidings. Yet, by reason of a peculiar weakness of human nature, pure faith can never be relied on as much as it deserves, that is, a church cannot be established on it alone. Kant, Immanuel (1960). *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. T. M. Greene and H. H. Hudson. Harper, New York. (Kant, 1960, p. 94, AK VI, 102-3).

Kant himself was likely an agnostic. Kuehn, Manfred (2001). *Kant: A Biography*. Cambridge University Press, New York.

³⁶ The Roman Empire and its culture were generally tolerant of other religions and beliefs. As a pagan syncretical culture, it was ready to accept almost all gods and goddesses, if they could only be integrated within the general pieties of Rome. Thus, one found Romans who had no difficulty in worshipping Christ alongside other gods. For instance, the Augustus Septimus Severus worshiped Christ, among other deities. "His manner of living was as follows: First of all, if it were permissible, that is to say, if he had not lain with his wife, in the early morning hours he would worship in the sanctuary of his Lares, in which he kept statues of the deified emperors—of whom, however, only the best had been selected—and also of certain holy souls, among them Apollonius, and, according to a contemporary writer, Christ, Abraham, Orpheus, and others of this same character and, besides, the portraits of his ancestors." *The Scriptorum Historiae Augustae*, trans. David Magie (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), xxix.2, vol. 2, p. 235. The difficulty with Jews and Christians was that they refused this syncretical assimilation of their God. They recognized that neither their God nor their religion was simply one tradition among others. Instead, they insisted on affirming the non-negotiable recognition of the unique truth of their religion and their God. In this light, all other religions were and are for Christians at best well-meaning mistakes, and at worst diabolic deceptions.

³⁷ The Orthodox Church holds to the unbroken tradition of the Apostles and the Fathers; this continuation was affirmed at the close of Nicea II, the Seventh Ecumenical Council (A.D. 787). "To make our confession short, we keep unchanged all the ecclesiastical traditions handed down to us, whether in writing or verbally.... For we follow the most ancient legislation of the Catholic Church. We keep the laws of the Fathers. We anathematize those who add anything to or take anything away from the Church. We anathematize the introduced novelty of the revelers of Christians." Nicea II, "The Decree," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), vol. 14, pp. 550-1. In this context, tradition is not mere custom.

³⁸ The term fundamentalist originally designated those who, in response to the liberal Protestant deconstruction of orthodox Christian truth, identified propositions they took to be essential, that is, fundamental, to Christian belief. These fundamentalists saw themselves opposed to those who rejected the fundamental, traditional, doctrinal commitments of Christians. The *Oxford English Dictionary* recognizes this history; fundamentalism identifies "a religious movement which became active among various Protestant bodies in the United States after the war of 1914-18, based on strict adherence to traditional orthodox tenets (e.g. the literal inerrancy of Scripture) held to be fundamental to the Christian faith; opposed to *liberalism* and *modernism*." (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), Supplement, p. 399. The roots of this usage lie earlier than 1914 and came from twelve pamphlets entitled "The Fundamentals", which began to be published in 1909. See R. A. Torrey (ed.), *The Fundamentals* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1990). These tenets, held to be fundamental to orthodox Christian belief, were affirmed by the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1910. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 812-16. Over against those who affirm the fundamentals of orthodox Christianity, others reject them out of hand. Consider, for example, the view of Bruce Chilton, a contemporary liberal theologian, concerning his experience with some students in the United States:

"During my discussions with my students . . . , they asked me to define 'Fundamentalism' for them. I explained its five main tenets . . . the accuracy of the Bible in its reflection of God (biblical 'inerrancy'), the virgin birth of Jesus, his actual miracles, his atonement offered to God by shedding his blood, and his resurrection in the same body in which he died. The response of my students was direct and to the point: 'But isn't that what all Christians believe?' Their reaction was telling. It reflects how little impact academic theology over the past two hundred years has had on popular awareness in the United States." Chilton, *Redeeming Time* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), p. 12.

Chilton in his remarks betrays his astonishment that anyone could still hold to the actual physical truth of the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection of Christ, etc.

³⁹ John Rawls defines fundamentalism as a failure to accept as canonical the dominant secular social-democratic understanding of the politically rational and as a fundamentalist one who asserts that "the religiously true, or the philosophically true, overrides the politically reasonable." Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," *University of Chicago Law Review* 64 (Summer 1997), 806. In taking this position, Rawls like Machiavelli draws a distinction between the political on one hand, and the moral-philosophical and the theological on the other. For Rawls, like Machiavelli, political reasonableness takes precedence over religious moral commitments.

⁴⁰ When one considers the great hardships and struggles of St. Herman and his fellow missionaries, one can put in perspective the challenge that lies ahead of us. For a

contemporaneous account of the difficulties the Orthodox missionaries faced, see Richard A. Pierce (ed.), *The Round the World Voyage of Hieromonk Gideon 1803-1809*, trans. Lydia T. Black (Fairbanks, AK: Limestone Press, 19898), especially pp. 72-130. See also *Little Russian Philokalia*, vol. 3, *A Treasury of Saint Herman's Spirituality* (New Valaam Monastery, AK: St. Herman Press, 1989) and Michael Oleksa (ed.), *Alaskan Missionary Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).