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Studying Politics and Religion: How to Distinguish Religious Politics, Civil Religion, Political Religion, and Political Theology

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Abstract
The study of politics and religion is today fragmented to a degree that you can hardly refer to it as one academic field anymore. This article lists four fundamentally different approaches to the study of politics and religion: political religion; religious politics; civil religion; and finally, political theology. The article compares the four approaches on a number of significant parameters: their understanding of what religion is; their critical ambition; to which degree a preliminary distinction between politics and religion is presupposed; and most importantly, how to approach the relationship between religion and politics in an analytical, strategic sense. The ambition with this survey is to support a discussion between the four approaches with a view to reach a more complete understanding of the relationship between politics and religion in all its complexity.

Keywords
Religious politics; civil religion; political religion; political theology; secularism

Introduction

Even though the study of the relationship between the political and the religious is obviously not a new enterprise, probably only a very few would deny that it is a field in rapid growth. The interest in religion has gone from being the concern of those relatively few with an interest in, for instance, the significance of Islam in Middle Eastern politics or religious parties in the West to forming an integral element in what one might perhaps call 'normal social science.' In political theory as a discipline, dealing with

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multiculturalism as a matter of social fact is 'required reading;' researchers with an interest in international politics must, by necessity, consider religion as a possible element in international conflict; and finally, still more academics feel obliged to examine whether their concepts and views have their origin in a particular Western, that is, Christian, tradition.[1]

So why has religion gone from being an odd thing to being something about which many scholars wish to, can, or ought to converse? Overall, one may give three explanations, of which the first two are rooted in changes in social structure and the third in changes within the scientific field. The first change in social structure consists in a large number of societies having gone from being mono- to being multicultural, whereby the religious has become far more present in relation to the political sphere. Given the presence of the many new citizens belonging to a different religion, a large number of presuppositions cease to be obvious. What used to have the appearance of neutral mechanisms, phrases, and institutions is now increasingly seen as expressing a particular religiously founded culture and as a possible suppression of others.

The other change in social structure has to do with the international sphere. It is still vehemently discussed whether we have seen more religious conflicts since the end of the Cold War. Samuel Huntington[2] claims so in his much debated work about the clash of civilizations; Mark Jürgensmeyer[3] talks about religion being the foundation of a new cold war; and finally, Benjamin Barber[4] argued that the world after '89 has been characterized by a clash between religious forces on one side (what he calls Jihad) and representatives of a globalization driven by capitalism (what he calls McWorld) on the other. We need not answer here whether or not we have seen a flourishing of religiously grounded violence. Suffice it to note that politically, there is an increasing focus on religion. Obviously, the crucial event was Al Qaeda's terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001. Here, religion went from being thought of as a matter of conflict in distant, and often underdeveloped, states to forming a global and globalized threat.

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1) Carsten Bagge Laustsen & Ole Wæver, "In Defense of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization", *Millennium*, 29/3 (2000), 705-740, here 737ff.

2) Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Touchstone Books, 1996).

3) Mark Jürgensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

4) Benjamin Barber, *McWorld versus Jihad*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995).

The above two developments have both been significant for the most essential debate concerning the study of the relationship between religion and politics, namely the question of secularization and desecularization. The works of American sociologist of religion Peter Berger mark the extremes of this debate. In Berger's main work of sociology of religion from 1967, secularization is defined as "the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols."[5] Social questions go from being the prerogative of priests to being the occupation of a number of non-ecclesial authorities. Education ceases to be an ecclesial matter, politics becomes an independent sphere, and logic, literature, philosophy, indeed thinking, are freed from the grip of religion. Finally, we see the emergence of a secular consciousness, which will manifest itself not least in the independence of the scientific system. A little more than 30 years after *The Sacred Canopy*, however, Berger turns around completely. He now claims that "the world today … is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever,"[6] and among the arguments for this view are the two developments outlined above.

However, Berger's move away from his earlier works is less radical than it sounds. Undoubtedly, the theorists of secularization were wrong when they saw secularization as an automatically progressing process through which the world is increasingly disenchanted. True, the pendulum may swing both ways! Still, it is worth noting that Berger, in his discussion of desecularization in 1999, apparently misses his own, much more radical, insight in his book from 1967. Here, he foresaw an increasing secularization, but at the same time, he understood this process as conditioned by a particular religious perspective. The question of whether we are more or less secularized – whether, for instance, we attend church more or less frequently and whether there are more or fewer international conflicts with religious content than before – seems to block out another, more radical, way of asking about 'the religious in the political.'

Thus, facing the observations as to where there is more or less religion is an entirely different way of asking about the relationship between religion and politics: a tradition focusing on a movement – not from religion to

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5) Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy. Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), here 107.

6) Peter L. Berger, "The Desecularization fo the World: A Global Overview", Peter L. Berger (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, (Michigan: William B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 1-18, here 2.

non-religion (and back) – but rather from religion as conventionally defined; that, is as associated with a specific religious sector and defined in accordance with everyday language, to a form of religion that may well have put religious terminology behind it and that is no longer practiced in the 'ecclesial sector,' but that has become no less religious for that reason. Facing those who compare degrees of religion according to a sort of more-or-less scale stands a tradition of research that claims that the religious will always be with us. The central matter to study is, therefore, not *whether* the religious has any significance, but rather *how* it manifests itself – *in which way* it is significant. The process that Berger described in his breakthrough work in the sociology of religion, according to this second perspective, deals not with the weakening of religion, but with the fact that the religious is moved to new institutions and clad in new linguistic garments.

We have now reached the third important reason why religion and politics are now thematized anew. The old understanding of the religious as something belonging only to the ecclesial sector and the academic labor division, where only theologians and sociologists of religion address the phenomenon, is dissolving. Ever more disciplines are asking about the religious in their fields.[7] The distinction between the religious and the non-religious, the content of the concepts, and the secularisms that aim to guard their non-contamination cannot be taken for granted. The distinction between religion and politics is no longer a theoretical a priori but something that is in itself to be investigated. Berger, as already mentioned,

7) International Relations as a discipline is perhaps the best example. The ground-breaking volume of *Millennium* from 2000 (third issue) on religion and international politics was soon followed by a range of volumes: John D. Carlson & Erik C. Owens (eds), *The Sacred and the Sovereign: Religion and International Politics*, (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2003), Jonathan Fox & Shmuel Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Relations*, (New York: Palgrave, 2004), Robert A. Sieple & Dennis R. Hoover (eds), *Religion and Security: The New Nexus in International Relations*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations: The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-First Century*, (New York: Palgrave, 2005), Eric O. Hanson, *Religion and Politics in the International System Today*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Ron E. Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), Erin K. Wilson, *After Secularism. Rethinking Religion in Global Politics*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), Jeffrey Haynes, *Religion, Politics and International Relations: Selected Essays*, (London: Routledge, 2011), Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott & Timothy Samuel Shah (eds), *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), Timothy Fitzgerald, *Religion and Politics in International Relations: The Modern Myth*, (London: Continuum, 2011) and many more.

pointed out that the Western process of secularization had its religious presuppositions. In the same way, various disciplines today ask whether their concepts actually point back to a Christian frame of interpretation.[8] If one answers in the affirmative, and still more scholars do, this may have quite significant consequences for the self-understanding and research results of a given discipline. In other words, the central discussion is one of different conceptions of religion and politics and, accordingly, of how to think of the relationship between the religious and the political on the background of such conceptions.

The ambition of this article is to map out four distinct approaches to the study of the relationship between religion and politics, to investigate how religion and politics is understood in each of the four approaches, and, on such a background, to show that the question of secularization and desecularization will be posed in radically different ways, depending on which approach one subscribes to. The four approaches are located along a continuum ranging from the narrow to the broad concept of religion, in the sense that the first approach lies closest to what one understands by 'the religious,' in everyday language. The fourth and last approach is the furthest from this understanding. The article shows that behind the question of secularization or the return of religion lies a much more important discussion, namely that of how the relationship between the political and the religious may be studied and of what we even mean by saying 'politics' and 'religion.'

By way of introduction, I will describe an approach that is called *religious politics*. The focus here is on religion in the conventional sense and on how something conventionally religious is translated into political viewpoints and political practices. For instance, we might be speaking of the study of religious parties or players, of how they derive political stances from fundamental religious dogmas, and finally, of how a specific version of secularism regulates such attempts. The second approach is the study of *civil religion*. This approach focuses on how religious phrases are used in relatively noncommittal ways, for instance, in presidential speeches. When the president says, 'In God we trust,' no specific god is referred to, but rather the idea itself of a divine obligation or of divine providence. The third approach is called *political religion*, and the focus here is especially on the attempts of totalitarian systems at constructing their own new form of religion. One might,

8) Laustsen & Wæver, "In Defense," here 737ff.

for instance, analyze the *Führer* cult in Nazism as part of a new Nazi religion. Finally, a distinct tradition emerges that is called *political theology*, in which the religious is understood as certain logics or functions that are not necessarily found in the 'ecclesial sector' and not necessarily articulated through conventional religious semantics. The central point here is that the religious and the metaphysical are keys to understanding seemingly secular political phenomena.

The four approaches are presented as ideal types. There are, among scholars, some terminological confusion concerning the names of the approaches, and one of the purposes of this piece of work is thus to establish a clear and consistent way to speak of distinct strategies of analysis. Some distinguish between different forms of civil religion (for example, immanent and transcendent[9]), others use the concept of political theology to indicate the contributions of religious thinkers to thinking the political (the revolutionary Jesus in emancipation theology, and so on) – that is, what I attempt to cover with the concept of religious politics – and still other use the concept of religious nationalism behind which, I would claim, we do in fact find two different strategies of analysis: civil religion and political religion.

Despite the conceptual confusion, four traditions and approaches seem to emerge that respectively distinguish themselves, not only in their fundamentally different approach to the study of religion and politics, but also in their focus of analysis: conventional political players and their relationship with religious texts, religious nationalism, the sacralized legitimization strategies of totalitarian states, and finally, the religious as a source of knowledge about the constitution of the political. These four approaches can thus be read as prisms of analysis, each of which is modeled for the study of a particular form of (political) religion. However, one can also, in a more constructivist way, focus on how the four approaches shape the observed object of analysis differently. I will do both in the following.

Finally, I will suggest a fifth approach to the study of religion and politics, a meta-approach, which consists in using the four approaches in turn and in combination. Hereby, two blind angels that occur when using only one approach are highlighted: First, the lacking awareness that the construction of the political and the religious is a in itself a matter of political and

9) See Michael Angrosino, "Civil Religion Redux", *Anthropological Quarterly*, 75/2 (2002), 239-267.

religious struggle. And second, a lacking awareness that behind each and every attempt to distinguish politics from religion lies a historically given religious and political tradition. The very attempt to distinguish politics from religion has its presuppositions in a Christian tradition, and as such, it does some injustice to the study of religion in non-Western societies.

Religious Politics

How do our new Muslim fellow citizens relate to the political and to democracy? What is their politics – for example, their stance on education, the welfare state, the penal system, and on questions concerning 'church politics?' And what, for instance, was bin Laden's 'politics?' Not only was he ready to set the world on fire based on his religious conviction. He also made statements concerning questions that we would normally see as political: the gravity of, and responsibility for, global warming, the politics of Israel concerning the occupied territories, and the military presence of the US in Saudi Arabia.[10] As relevant as these questions may seem, it may be necessary to temporarily bracket them and pose the much more fundamental question about that which seems to function as the unspoken premise of such questions. Why have we begun to distinguish between religion and politics in the first place, and how is it that this distinction comes to us so naturally that we can hardly understand if people do not base their views and practice upon it?

If one were to point out a distinctive mark characterizing the study of religion and politics in its most commonly seen form, which I here call 'religious politics,' it would be the fact that it is not radically questioned what religion, or politics for that matter, is. Religion is understood in the way that it is defined in everyday language. One can refer either to what everybody understands as religious, that is, to people who see themselves as members of an established religious faith, or to a broad array of conditions that determine what is seen as religious. Are there churches, mosques, or the likes, that is, special religious buildings for religious worship? Is there a clergy, a dogmatic? Are there rituals, persons who claim to believe, and so on? Whichever way one understands the religious, it is here seen as

10) Osama Bin Laden, *Messages to the World. The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*, (London: Verso, 2005), here 160-172.

something existing outside and independently of the political. A central distinction will therefore be the one between parties that derive their core values from religious dogmas (Christian, Hindu, Muslim…) and parties based on ideologies (conservatism, liberalism, socialism…). By extension, the research-oriented question would be how the religious comes into contact with the political. Given that people are religious, what manner of significance does this have for their political preferences and their political behavior?

A distinction is therefore often made between core religious stances and a number of political manifestations thereof. Once again, the central point is that the religious is thought of as something to be found outside the political and therefore as something that needs to be translated into political language. The study of religious politics can be exactly that. One attempts, by analysis, to bring out a connection between religious doctrine and a set of political stances.[11] What is the significance of a particular religious confession, for instance, for one's stance on abortion, homosexuality, distributional politics, and penal law? If one is a Christian, does the faith in God's creation of the world then mean that one must, politically, argue against the teaching of Darwin's theory of evolution in schools? Is it the natural consequence of the idea of life as holy that one should reject abortion? Does the injunction to love one's neighbor mean that one should say no to military service and embrace pacifism?

When speaking of religious politics, the central matter is that this politics is seen as deviating from a non-religious politics. And exactly this non-religious form of politics is understood as the dominant one and as definitive of the political field. The point of departure is that the political is secular and that the religious is therefore a foreign element that is either accepted, tolerated, or seen as something that should have no place in the political sphere. If we here make use of a distinction that is difficult to make

11) The literature on religious politics is vast, so only a few examples will be mentioned here: Nathan Brown & Amr Hanzawys, *Between Religion and Politics*, (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010) study of Islamic political parties in the Middle East, Hansen's of Hindu nationalism: Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), Kalyvas' and Hanley's studies of Christian parties in Europe: Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), David Hanley, *Christian Democracy in Europe*, (London: Pinter, 1998), and finally, Weiss' studies of the Democrats in the US: David Weiss, *What Democrats Talk about When They Talk about God. Religious Communication in Democratic Party Politics*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010).

in English, namely that between '*la politique*' and '*le politique*,' the former refers to politics in the sense of a political community, political rules of play, political forum, agora, and so on, whereas politics in the masculine form refers to politics in the sense of stances, actions, and programs.[12] 'Politics' in 'religious politics' refers to the latter form, to particular political stances and programs, whereas the premise is that the political community ('*la politique*;' in a Western context, the democracy) is not in itself religious.

Hence, a distinction between what is, in this approach, considered to be public and private is of utmost importance – religion belongs to the private sphere and politics to the public. Thus, religious politics is a manifestation of "not keeping the religious indoors," with reference to a famous newspaper feature by Anders Fogh Rasmussen,[13] a former Danish prime minister. Religious politics is carried out by the few for whom religion is not merely a private matter. For instance, it is in Denmark characteristic for non-religiously defined parties to leave members of parliament at liberty concerning questions of a 'moral' or 'religious' nature (that could, for example, be questions concerning stem cell research, the right for homosexuals to be married in church, or rules concerning abortion). Such questions are seen as a sort of residuals about which one cannot formulate a politics. For religious parties, by contrast, exactly these questions are definitive of the party, and it would therefore make no sense to set members of parliament at liberty in relation to these questions.

In many of the attempts to bring religion back to the study of international politics, we see a similar pattern. What is often suggested is to include a focus on 'religious' actors, religious NGO's, theocratic states, fundamentalist terrorists, or (religiously given) civilizations, but the way religion and politics are understood has not changed significantly. When Huntington predicts a clash of civilizations and Jurgensmeyer a new cold war, new religiously driven actors emerge, but the power game they play is a known one and an old one. The distinction between the public and the private is now transformed into one between the national and the international sphere.

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12) Claude Lefort, "The Permanence of the Theological-Political?", Hent de Vries & Lawrence E. Sullivan (eds), *Political Theologies. Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 148-187, here 151ff.

13) Anders Fogh Rasmussen, "Hold religionen indendørs", *Politiken*, (2006). 20/5, 3rd section, 6.

The first might or might not be influenced by religion while the latter is defined as a sphere driven by secular power dynamics.[14]

Recent research within this paradigm has also focused on the institutional settings regulating the translation of the religious into the political. The bar between the political and the religious is set differently in different European countries. There are different forms of secularism.[15] This does not necessarily imply that the concepts of politics and religion are radically challenged. It is rather a matter of investigating how much and which form of religious practice is accepted/ tolerated in the public domain, and what counts as a religious practice is most often defined in a conventional way. In some countries, religious symbols are tolerated in schools, in others they are not, to give just one example. And in extension, the study of the many secularisms is still, in every instance, an investigation of how politics and religion are separated, implying, of course, that a rigorous distinction can be made. Although there are many different forms of secularism, they are all ways of demarking the political and the religious sphere and of regulating how one sphere can intervene into the other.

Religious politics is a particular form of politics that can be traced back to, and that is founded in, religious scripture. The religious is thus a view of life as well as a worldview. It is the fundamental level definitive of how one sees the world (a view of life) and therefore relevant for all political matters (a worldview). One can see the religious as a matrix founding and generating political viewpoints. A question here is often whether such a connection can be established and whether it is legitimate and acceptable. If a religious group of a Christian observance maintains that Darwin's theory of

14) There are a number of attempts to move beyond this focus on religious politics and towards a post-secular paradigm, a paradigm in which the idea that "democracy, freedom, equality, inclusion, and justice may not necessarily be best pursued within an exclusively immanent secular framework," Luca Mavelli & Fabio Petito, "The Postsecular in International Relations: an overview. *Review of International Studies*, 38 (2012), 931-942, here 931. Similarily, Dallmayr argues for an epistemological break and "a definition where the prefix 'post' signifies neither a secular nor a religious triumphalism, but rather an ethical-political task: the task of liberating public live form its attachment to 'worldly' self-interest and the unmitigated pursuit of wealth, power and military adventures," Fred Dallmayr, "Post-secularity and (global) politics: a need for radical redefinition," *Review of International Studies*, 38 (2012), 963-973, here 963. For an overview of contemporary post-secular contributions to the study of international politics, see Mavelli & Petito, "The Postsecular."

15) Elizabeth S. Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

evolution should not be taught, is this a legitimate claim or are we dealing with a problematic derivation of a political viewpoint from the Biblical text?[16] Such a critique is, however, difficult to carry out as it is based on the acceptance of the very premise with which secularism breaks. If one argues that something is an illegitimate transposition of religious dogmas into political viewpoints, one implicitly acknowledges that a legitimate transposition exists and that the religious thus can and ought to have constitutive significance for the political.

The critique therefore most often holds that people can believe whatever they want and that, in a democratic system, one does not take an interest in the derivative origin of people's views and preferences. The important thing is that, in a political conversation, one should be prepared to relativize that which, in one's religion, has the form of absolute claims and be prepared to make compromises. Returning to the distinction between '*la*' and '*le politique*,' one must accept that the political arena (national parliaments or international organizations such as the UN) is defined in secular terms.

We may also make use of this distinction to mark the difference between two forms of religious politics: one form that accepts that religious politics must be carried out in a secular and democratic arena and, by opposition, religious politics in the sense of fundamentalism. Whereas in the first form, religion is seen as something definitive of one's own group and party (in the same sense that many workers have earlier seen the Social Democratic Party as their party), fundamentalists see the message of their religion as true for everybody. In extension thereof, they wish to change the political rules of play in order for these truths to be made those constitutive of the political.[17]

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16) To add an example from international politics, it has been discussed if bin Ladens's interpretation of *Jihad* is correct and legitimate.

17) Two typical examples of such a critique is, first, the critique of various fundamentalist Islamic groups for holding political opinions that have a cultural rather than a religious background, for instance, the injunction to wear the burka, wear one's beard long, and circumcise women. Second, in an American context, one finds an abundance of political pamphlets that try to demonstrate that God and Jesus are on either the Democrat or the Republican side and that the other wing is therefore abusing Christianity to promote a non-Christian politics. Take the following two titles, which, in a sense, say everything: "Jesus Is Not a Republican: The Religious Right's War on America", Clint Wills & Nate Hardcastle (eds), *Jesus Is Not a Republican: The Religious Right's War on America*, (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005) and "The Hijacking of Jesus: How the Religious Right Distorts Christianity and Promotes Prejudice and Hate", Dan Wakefield, *The Hijacking of Jesus. How the Religious*

An example of the latter distinction is Mehdi Mozaffari's[18] studies of so-called Islamism. First, a distinction is maintained between Islam and Islamism, or between Islam as a religion and Islam as a totalitarian movement. Whereas Islam may possibly thrive in a democratic society (such as Euro-Islam), Islamism is a fundamentalist movement that wishes to revolutionize the principles of the political (for instance, by implementing Sharia legislation and substituting clerical rule for democracy). As in the study of the democratic religious politics, in the study of fundamentalism, political views are traced back to religious dogmas. The important and definitive difference, however, is that whereas in the democratic variety, the transposition is understood as a mediation that may therefore be discussed and relativized, in fundamentalism, it is seen as immediately given by the religious texts. On this background, Tina Magaard[19] investigates conceptions of violence in the *Qur'an*. There are certain conceptions here that are, in Islamist fundamentalism, made manifest in concretely enacted politics. In other words, the *Qur'an* is, for fundamentalists (Islamists in Magaard and Mozaffari), a key to acting in the world, and this is precisely why it becomes relevant to investigate the proto-political conceptions found in the religious texts.

In summary, the study of religious politics is based on the following basic premises: First, the religious politics to be investigated is a politics in the sense of 'a political program.' Second, the political community is seen as politically, not religiously, constituted. It is thus given by different logics from those dominant in the religious field. The secular, and with it, the separation of the political from the religious, is, in other words, a premise, but the bar separating the two can, of course, be set differently according to different versions of secularism. Third, distinctive for religious politics is that it is conceptually regarded as a sort of reminiscence. People and

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Right Distorts Christianity and Promotes Prejudice and Hate, (New York: Nation Books, 2006). This critique is clearly based on the understanding that religion can legitimately have political significance. The problem is "merely" that, in a particular case, an illegitimate transposition is made from religious dogmas to political viewpoints.

18) Mehdi Mozaffari, "Islamisme – venskab og fjendskab," Mikkel Thorup, Hans-Jørgen Schanz & Mehdi Mozaffari (eds), *Totalitarisme. Venskab og fjendskab*, (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2007), 191-212, Mehdi Mozaffari, *Islamisme. En orientalsk totalitarisme*, (København: Informations Forlag, 2013).

19) Tina Magaard, "Fjendebilleder og voldsforestillinger i islamiske grundtekster," Mikkel Thorup, Hans-Jørgen Schanz & Mehdi Mozaffari (eds), *Totalitarisme. Venskab og fjendskab*, (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2007), 213-238.

parties who undertake it do not keep religion 'out' but, instead, formulate political viewpoints based on religious texts. To them, and this is the fourth definitive feature, the religious is both a view of life and a worldview (and thereby also a matrix for formulating political viewpoints). Finally, the conception of a political system defined in secular terms occasions the distinction between two forms of religious politics – one form that accepts this distinction, and therefore also that some form of mediation must take place in the move from private religious articles of faith to public political viewpoints, and one form that does not accept such mediation and can therefore be criticized as undemocratic, fundamentalist, or totalitarian.

Civil Religion

In the above, we introduced a distinction between two different understandings of politics: the distinction between politics ('*le politique*') and the political ('*la politique*'), so that the former refers to politics in the sense of a particular program or a politics concerning a given area (for instance, church politics), and the latter refers to the very constitution of the political community. The latter understanding of politics is absolutely central to the approach we call civil religion.[20] As already mentioned, civil religion can refer to a particular object of analysis – a particular way in which religion is present in the political – but it can also be understood as the defining core concept in a tradition that analyzes the relationship between religion and politics in a particular way. Starting with the substantial definition of civil religion, we are dealing with a type of abstract religion that may found and

[20] Earlier terms for what Bellah calls civil religion are "common religion" (Robin Williams), "common faith" (John Dewey), "the religion of the republic" (Sidney Mead), "republican religion" (de Tocqueville), "the American creed" (Seymour Lipset), "democratic faith," and "culture religion," Cristi, Marcela, *From Civil to Political Religion. The Intersection of Culture, Religion and Politics*, (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), here 48. Jones and Richey distinguish between five forms of civil religion: "folk religion" (a non-normative celebration of the community), "transcendent universal religion of the nation" (a civil religion that is prophetic and holds the nation accountable to a higher judge – this form seems to come the closest to what Bellah understands by civil religion), "religious nationalism" (celebration of the nation), "democratic faith" (constitutional patriotism and the conception of values such as freedom and equality as having an elevated status but not necessarily as transcendentally given), and "Protestant civic piety" (which refers to the particular alliance between Protestantism and nationalism in the US), Cristi, *From Civil*, here 58.

back up a political community precisely by transcending traditional and established religious differences. Civil religion is American sociologist of religion Robert Bellah's term for the rituals that connect the politics of the state with a higher goal: "I refer to that religious dimension, found I think in the life of every people, through which it interprets its historical experience in the light of transcendent reality."[21]

Civil religion is not a direct rival of conventional religions. It coexists with a broad range of 'private' belief systems: in the US, among others, Judaism, Hinduism, various versions of Islam, and a vast number of Christian denominations. As Bellah[22] says, civil religion is not first and foremost a religious legitimization of a given political rule and its politics. The central issue, in the case of the US, is rather the conception of a country that is to a unique degree obligated with regard to some universal, elevated values. The US is, for instance, *A City on a Hill* that must cast light into the entire world and serve as its role model. Among the puritans, one found the conception that America was God's new Israel – a place where the Kingdom of God was to be established on Earth, and where the conflicts and strife of the old world were to be no more.[23]

The central issue in Bellah's analysis is that the American presidents connect their conduct of office and the destiny of America with a higher goal. There is a tradition of citing from the *Bible*, God is invoked, and finally, the religious experiences of the presidents themselves are often mentioned. Second, the bond between the citizens of the nation is religious in a less direct sense. Civil religion is a distinct and novel form of public religion. Among other things, this is made manifest by the respect surrounding the constitution and the declaration of independence. These documents are treated in a way similar to the Holy Scripture, as something that is sacred and thus beyond critique. The great presidents of America are treated as sacred persons; George Washington was the American Moses leading the people, who were oppressed by the English, towards its freedom. Abraham Lincoln was the martyr who ultimately had to give his life so that the nation, which was divided by civil war, could be reunited. One can express one's

21) Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant. American Civil Religion in the Time of Trail*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), here 3.

22) Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," Robert N. Bellah & Steven M. Tipton. (eds), *The Robert Bellah Reader*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 225-245.

23) Maureen Henry, *The Intoxication of Power. An Analysis of Civil Religion in Relation to Ideology*, (London: D. Reidel, 1979), here 23.

veneration for these presidents at what is best understood as sacred locations, for instance, the Lincoln memorial. Apart from the president, the nation has a long list of martyrs (fallen soldiers, among others), special events surrounded by a religious aura (for instance, the inauguration of presidents), and finally, there are a number of national holidays such as *Thanksgiving* and *Memorial Day*. Civil religion has a counterpart to practically everything found in 'normal' religions. We are concerned with a nationalism of an especially transcendent kind. Before we move on, let us briefly dwell on the references of 'civil' and 'religion' in civil religion, as both terms mark continuity as well as a break with what we identified as 'religious politics.'

When speaking of religion in connection with civil religion, the conventional sense of the 'religious' is still intended. Something is identified as religion with reference, among other things, to the occurrence of words such as 'God,' 'providence,' and 'mission' – words that originate in Holy Scriptures. It is a religious language used with reference to the nation. However, this terminology is used in such an abstract way that it becomes unclear whether one is dealing with a Christian, a Hindu, a Jewish, or a Muslim God. Civil religion thus becomes something that gathers together rather than splits apart. It serves as the foundation for a conception of politics in an unproblematized singular form. The 'religious politics' was, by contrast, characterized by the derivation of political viewpoints from various religious dogmas, and thus, there will always be a conflict between the different religiously derived recommendations.

The designation of civil religion as 'civil' first and foremost means that it belongs to what in this approach is considered to be the public sphere. As in the 'religious politics' approach, a distinction is made between the private and the public. This time, however, the distinction does not play out as a distinction between a possible religious private sphere and a secularized public sphere. Instead, we are dealing with two different types of religion: private religion and public religion – or, in Bellah's term, civil religion. Religion in public space is thus no longer something derived from the private sphere (as in religious politics) but is instead to be understood as something sui generis originating from and belonging to the public sphere.

Let me here mention one of two important critiques of the conception of civil religion. First, civil religion is often much more closely tied to 'the private sphere' and to more substantial religious systems than it pretends. The American civil religion has thus been accused of being a white protestant or, in any case, Christian, civil religion. In other words, the critique

claims that civil religion is really 'religious politics.' The problem is not that Bellah follows Durkheim in seeing religion as the self-hallowing of a community, but rather that he assumes, in an unproblematized manner, that only one such community exists, namely the national one.[24] Politics in the sense of the conflict between different political visions thereby disappears. Bellah's understanding of civil religion as a type of culture setting the stage for the political points in the same direction.

In places, however, Bellah does hint at a perspective of conflict theory. In his article from 1967, he criticizes the use of the American civil religion in legitimating the Vietnam War. In other words, both a good and a bad civil religion appear to exist – or better, a civil religion used in the service of peace or of war. Immediately, one might think that it is impossible to separate precisely these two forms. Unity within the community is created through the construction of an outer enemy, of some who must be saved or converted.[25] Here, we come across another sense of the predicate *civil*. Civil may refer to something non-militaristic and therefore peaceful. Bellah's writings are normative, and this is seen in two ways: as a conviction that civil religion is desirable and as the absence of politics in the sense of conflict.[26]

Second, Bellah's work seems to be tied to an American context. Does civil religion exist in other countries? Bellah reluctantly answers in the affirmative. Why such caution? One answer could be that an awareness of European history helps one to highlight the weaknesses of Bellah's concept. In a European context, religion has been seen as the evil per se and the secularization of the state as a means to doing away with the numerous religious wars. Whereas in the US, religion has functioned as a source of legitimacy for the state, in Europe, it has often been connected with violent and expansionist ambition. In a European context, one therefore speaks of religious nationalism rather than of civil religion. Immediately, one might think that religious nationalism could be more sufficiently analyzed as a form of religions politics. In a European context, it is characteristic for the 'religion of state' to be less abstract than in the US, and to thus refer to a particular creed (if we take as an example the rule of Milosevic, it was legitimized

24) Michael Hughey, *Civil Religion and Moral Order*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), here 66-69.

25) Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, *Captain America and the Crusade against Evil. The Dilemma of Zeleous Nationalism*, (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003), here 55-78.

26) Cristi, *From Civil*, here 73.

with reference to Serbian Orthodox Christianity). When one can, after all, see the religious nationalism as the manifestation a type of civil religion, this is because it *pretends* to be open and universal. The conception of the nation is that everybody participates in it. Conflict and opposition are not accepted. The religious nationalism is thought of as the foundation of the state, and on this background, conflict is thought of as merely 'domestic disturbances.'

Studies of religious nationalism are numerous.[27] In these studies, a number of legitimization practices of the state are connected with religion. This can basically be done in two ways. One may, first, draw upon an already established religious terminology and existing religious institutions. Here, a good example is, once again, the rule of Milosevic. Milosevic legitimized his politics with reference to a number of myths that connect the religious with the political. The most important of these was the myth of Prince Lazar, who was a Serbian prince and a religious martyr according to Serbian Orthodox Christianity. In other words, Milosevic took over an already existing religious myth and made use of it to legitimize his autocratic leadership of Serbia.[28] The other possibility is to invent a whole new religion for the state and thus radically sever ties with anything conventionally religious. Whereas the first form of sacralizing of the state can be designated as civil religious, I will call the other form a political religion. This form I will describe in the following.

Before doing so, however, I will summarize what characterizes civil religion and the study of this phenomenon. First of all, civil religion is characterized by being a religion for the state – a fairly abstract and non-committal one which therefore, second, does not stand in opposition to 'private' religious conceptions. Third, civil religion is maintained through a number of public rituals, for instance, national holidays, presidents, soldiers, or others who are given a martyr's role, or a national narrative or heroic epos in which national history is connected to a forthcoming goal. Fourth, it is characteristic for religion in civil religion (or religious nationalism) to be seen as a form of national adhesive that can form a pre-political

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27) For instance, Allan Davies, *The Crucified Nation. A Motif in Modern Nationalism*, (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2008) and Smith, Anthony, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

28) Lene Kühle & Carsten Bagge Laustsen, "The Kosovo Myth: nationalism and revenge," Tonny Brems Knudsen & Carsten Bagge Laustsen (eds), *Kosovo between War and Peace*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 19-36.

foundation for the state. Finally, it is an ongoing discussion to what extent civil religion is connected with positive consequences or with negative ones such as war and violent expansion. The latter discussion is an obvious link to the next approach: political religion. The important aspect here is not the existence of religious conceptions and semantics that may serve as a foundation for the state, but rather the political production of such conceptions in order to outmatch political opponents.

Political religion

At first glance, political religion and civil religion may seem to have quite a few traits in common. In both cases, we deal with a form of religiosity that sacralizes the state. Whereas religious politics touches upon the question of politics in the sense of political programs or political opinions, both civil religion and political religion deal with the foundation of the state, that is, with the constitution of a political community ('*la politique*'). What, then, is the difference? Primarily, whereas religious politics and civil religion can be associated with an established and conventional religiosity, the term political religion refers to a religion invented by the state.

I (unlike others) avoid using the term religious nationalism to cover a specific approach to studying the relationship between religion and politics because the term seems to cover two distinct strategies of analysis. Religious nationalism may either be analyzed as a nationalism that harnesses the conventional religiosity (which I choose to analyze as civil religion) or as a religion invented by the state (which I analyze as political religion). Another important difference is that whereas civil religion is usually seen as something that allows for pluralism and that does not directly dictate action, political religion is characterized as totalitarian and as demanding particular courses of action. Finally, a central difference is that civil religion connects nationalism with something transcendent whereas political religion is immanent. This will be elaborated below. Gentile makes the distinction between civil religion and political religion in the following way:

> Civil religion is the conceptual category that contains the forms of sacralization of a political system that guarantee a plurality of ideas, free competition in the exercise of power, and the ability of the governed to dismiss their governments through peaceful and constitutional methods. Civil religion

> therefore respects individual freedom, coexists with other ideologies, and does not impose obligatory and unconditional support for its commandments. Political religion is the sacralization of a political system founded on an unchallengeable monopoly of power, ideological monism, and the obligatory and unconditional subordination of the individual and the collectivity to its code of commandments. Consequently, a political religion is intolerant, invasive, and fundamentalist, and it wishes to permeate every aspect of an individual's life and of a society's collective life.[29]

The study of political religion has had a particularly strong position in connection with the study of the use of rituals and myths by totalitarian states. Whereas in civil religion, already existing religious convictions are drawn upon, it is characteristic of totalitarian states that such convictions are often seen as rivals of the state's own religion. Only one religious center is allowed. The religion of the state is thus a surrogate religion intended to outmatch traditional religious institutions.[30] The religious is thus not identified as references to conventional religious scriptures (as is the case in religious politics and civil religion). Rather, a large number of phenomena are comparable to something we would conventionally understand as religion, that is, as comparable to what goes on in 'the religious sector.'

Nazism, for instance, had a counterpart to practically everything offered by the world religions. Instead of a divinely given law, it was the (earthly) law that granted the individual's existence meaning in relation to a higher goal. One needed a chosen people, the Aryans, and a tempter, the Jews. The Aryans were led by a prophet, the *Führer*, who had, by revelation, gained insight into divine truths. The people met its prophet through mass meetings that served as a form of politically religious church service. The holy book was, naturally, *Mein Kampf* – the Nazi counterpart to the *Bible*, and just as naturally, the parallel to the cross was the swastika, although the latter, according to Nazism, was not a symbol of weakness and submission, such as the Christian cross, but rather one of strength. Finally, there was a conception of a paradise – not one of the beyond, however, but one here on Earth: the Millennial Kingdom.[31]

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29) Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), here xv.

30) Gentile, *Politics*, here xvi.

31) For a comprehensive analysis of Nazism as a political religion, see Claus Ekkehart Bärsch, *Die politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus*: *Die religiöse Dimension der NS-Ideologie in den Schriften von Dietrich Eckart, Joseph Goebbels, Alfred Rosenberg und Adolf Hitler,* (München: Fink, 2002).

Why construct political religions at all? The response is often that secularization has created a form of vacuum. In the German case, the Weimar system gave birth to a crisis of orientation. One was searching for stable points of reference, and this was precisely what Nazism qua religion offered. In other words, political religions are seen as reactions to the disenchantment or, if one prefers, the secularization of the world. We are thus not dealing with a move from more to less religion but rather a move from one form of religion to another or from 'genuine' religion to 'pseudo'-religion. On this background, the religious is understood as a kind of trump card. The political is too weak, and based on this fact, the use of pseudo-religious semantics and practices can re-enchant the political. What religion is useful for is seducing the masses and ensuring their support of a particular political program. This also implies that political religion is a relatively new phenomenon. As pointed out by Arendt,[32] the basis of political religion (and totalitarianism) is a democratic (and therefore precisely political and not theocratic) system in which it is central to secure one's support from and legitimacy with the masses.

In the political religion approach, the religious is primarily understood in a functionalist way. Religious functions can be maintained in other fields, in this case the state. Whereas in the civil religion approach, one would look for traces of religious terminology, in the political religion approach, one looks for religious resemblances that do not, however, immediately pose as religion. What, then, is the difference between something genuinely religious and something pseudo-religious? This distinction is, almost without exception, constructed as a difference between a religion that has transcendence and one that does not. This transcendence may be the conception of a human being as sinful and unable to live up to the divine as a higher goal unattainable to man, a higher entity by which one will be judged, or a state of being that has not yet been established or attained. As we remember, it was absolutely central for Bellah that civil religion refers to something transcendent. Political religion may, in this sense, be seen as an instrumentalist use of civil religion.

Which property of political religion is disclamatory of transcendence? Yes, precisely – the fact that it is political. It is by using religion politically that it loses its transcendence. In political religion, the religious serves as a means of de-politicization. A given political program will, when surrounded by a religious aura, seem like the only way forward. Studies of political

32) Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (London: Harcourt Brace, 1979).

religion have often been criticized for stretching the concept of religion too far. As is seen in the above, this amounts to banging on an open door. The point is precisely that we are not dealing with genuine religion. Why, then, use the concept religion and not merely political ideology? Because the political program imbedded in a (quasi-)religious language has an entirely different punch than it would otherwise have had. Or, to put it differently: The religion is quite genuine, and it thrives on genuinely religious aspirations. The problem is that it becomes political, that it is used politically. We thus, once again, encounter the classical distinction between a private and a public sphere. The religious does not belong in the political sphere and should therefore be kept outside. If this is not observed, catastrophic consequences may follow. Nazism and Stalinism are examples of precisely that.

One problem here may be the assessment of when something is transcendent. The religion that is approved of becomes one without much of an edge in relation to political action. Religion is reduced to that which may constitute a political community whereas religion, when serving as the foundation for a political program, is regarded as an evil. One might also ask whether such a relativized, completely transcendent, and democratic religion even exists. Is a religion possible that has no elements of orthodoxy, fundamentalism, or absolutism? Slavoj Žižek answers no. Religion without these properties is not a genuine religion. The rejection of 'totalitarianism' and 'fundamentalist' is really the rejection of any genuine political commitment. On this background, a re-politicization of the Western democracies is, for Žižek,[33] only possible as a return to the religious in its most orthodox sense. Here, one could point to the fact that the flip side of this critique of fundamentalism is an appraisal of liberalism and, with it, a clear distinction between the religious and the political.

In summary, the main interest of political religion as a tradition is how totalitarian states construct a religion that legitimates the regime. The political is regarded, first, as too weak in itself, which is why the state needs to sacralize its existence. Political religion should therefore be understood as a rival of conventional religions, religions belonging to the 'sacred' sector. Third, the religious in political religion is seen as a form of fundamental discourse concerning the political itself. As in the study of

33) Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*, (London: Verso, 2001).

civil religion, religion contributes to constituting the political community, but it does so in a way that leaves no room for political dissent. '*La*' and '*le politique*' converge; they are reduced to one and the same, thereby dissolving democracy. Religion, thus, fourth, becomes a means of de-politicization. Politics in the sense of a plurality of political programs, and thus of a conflict, becomes impossible.

Political Theology

Some understand political theology as a theology that is explicitly political, such as the Latin American Liberation Theology. The Liberation Theologians were a group of Catholic theologians who found in Catholicism the foundation for a social effort among the poor and underprivileged.[34] The movement took its name from Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutierrez'[35] book *A Theology of Liberation*, which serves as the movement's foundation. Liberation Theology is best understood as a form of hybrid thinking combining religion and Marxism: The responsibility for one's neighbor – the poor – incites social change that may improve their conditions. This social-revolutionary work is to be understood as a preparation for the return of the Messiah. In my opinion, this conception of political theology should be labeled religious politics, since we deal here with a number of religious dogmas from which political consequences are derived.

The term political theology may be used in two other senses, of which I will include only the last under what I will establish as political theology. Whereas in the above use of the concept, 'political' qualifies the theological – thus presenting a theology with political consequences – the emphasis may also be placed on the political, thus signifying a politics or a political philosophy that contains a theology. It may be difficult to make an exact judgment as to whether something is a political theology or a theology with a political edge, but as a start, one may distinguish between different professions. Is the case in question one of trained theologians thinking in a political direction or one of political thinkers approaching the

34) For an overview of the tradition of liberation theology, see Robert S. Mackin, "Liberation Theology: The Radicalization of Social Catholic Movements," *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 13/3 (2012), 333-352.

35) Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation. History, Politics, and Salvation*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988).

theological? If we take the European canon, Benedict de Spinoza[36] is often mentioned as the first to carry out a political theology. However, one may also reach back further and claim that, for instance, St. Augustine[37] has a political theology. With the distinction between the '*City of God*' and the '*City of Man*,' an opening is made for thinking of the political as something non-derivatory, and consequently, the need arises (for a religious thinker) to conceive of the connection between the religious and the political. By way of more recent thinkers with a political theology, one might mention Eric Vogelin,[38] Jacob Taubes,[39] and Slavoj Žižek.[40]

In this article, what I am interested in is a third form of political theology that is primarily associated with German law scholar and political theoretician Carl Schmitt. Schmitt also, in many ways, fits in as a member of the group of political thinkers mentioned above. Schmitt wished to develop a political theory from Catholic premises[41] that, in the present context, is of lesser importance. Of great importance, on the other hand, is a brief passage in a book bearing the title *Political Theology*, where the following passage serves as the foundation for an entirely new way of enquiring about the relationship between religion and politics:

> All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development – in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver – but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts. The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology. Only by being aware of this analogy can we appreciate the manner in which the philosophical ideas of the state developed in the last centuries.[42]

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36) Benedict de Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise. A Political Treatise*, (New York: Dover, 1951).

37) St. Augustine, *City of God*, (London: Penguin, 1984).

38) Eric Vogelin, *Modernity without Restraint: The Political Religions, The New Science of Politics, and Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999).

39) Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

40) Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute – or, why is the Christian legacy worth fighting for?*, (London: Verso, 2000) and Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf. The Perverse Core of Christianity*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003).

41) Carl Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, (London: Greenwood Press, 1996).

42) Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology. Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), here 36.

Implicit in the above is an entire program for the analysis of the relationship between religion and politics. Let us go through the elements of this program one by one. The first sentence claims that all pregnant political concepts (or, as Schmitt writes, all concepts of state theory) are secularized religious concepts. First of all, naturally, this means that political concepts that have the immediate appearance of being non-religious may be traced back to the religious concepts of earlier times. Many have seized hold at this point. For instance, Ernst Kantorowitz[43] has investigated how the medieval conception of the king's two bodies may be traced back to the conception of Christ having both a mortal and an immortal, that is, divine, body. Others have pointed out that the conception of the nation as an organism is modeled over the conception of the Christian community as the body of Christ united by the Holy Spirit, where everybody occupies a certain place in the scheme of things. In the above quotation, Schmitt himself gives two examples of the religious roots of secular concepts: the conception of the exception (and the decision) points back to the conception of the miracle, and the legislator or, rather, the sovereign – Schmitt does not think democratically – points back to the conception of an unrestrained creator god. Like God, the sovereign can create something from nothing: *creatio ex nihilo*.

In the cited passage, however, it is important to note that the concepts of state theory are *secularized* theological concepts and, later in the passage, that an *analogy* to the religious is the key to understanding the state's development. Schmitt is thus not saying that the concepts of state theory are theological concepts – they are secularized. An absolute symmetry is not in effect. One is forced to work one's way through by analogy. What do these two qualifications imply? First of all, that the religious connotations are no longer present. The concepts are not associated with something we would conventionally understand as religious, something that is to be found in the 'sacred' sector. Second, the concepts have been moved from the ecclesial to the political sphere. Finally, Schmitt does not claim that the state is the heir of the Church in the sense that it acts as a framework for that which the Church has traditionally framed: baptism, confirmation, matrimony, interment, and so on.

In effect, an analogy exists between the theological concepts and those of state theory because they point back to the same problematic.

43) Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

For Schmitt, this problematic concerns metaphysics. Any community refers back to something that founds it. Transcendence can never be eliminated – at the most, it can be disavowed, which Schmitt claims is the move made by his opponents, the liberalists. Religion has been the sphere from which human beings have articulated their basic conditions, and this is the task now managed by state theory. This theory thus concerns not only the state, but also, more fundamentally, human existence as such. If such a parallelism exists, why return to the theological concepts, one might ask. The argument goes that this basic human condition is better expressed here than after the process of secularization. Liberalism, rationalism, positivism, and enlightenment thought in general, have shrouded the political in misguiding and dangerous obscurantism, and our deductions by analogy help us penetrate this obscurity.

Thus, it is not religion as such that interests Schmitt, but rather the questions that also religion attempts to answer. These questions will always have some pertinence, and so only the linguistic garments change that cloth our responses. The reference to the history of the concepts is thus not an historical argument as such. Schmitt is a structuralist and a metaphysician. The route through the religious concepts of earlier times is merely a methodological shortcut that serves to make the metaphysics of the concepts of the state stand out more clearly. By now, it should also be clear that theology and not religion is central to the study of political theology. It is of no concern whether people are religious and worship a deity. What is of interest is rather the metaphysical thinking – which is, typically, most clearly expressed in theological treaties and political philosophy.

What, then, is the political component of political theology? To Schmitt, the political refers first to the act of distinguishing between friend and enemy and to a number of derived distinctions such as that between the respective states of normality and exception.[44] At the next level, the political refers to a specific field: the state. Schmitt speaks precisely of the concepts of *state* theory as secularized theological concepts. The political, however, is not necessarily to be found here. In partisan warfare, for instance, the political is detached from its traditional connection with a specific field.[45] Politics, to Schmitt, is a decisionist act that ends political

44) Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
45) Carl Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan: Intermediate Commentary on the Concept of the Political*, (New York: Telos Press, 2007).

discussion by power of will. Politics (security policies, the declaration of a state of exception, sovereignty, and so on) is thus a form of de-politicization through which an irreducible will is made manifest. An obvious parallel thus exists between the political role that is played by religion in political theology and in political religion, respectively. Religion qua metaphysics is politics.

Here, we encounter one of two obvious points of critique concerning political theology. The analogy constructed by Schmitt is one between a monotheistic religion and an authoritarian politics. Both make manifest the conception of an irreducible will. But are not democracy and secularization characterized precisely by breaking with such a conception? As argued by Lefort,[46] democracy is characterized precisely by the vacancy of the place of power. Here, secularization thus concerns not only the transferring of 'the religious' from the religious sphere to the political one, but also the establishment of political pluralism and divisions of power. This is, however, not necessarily an argument against political theology as such, but rather one against Schmitt's particular version thereof. One might point out that modern democracy and the conception of the division of power also have religious roots – for instance, in the guise of the conceptions of the Trinity, of a deistic God, who, after creating the world, has retreated from it, leaving the completion of creation up to humankind, and that of fallen man, who is fallible and who will therefore never attain divine likeness.

Relatively few empirical studies exist that are inspired by political theology – probably because of the laboriousness of establishing historical parallels in order to demonstrate the permanence of the same metaphysical questions. One would have to trace a single concept several hundred years back. A shortcut is therefore often made. The analogy may be *postulated*, based on structural similarities between the concepts of the current era and those of an earlier one. The question now remaining is that concerning the significance of the secularization of concepts. Schmitt's answer is that when the metaphysical character of concepts is denied, a crisis of orientation ensues, such as the one seen in the Weimar Republic. Here, admittedly, matters become somewhat unclear. Are we dealing with secular concepts that blind us to the metaphysics of power, thereby weakening the political, or do they, in effect, have the same political potency,

46) Lefort, "The Permanence."

only clad in different linguistic garments? Does the analogy refer to a conceptual symmetry or to a more fundamental problematic to which the concepts explicitly (the theological ones) or implicitly (the secularized ones) refer – or to which they, perhaps, do not refer at all?

In consequence of the above, two strategies of analysis are open to pursuit: On the one hand, one may focus on secular concepts and, on such a background, make the connection with metaphysical questions, which these concepts are not, however, able to grasp with sufficient force (to Schmitt, the concepts of liberalism). Or one may point to the fact that a large number of practices and concepts are, in effect, substitutes for religious concepts (to Schmitt, the concepts of state theory). Schmitt oscillates between these two strategies, or rather, he combines them in what is effectively a third strategy of analysis. As already mentioned, the metaphysical questions are always the same, but three distinct vocabularies may more or less directly refer to these questions. One vocabulary is that of theological concepts. After the process of secularization, these have been abandoned, and we are thus left oscillating between two political vocabularies: one in which the metaphysical pole is denied (that of liberalism: the contest among parties, individualism, division of power, democracy, and so on) and one in which it is not (that of decisionism: reason of state, sovereignty, friend-enemy relations, authority, and so on).

By extension, one might benefit from distinguishing between Right and Left Schmittianism, respectively. Right Schmittians would be characterized by their approving of the re-sacralizing of political language in what one might call a political existentialism. Left Schmittians would also focus on the sacralization of political language and practice; only they would view this as an unfortunate development blocking out radical democracy. Both traditions focus on the pendulum motion between sacralized and non-sacralized language, differing only on their normative conception as to where the pendulum ought to swing.

An obvious example of a Left Schmittian manner of analysis is the so-called Copenhagen School in International Relations, with Ole Wæver[47] as its dominant representative. The point here is that making something a question of security contributes to its de-politicization: instead of democratic deliberation, security policy gives us decisions made by a council for security policy and, ultimately, by a sovereign. Instead of the negotiations

47) Ole Wæver, *Concepts of Security*, (København: Institut for Statskundskab, 1997).

of normal politics, 'trial and error,' and thorough preliminary work, we have a practice of security policy that demands resolute action and in which one is prepared to use extraordinary means, thus breaking with the constitution and with positive law. A political sovereignty in the guise of a strong and irreducible will is substituted for the democracy of discussion. In this Left Schmittianism, religion is an evil that removes politics from the democratic agora.

Concerning their understanding of religion, Left and Right Schmittianism are both vulnerable to the same critique also directed at the approach of political religion. Is it impossible to unite religion and democracy? Is religion necessarily about unbounded authority, delegated will; about deferred and existential choices? Based on classical realism (mainly Niebuhr), Vibeke Schou Tjalve[48] has answered that the religious may also be constructed in other ways – as an awareness of human fallibility, of the porosity of the political community and, consequently, also of the tragedy of international politics. What Tjalve suggests is thus a democratic political theology. At first glance, one might view this as something different from what Schmitt advocates, but as far as strategy of analysis is concerned, the approach is identical. In both cases, secular political concepts are traced back to a religious conceptual frame.

The starting point for the strategy of analysis called 'political theology' is, in summary, that all pregnant political concepts are secularized theological concepts. The pregnancy of such concepts means, second, that they have articulated the basic human condition. A distinction is therefore, third, made between a structural and metaphysical level (which is always present) and specific vocabularies that give content to the structural level. Fourth, this occasions a distinction between concepts in which the metaphysical pole is denied (those of liberalism) and concepts in which it shines through (those of state theory). The concepts of state theory are pregnant concepts whereas those of liberalism are not. Political theology thus, as our fifth point, implies an explicit normative critique of rationalism and modernity, that is, of the shrouding brought about by secularism. Finally, two strategies of analysis are open. One may, through the discipline of conceptual history, trace the religious core of given religious concepts connecting the concepts of our time with those of a religious period, or one may argue

48) Vibeke Schou Tjalve, *Realist Strategies of Republican Peace: Niebuhr, Morgenthau, and the Politics of Patriotism Dissen*t, (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2008).

a structural similarity, an analogy, between the secular concepts and the religious ones.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to map out four distinct approaches to studying the relationship between religion and politics. As has hopefully become clear, we are not only faced with four different ways of interpreting relationships between religion and politics. There is also great variation as to what is understood by religion and politics within the respective approaches. The article has attempted to inform these two aspects: how one analyzes the relationship between religion and politics (strategies of analysis) and what one understands by religion and politics and, consequently, also by secularization, that is, by the conception of a separation of these two concepts, spheres, and logics.

The four approaches regard their object of analysis each in their own manner, thereby also differing as to how they construct the object. We are thus not dealing with four different competing theories about 'the same thing.' However, precisely for this reason, the application of several or all of the four approaches to a certain phenomenon may be beneficial. This would not amount to theoretical triangulation (for which one and the same object would have to be investigated by various methods), but rather a perspectival realism that contributes to unearthing different aspects of a given phenomenon.

One could perhaps, in addition to the four approaches mentioned in this article, speak of a fifth approach, an approach that critically investigates how the very distinction between the political and the religious is constructed. What is the politics of constructing the distinction between the political and the religious? This would be the question guiding work within the fifth approach. There is certainly a need for reflective attitude like the one just described, but as I see it, it is not really an approach like the four mentioned earlier; it is perhaps more of a reflective way of using the four approaches than a genuinely new one. First and foremost, it differs because it is does not contain a theory. It does not have an explicit advance understanding of the relationship between the political and the religious and a set procedure for how it can be studied.

In lacking an explicit theory, the analysis of the construction of the religious and the political either takes as its starting point the way these

concepts are used in everyday language and by political agents. In this way, it approaches the field of research in a manner not unlike the two first approaches mentioned in this article. Or, different ways of constructing 'the same' is investigated, that is, something that is considered to be genuinely political or religious, and as such, the way of research is implicitly harboring on the third or the fourth approach mentioned in this article. Even though the relationship between the political and the religious is investigated critically, one still presupposes an initial meaning of the two core words: 'the political' and 'the religious.' What one can do, however, is to be critically aware of how these concepts shape the investigative frame used, an awareness that is indeed enhanced through perspectival shifts in the four approaches. Thus, I agree with Hurd when she writes the following:

> To take the secular/religious distinction, presumable one's own or the disciplinary norm, for granted is to miss the influence of varieties of secularism in international relations. International-relations scholars need to attend to how the terms of this distinction prestructure political theory and practice. Conventional negotiations of the secular/religious distinction in the discipline of international relations presume a fixed definition of the secular and, corresponding, the religious. This rules out identifying and framing objects of study that require historization and politicization of the secular/religious binary to appear in the researcher's field of vision.[49]

Even though I agree with the abovementioned points, I still have two critical remarks. The first is that concepts, of course, always pre-structure what is investigated. One should strive for an awareness of how they do so, and the aim of outlining the four approaches is precisely to facilitate such a reflective attitude towards one's object of study. If the above is understood as an aim to move beyond theory and towards simply investigating things as they are 'out there,' that is, independently of a theory and of concepts, I think the move will be not towards a more reflective and critical attitude but rather in the other direction. The way out of the constraints of theory is not empiricism. It is an increased theoretical awareness of the

49) Elisabeth S. Hurd, "A Suspension of (Dis)Belief: The Secular-Religious Binary and the Study of International Relations," Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer & Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds), *Rethinking Secularism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 166-184, here 172.

blind spots that ground all attempts to understand and investigate a phenomenon.[50]

Second, the endeavor to investigate the many historically and geographically specific forms of secularization[51] is, of course, superior to an undertaking that treast the political and the religious as a-historical essences. As already mentioned, one can see the research in different versions of secularism as a reflective way of understanding the bar that separates the public and the private as well as the political and the religious in the approach I have labeled religious politics. The study of religious politics is the study of the translation of religious viewpoints into political statements, but besides that, it is also an investigation into the filtering processes that allow for something to become a public concern and prevent other things from gaining that attention. I also mentioned that in democracies, one norm regulating the translation of religious viewpoints into politically relevant statements is the idea of contestation. This is, of course, only one aspect. Many other things might be seen as relevant for distinguishing the private from the public and for limiting the role religion might play in the political sphere. And what is considered relevant might, of course, vary geographically and historically.

A critical and post-secular approach might thus be seen as a fifth and new approach differing from the other four mentioned in this article; but only if these four approaches are understood in an essentialized way. If they are not, the post-secular and critical attitude would rather designate a reflective stance towards the way concepts are used in the four approaches. As there are many secularisms, there are, of course, also many variants of civil religions, political religions in various formats, and finally, different political theologies. We are dealing not with fixed theories in the positivist sense but with approaches, with ways of doing research.

Now, as a form of summary, I will briefly compare the four approaches with regard to their conception of what religion, politics, and secularization are. Starting with the conception of religion, religious politics subscribes to a classical understanding, based on everyday language, of what religion is. Religion is what takes place in the ecclesial field; it is about faith made explicit, about particular religious acts (prayer, attending church,

50) Niklas Luhmann, *Introduction to Systems Theory*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), here 101-120.

51) Hurd, *The Politics*.

reading religious scripture, and so on), and finally, religion is identified in the shape of explicit references to religious texts. The same may, to a large degree, be said of civil religion as an approach, with certain qualifications, however; the religious references are of a more diffuse nature, and religion is conceived of as the sacralization of phenomena in the sphere of the state (and not in the traditionally religious sphere). In the approaches called political religion and political theology, the interest is shifted towards the political. As indicated by the names of the approaches, religious politics and civil religion concentrate on the identification of certain religious phenomena that are significant for politics, whereas the remaining two approaches are interested in religions (and theologies) that are political. Here, the religious becomes a means in the political struggle whereas the political, in the first two approaches, serves as a platform for the articulation of something religious.

These four conceptions of religion are brought into relation with the political in widely diverging ways. If we take a look, first, at the connection with substantial religions, the religious in religious politics and in political religion does not immediately form a connection with something else. In religious politics, religion is something underlying (a matrix), concerning which one cannot, in principle, compromise. Of course, one may strike political deals, but these are not seen as something compromising one's religious position. This possibility of political negotiation is entirely absent in political religion, which is an attempt at rooting the political in a fundamentally religious orientation. As opposed to these two approaches, in civil religion and political theology, the specific nature of the religious content is open. In the one case, religion is conceived in a very abstract sense, and in the other, as metaphysics rather than religion in any substantial sense. In both cases, the focus is on ways in which religion may help constitute a political scene ('*la politique*') whereas religious politics and political religion focus upon various political programs ('*le politique*').

As we have seen, there is a great difference between, on the one hand, religion as a phenomenon that enables democracy and, on the other, as a phenomenon de-politicizing the political. Religious politics may be found in democratic as well as non-democratic settings, depending on whether or not the necessity is accepted of some form of mediation between religious stances and political positions. Civil religion, in Bellah's version, was the very prerequisite of democracy since it is the conception of belonging to a people that makes it possible for people to negotiate amongst themselves rather than make war. The dominant conception, in the political religion

and political theology approaches, of the relationship between the religious and the political is that religion here contributes to giving the political an absolutist form. Skeptical voices concerning both approaches have, however, pointed to the possibility of religion not necessarily serving only to found an absolutist or totalitarian state – that religion may also serve as a foundation for democracy.

Secularism, as we have seen, occasions the distinction between the private and the public. Secularization is not about the disappearance of religion, but rather about the separation of two spheres. All four approaches were characterized by their acceptance of this premise. The point of departure is that a distinction is possible between something political and something religious. Of all the approaches, political theology comes closest to escaping this distinction, but still, the very claim that pregnant political concepts are secularized theological concepts demands that religion be separable from politics. In religious politics, the distinction between public and private was played out as the separation of a 'private' religious sphere that held significance in the public sphere. People are religious first and political next. In political religion, the exact opposite is true. Here, religion is tied to the public sphere, from which a number of devout, believing subjects are produced. Concerning the two remaining approaches, civil religion and political theology are both tied to the analysis of religion in the public space and its relation to the political process.

American political scientist William Connolly[52] has developed an analytical approach for understanding what he calls contested concepts. One concept, given as an example, is the concept of politics (other concepts are, for instance, equality, freedom, and democracy). Characteristic of a contested concept is that it is normatively loaded, a conceptual cluster consisting of several elements with a lack of consensus as to which elements should form the definition of the concept, and with no single element forming the core or forming part of all concepts (rather, one deals with a family resemblance among concepts, if we may here use Wittgenstein's term), and finally, that the application range of the concept is disputed. When concepts are contested, one may view this as an indication that they are politicized, but one may also see it as a manifestation of academic dispute. And, in the final analysis, these two types of contest are not necessarily completely distinct. The concepts of politics and

52) William E. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*, (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993).

religion – as well as their mutual relationship (they are very much defined by mutual opposition) – are disputed in both senses.

One thing, however, stands out as uncontested, namely the very possibility of distinguishing between something political and something religious. All four approaches have this same blind spot. The theory of secularization, when read at its most abstract, is the narrative of how the religious and the political were separated. The above is my suggestion as to how one may analyze the ways in which the two phenomena can, on this background, form a relation with one another. I do not think an approach is possible that does not take the distinction between the political and the religious as its starting point. The two concepts, religion and politics, are defined in relation to one another in such a way that any attempt to move beyond this mutual articulation would dissolve both, and thereby also the possibility of any political science approach to the study of religion in the political space.

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