POSTSECTEAL SPIRITUALITY, ENGAGED HERMENEUTICS, AND CHARLES TAYLOR’S NOTION OF HYPERGOODS

INTRODUCTION: DISCOVERING SPIRITUALITY IN A POSTTHEISTIC WORLD

In his book, Ethics in the global village: Moral insights for the post 9–11 USA, Hill (2008) refers to the words of the pastoral counselor Howard Clinebell (1984:138), who stated that our age is marked by ‘an epidemic of moral confusion and value distortion’. According to Hill (2008:16), we ‘are like children torn by a divorce, trying to decide which parent to live with – the relativist or the dogmatist’. However, ‘to frame our moral epidemic in this polar fashion is to ignore broad spectrums of actual moral experience’ (Hill 2008:17). Against the background of this ‘epidemic’ and the possible ‘broad spectrums’, this essay emphasises the fullness of being spiritual, even in the secular age.

However, to be spiritual and to do theology in our present-day context does not imply the denial of being rational too. A sacrificium intellectus is not a prerequisite for being spiritual or religious. A change of paradigm, however, also does not mean business as usual. Fifteen years ago, in an appeal for ‘engaged hermeneutics’ with regard to responsibility morality in the light of the postmodern paradigm shift, I cited Herbert Butterfield’s (1975:1) words that what we need is ‘putting on a different kind of thinking cap’ (Van Aarde 1994:584–585). On the basis of two citations, from Butterfield’s (1975) The origins of modern science: 1300–1800 and Kuhn’s ([1957] 1979) The copernican revolution respectively, Kopfensteiner puts it as follows in an article entitled ‘Historical epistemology and moral progress’:

A shift of paradigm will result in “handling the same bundle of data as before, but placing them in a new system of relations with one another by giving them a different framework, all of which virtually means putting on a different kind of thinking cap”. A scientific revolution has a dual nature; it is “at once ancient and modern, conservative and radical”. To some practitioners the new paradigm will be the point of departure for previously unanticipated scientific activity, to others, however, the new paradigm is merely akin to its predecessors. Hence, each evolutionary niche of development understands the world differently, but never independently of its predecessors. The epistemological discussion within philosophy and history of science has shown that “(the) reciprocity of tradition and the emancipation accounts for moral progress. At each evolutionary niche, new possibilities of being-in-the-world are opened up to human freedom. This is the meaning of a shift of paradigm in a moral context, and its possibility rests on a historical [i.e. a social constructionist – A.G. v A.] rather than essentialistic understanding of the moral law.” (Kopfenstein 1992:47, 57)

Secularity represents such a ‘shift of paradigm in a moral context’ and has brought about a change in traditional Christendom. Charles Taylor, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy and Political Science at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, sees a link between classical theism (or even pantheism), practised by Augustine in the fourth century for example, and the movement away from theism, brought about by Jean Jacques Rousseau. Taylor describes the continuity in this paradigm shift, which happened despite Rousseau’s notion of self-determining freedom, as follows:

To see what is new in this, we have to see the analogy to earlier moral views, where being in touch with some source – God, say, or the Idea of the Good – was considered essential to full being. Only now the source we have to connect with is deep in us. This is part of the massive subjective turn to modern culture, a new form of inwardness, in which we come to think of ourselves as beings with inner depths. At first, this idea that the

1 Yolanda Dreyer (2006:157), with reference to Berger and Luckmann’s book (1967), The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge, explains ‘social constructionism’ – over against the notion of immutability in the concept ‘essentialism’ – as follows: ‘Berger & Luckmann (1967:41) refer to the Seinsgebundenheit (“the existential determination”) of human knowledge. According to the sociology of knowledge, reality itself is a social construct, a product of socially conditioned observation. According to this view, authors of texts – present or past – give creative expression to reality. These expressions are produced within the constraints of history and are shaped by the personal and social experiences of the author, who share a framework of credibility with their audiences. No communication or social interaction can take place outside of such shared social and cultural frameworks. Beliefs expressed in language are credible within a specific frame of reference. Within this framework concepts are shared and views that contribute to meaning making can be appropriated. Communication happens within a framework of shared concepts and a common context. In this way truth claims can gain credibility and convictions acquire power. Also within this framework unacceptable points of view and harmful interactions will be exposed

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While agnosticism refuses any particular homage to a specific god, henotheism special respect is paid to one of them, according to which there are many gods, but that affirm the existence of a transcendent God and affirm that fideism, monotheism, polytheism and henotheism are all views that prevail today. Theism, pantheism, panentheism, deism, positivism that upholds the traditional proposition that 'God exists' as a 'truth of a conceptual necessity' (see Swinburne 1977:272-278; Sobel 2004). It is nonsense to assume a logical continuity between 'theism' and 'atheism', similar to the logical continuity between 'theism' and 'posttheism' (cf. Schrag 1997:69-74, 129; Van Huyssteen 1999:137-139).


In the course of presenting such 'ethics of authenticity' in this essay, two concepts, namely 'posttheism' and 'engaged hermeneutics', ought to be clarified at the outset. It seems reasonable that posttheism (see discussion of use of hyphenated and unhyphenated form later) presupposes a departure from theism. However, the critical part of the definition of 'posttheism' has to do with the prefix 'post-', which signifies two different meanings in one compound word. The same applies to a discussion within the field of postcolonial theory (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1989:1-4; Moore 2000:182-188; Young 1996:67-68; 2001:1-10) and of 'postmodernity' (e.g. Schrag 1997:69-74, 129; Van Huyssteen 1999:137-139).

If the two words 'post' and 'theism' are compounded to form one meaning, then it is important to understand what 'post(-)' brings anew to 'theism'. It certainly does not mean that the belief patterns that marked theism are things of the past. The 'post' in 'posttheism' is not simply a historical event in which one can move from 'theism' to 'post-religiosity in the sense of a total disenchantment, or to 'strong' atheism, which, in an age of reason, denies any existence of gods (see Philipse [2004] who claims theism to be an 'epistemological tragedy'). Furthermore, the 'post' in 'posttheism' does not imply a present-day 'logical positivism' that upholds the traditional proposition that 'God exists' as a 'truth of a conceptual necessity' (see Swinburne 1977) 1993:272-278; Sobel 2004). It is nonsense to assume a logical continuity between 'theism' and 'atheism', similar to the linear continuation between modernism and post-modernism or the continuation between colonialism and post-colonialism, and analogous to the shift from a pre-Copernican mythological worldview to a post-Copernican scientific worldview.

The term 'posttheism', without the hyphen, is preferred, because it is less suggestive of (imagined) chronological or ideological supersession (Moor 2000:182, with regard to 'postcolonialism'). Theism as a concept and, as a practice, is still active in a new form today. This new form is 'neo-orthodoxy'. Many different conceptualisations of the existence and nature of God still prevail today. Theism, pantheism, panentheism, deism, fideism, monotheism, polytheism and henotheism are all views that affirm the existence of a transcendent God and affirm that God is involved in creation. Henotheism, like agnosticism, is a polytheistic view according to which there are many gods, but in the case of henotheism special respect is paid to one of them, while agnosticism refuses any particular homage to a specific godhead. It seems that some atheists are also tolerant towards the conviction of believers that God exists. However, 'strong atheism' (referred to by Philipse [2008:179] as 'disjunctive atheism') advocates the absence of authenticity when adhering to whatsoever a theistic belief that ascribes attributes, such as omnipotence, omniscience, mutability (the quality of being unchangeable) and impassibility (incapable of suffering), to a god.

The unhyphenated compound word, 'posttheism', refers to a postmodern way of thinking that evolved as a critique on certain aspects of theism. It supposes a selective departure, but not a total break. It still affirms the existence of a transcendental God, without endorsing the old and mythical view that the world consists of three levels, namely heaven, earth and the underworld. If people were still to subscribe to this old worldview, it would amount to an instance of sacrificium intellectus.

Being spiritual within a posttheistic paradigm requires of one to ask the critical question on what is meant by speaking in a metaphorical manner about the Transcendence's actions with humankind. Yet, no one, including the writers of the Christian Bible, can speak about God in any manner other than by means of 'objectifying language'. Despite that, a posttheistic disposition acknowledges a dialectical manner of speaking metaphorically about God, while it does not want to objectify and humanise, or reify, God. God-talk, which manifests as an objectifying speaking about God's actions, does not necessarily imply that God becomes an object that interacts with people in ways similar to those in which one human being encounters another human being. Neither does it intend to imply that any speaking about God's actions could be possible without an analogous manner of speaking. God's actions cannot be proven objectively. These actions can only be experienced and seen in the effects they have on human beings' existential involvement in them.

Posttheism acknowledges that no worldview is final, and neither is the biblical manner of speaking therefore final. Within the Christian faith community, engaged hermeneutics – through the meeting with Jesus, or with the 'word' Jesus proclaimed, or the 'word' which proclaims Jesus' message – aims to establish the important insight that faith does not uphold propositions as truth, but presumes a living, existential relationship with God. Even though Christians are still part of history in this saeculum, they already become new human beings the very moment they make an affirmative decision about faith. Engaged hermeneutics pertains to the interpretation of the Scriptures in such a way that they can be understood as addressing kerygma. Such an interpretation is not devoid of scientific means, because it critically and with suspicion questions the intention and reception of Scriptures.

Engaged hermeneutics thus places the biblical text in a new light and poses new challenges to faith. It also implies that faith is not putting propositions forward as truth, but rather as a living existential relationship with God in the here and now of a believer's life. Discovering spirituality in a posttheistic world means engagement with God and fellow human beings in a world that takes both science and faith seriously. This, however, would not have been possible without the change that secularisation had brought about and the perseverance of faith in the transcendental. If God is, in this, in what postsecular spirituality is all about: the quest for hypergoods in today's mass populist and consumerist-oriented world (see Melton 2001).

**POSTSECULAR SPIRITUALITY**

It therefore does not come as a surprise that what theologians consider to be the most prestigious award in our present, so-called secularised world, which is ruled by the rise and fall of the free market economy, is not Oslo's Nobel Prize, but the prize of the John Templeton Foundation, awarded for 'progress toward research or discoveries about spiritual realities' (John...
Despite all the variables among secularised theologies, they all share a hostility towards the premodern transcendentalistic belief that God created the world, intervenes in creation and interferes in the fate of creatures, either at God's own initiative, or sometimes on request through prayer; at other times again as a response to human beings' sacrifices or martyred suicide, or martyred death; or in response to peoples' worship and sacramental participation. Besides such an anti-theistic inclination, secularised theologies also contra-act to modern scholasticism and/or neo-orthodoxy. In the secular age, a revitalisation of orthodoxy manifests itself in ideas that God should be worshipped by means of strict adherence to both dogmatic propositional tenets and ecclesial-ordained liturgical practices, academic-oriented homilies from canonised Scriptures, and the celebration of divinely legitimated sacraments.

Neo-orthodoxy is a Scripture-based ideology in terms of which the Holy Scripture is considered to be normative, although by means of double and selective standards. For example, the Genesis narrative that the world was created in a time span of six days is not interpreted literally; yet biblical references to Jesus Christ's virginal conception and that he was bodily raised from death and ascended into heaven are understood literally as being empirically real. Similar narrations about Heracles or Augustus are regarded as mythical fictions (see, among others, Miller 2003; Scott 2008).

The third feature shared by secularised theologies is that they all reject fideism, which is a 'belief in belief', be that a belief in doctrine or in the church as such (e.g. confessionism or ecclesialism as a result of views such as the inerrancy of ecclesiastical creeds or ecclesiastical canons and office-bearers). Ironically, while neo-orthodox theism is part of the process of modern secularisation, modernistic neo-orthodoxy should be seen as a reaction to secularised liberal theology.

I therefore cannot endorse the appeal to enhance the renewal of 'reformed and evangelical orthodoxy' – such as recently proposed by Vos (2008:33–35) for the secularised Netherlands. However, an enhancement of neo-orthodoxy, even though disguised in seemingly acceptable reformational and/or evangelical vocabulary, would in our time mean regression and an escape from the challenges of postsecular realities. One of these realities is that our present-day context has moved away from what Taylor calls the 'Second Confessional Age' towards the 'Age of Authenticity'. The 'first' confessionalist outlook originated as a product of the sixteenth century. The 'second' is the result of a similar situation in which 'churches managed to organize so much of their members' lives, and hence became the focus of often intense loyalty, a sentiment akin to nationalism' (Taylor 2007:471–472). According to Taylor (2007:472), this 'second' confessionalism functioned powerfully and these 'powerful forms of faith' became one of the most popular faith traditions in the West in our time.

In his book, Liberal theology: A radical vision, Hodgson (2007:2) endorses the practical theologian from Manchester, Elaine Graham, who wrote: The complexities of our situation are such that liberal theology begins its work.' Graham identifies some
Jürgen Habermas played a significant role (Habermas 1981:3–14; cf. Browning & Schüssler Fiorenza 1992).

According to Adams (2006:198), Habermas claims that present-day grassroots spirituality ‘strips religious practices of their religiousness’. According to this view, religious traditions lost their operational basis because of the ‘collapse of metaphysics [that] caused theologians to assimilate to the atheism of university life, and thus betray their tradition’ (Habermas 2002:75–76). However, not even Jacques Derrida, the doyen of postmodern deconstructionism, agrees with such scepticism. Derrida is of the opinion that, of the various religions existing in the world, Christianity is perhaps the one that could transform itself. The process of globalisation began with ‘Roman Christianisation’ in the Constantine period from the 4th century onwards, and Christianity has proved its capability to face ‘unpredictable transformations’. According to Derrida (in Caputo, Hart & Sherwood 2005:33), even if the ‘deconstruction of Christianity’ develops, the roots of the Christian religion could indeed become unrecognisable and ‘yet, nevertheless, we will still be able to say that this is Christianity’.

For Paul Ricoeur ([1989] 1995:306), spirituality that is nurtured by the Jesus narrative cannot become an agency of hope, also not the church as institute (cf. Brewery, Wimendale & Monk 2000). In Pastoral praxeology, hermeneutics, and identity, Ricoeur refers to it as follows:

It is a problem of identity. It seems to me that this is also a problem for those concerned with pastoral ministry inasmuch as there is always the problem of the ‘who’: Who is the actor? Who intervenes? One intervenes in relation to whom?... It is in such reflection that the word ‘return’ takes on meaning, [such as when I speak of returning to myself, that is, of a return to what I am doing, but also to myself, to the self. (Ricoeur 1995:306)

This journey of such a ‘self’ implies that the ‘self’ as a ‘spiritual being’ has arrived at a ‘second naiveté’ (see Wallace [1990] 1995). A second naïveté assumes religio. In the first naïveté, religare was understood in accordance with its meaning of ‘binding’ or ‘keeping in protective custody’ (Simpson 1966:511). In this sense of the term, postsecular spirituality would mean the ‘end of religion’. According to Ricoeur’s sense of the word, religare means to return. This ‘return’ implies a ‘binding’ to something that goes back in time. Reliving it again today, as if for the first time, implies a deconstruction, a re-telling in order to both reformulate and retain. This is the ‘second naïveté’.

This returning completes the circle. But completing the circle does not mean returning to the old beginning. It is a process of suspicion that departs from the unacceptable and gives birth to new meaning. Such a ‘hermeneutical circle’ (Ricoeur 1995:186) of suspicion presupposes a return by means of remembering (in philosophical terms, mimesis; Ricoeur 1984–85) the important narratives of the biblical and ecclesiastical past, especially those of Jesus and of the church’s proclamation of his kingdom-message.

This process of returning to the past consists of three steps, all happening simultaneously: prefiguration, configuration, and refrigeration (Kearny 2001; 2004). The first implies the rational, critical, suspicious encountering of past faith experiences; in the second, ‘I am involved in the encounter’, not in a clinical, rational and objective way, but in a critical, rational, consciously suspicious way. The third tells the story of the birth of a new self – the interpretative process has changed me. The hermeneutist Pambrun explains it as follows:

In this sense, the configuration of the narrative becomes a cognitive and existential operation in my reframing of existence. The present, that is my life, becomes the place where my relationship in the future as hope and my relationship to the past as possibilities...
intersect, namely where the "unused potentialities of the past" are
affected on behalf of others.

(Pambrun 2001:296)

So many different options are available to people belonging
to our globalising, postsecular mass-consumerist culture.
During the bygone ages, prior to the Judeo-Christian option
(in its great variety), the options were mainly polytheism or
monotheism. Later on, in the Christian West, it became a choice
between God and Satan, and then, even later, between different
sets of theological dogmatic systems, religious traditions and
denominations within a tradition.

Before 1500, people were socialised into 'how things are and
should be'. Before the new millennium, 'exclusivist humanism'
was the main influence (Taylor 2007:19–21, 26–28, 41, 88, 98–99,
much greater variety is available.

As far as the Protestant Christian tradition is concerned,
one can say that 'theology', broadly seen, has to do with an
ecclesial reflection on the Word of God (as 'revelation') and
with the canons of the church (as deduced from the Bible).
However, mainline churches do not have the exclusive rights
to doing theology. Theology exists in mainline churches as
well as in what was previously called 'sects'. While some
pentecostal-charismatic groups claim not to be prescribed to
by traditional confessions, but to be guided by the Holy Spirit,
they too have internalised the central tenets of orthodoxy. This
socialisation can also be seen among 'public theologians' such
as film directors, poets and novelists. For centuries, people
embedded in the Westernised first-continental world have been
perpetuating traditional theism, supported by orthodox
doctrinal fideism. I am therefore sceptical about the typical
distinction that is being made between mainline churches and
charismatic churches, as if the two groups operated according
to two different 'theologies'.

HYPERGOODS

It becomes clear that spirituality manifests itself according to a
specific paradigm, which represents a kind of default mode to
which religious people involuntarily turn until such time as this
that the most significant change in the default mode took place
over a period of 500 years between 1500 and 2000 CE (Taylor
2007:13). The era before 1500 constituted the mythological premodern era, and that after 1500 the modern secularised era. We
have seen that Taylor (2007:27) describes the extremity of the
modern era as 'exclusive humanism'. In contrast to mythological
theism, people in the secularised, modern world can choose to be
religious or not, without the pressure of some external influence
or the fear of external retribution.

Anyone who considers herself/himself as being spiritual not
only lives with many values, but, according to Taylor (1989:62–
63), finds that one has to 'rank' that which is acknowledged as
'goods'. Ranking has the effect that some values are regarded
as more important than others, with some even being regarded as
'of supreme importance'. That moment in life when a commitment to that which is considered to be 'a highest good'
responds to a 'yes/no question with regard to what is 'utterly
decisive for what I am as a person'. Such a decision amounts
to a commitment. A strong commitment becomes 'higherorder goods', goods that are 'hypergoods'. Taylor refers to
them as follows: 'goods which not only are incomparably
more important than others but provide the standpoint from
which [values] must be weighed, judged, decided about' (Taylor

For Taylor, the love of God and the search for justice are examples of
hypergoods (cf. Taylor 1989:62–63; see also pp 63–73, 78, 81, 85,
88, 89, 98, 100–102, 104–106). Within Taylor's North American
culture, two aspects constitute the present-day 'ethics of justice',
namely the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, and the
issue of political integrity within a context of global pluralism
after September 11, 2001. Such ethics takes on an interpersonal
character, and in Christian circles it reopens the issue, among
others, of biblical hermeneutics, especially the phenomenon of
conflicting interpretation. Because of the interpersonal nature
of such ethics, the question, 'Why should I be moral?', cannot be
answered by a Christian simply by making an appeal to the Bible, since each generation needs to find the answer to this
question within its own situation and context.

From a hermeneutical point of view, it is simply not possible
to regard every statement in the Bible as relevant for all times.
Paul Tillich ([1969] 2007), for example, in his work *The irrelevance
and relevance of the Christian message*, cautions against a so-called 'kerygmatic theology' that comes with a proposition of
an intangible 'Word from Above', and which expects believers
to submit themselves blindly to the authority of God's Word
without taking cognisance of the impact of such an appeal on
life in reality. When rigid pronouncements taken from the Bible
are harmful to people, the power of such propositional claims
are irrelevant, simply because these 'propositional truths' cause
harm. In continuity with the Schleiermacher tradition, Tillich
prefers a responding-listening and meditative use of the Word
to a kerygmatic-propositional one.

If the Bible is read from this stance, with the aim to contemplate,
pray, confess and preach old and new stories of faith, as if doing
so for the very first time, the exegetical approach would
be postliberal. Walter Brueggemann (2005:170–171) explains the
"new characteristics of postliberal exegesis" as follows (my
paraphrase and interpretation): Though very much aware of
the audience, exegetes will not be guided by their conventions,
but will speak to their needs in an imaginative and creative
way. Brueggemann refers to this as 'an act of imagination'.

Both exegete and audience approach the text from the framework
of their own ideologies. The exegete knows that the text does
not have one meaning only that would be true for all times. On
the other hand, the text cannot be interpreted so freely that it
accommodates all ideologies. On the contrary, in a colonialis
c context, for example, a postcolonial reading would be ideologycritical. The same goes for gender critique in a male-dominated
and/or heterosexist world. Brueggemann refers to this as 'the
critique of ideology'. Such a critical reading will also expose the
denial of ideology by both exegete and audience. Brueggemann
refers to this as 'hidden ideology'.

Exeges approach the text with all that constitutes their being:
their presuppositions, prejudices, histories, experiences,
bodyliness. Because of an awareness of oneself and the situation
of the audience (which includes those inside and outside
institutionalised religion), it is impossible to approach the
Bible in a detached, rational and authoritative way. According
to Brueggemann, 'every reader and every reading is to some
extent contextual'.

For Brueggemann, this kind of biblical exegesis 'has a practical
urgency to it', because for too long damage has been done
to people, using the Bible as a means to do so. A postliberal
reading creates the awareness that 'life-and-death matters
are at stake both for the interpreter and for the community
of interpretation'.

This exegesis is not the enterprise of institutional religion
alone. It is an open question whether this could be regarded as
a matter of an institution at all. At least, 'postliberal exegesis'
assumes a dialogue between exegetes and 'theologians' in the
public square, such as film directors, poets, novelists and artists

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Against the background of my appreciation of the dialogue
between professional theologians and 'theologians' doing
theology on the public square, referred to above, I would like to close this article in the spirit of the ongoing debate between ‘atheists’ and ‘theists’. Without endorsing the appraisal of ‘panENtheism’ by the Observer (Dunkirk, New York) columnist, Daniel O’Rourke, but rather reflecting within the framework of the kind of postsecular posttheism which I have proposed in this presentation, I begin my in/conclusion with remarks from O’Rourke’s column on the ‘atheism-theism debate’. O’Rourke is a married former Roman Catholic priest who retired from the administration of the State University of New York at Fredonia. He is the author of The Spirit at your back: Spiritual reflections on this and that (O’Rourke 2007), a book that consists of a collection of his contributions that he has written as columnist for the Observer.

There has been a lot of print, talk and footage recently about atheism. Books such as Richard Dawkins’ ‘The God Delusion’ and Jonathan Miller’s public television series ‘A brief history of disbelief’ are just the tip of the iceberg. The subject is clearly in the public forum …

The threshold questions … are: what do atheists deny? What do theists affirm?

Proponents of atheism seem to take as a given an anthropomorphic god, which sees god as a super human patriarch. This god, of course, is almost always male and upstairs somewhere. The Greek Philosopher Xenophanes, however, observed long ago, ‘If horses had gods, their gods would look like horses.” It is not surprising then that humans make their gods look and sound human. Indeed we call them father, son, mother-father, but their projected human likeness doesn’t end there. Many churchgoers believe in – and therefore atheists deny – a god who gets angry, seeks revenge, punishes his enemies and rewards his friends. Many theists, however, don’t believe in such a petty, human-like god.

Some theists have a subtler, more spiritual, more universal idea of the Mystery. God isn’t “up there” at all; He/She/It (the pronouns never work) is down here: in nature, in us, in relationships …

The professional atheists, however, … focus their arguments against the more commonly acknowledged super human deity, They set up a straw man (a straw god?) and then dismantle “him” with their arguments. Their basic argument goes like this: if god is against the more commonly acknowledged super human deity, why does he do such things as wars, famine, child-porn and teenage acne? This argument, of course, not only presumes and then denies the simplistic chicken-soup-for-the-soul god, but also confuse this god with the problem of evil …

Although both theists and atheists may disagree, let me say frankly: the existence of God has little to do with religion, evil in the world, the nature of Jesus, immortality, reincarnation or survival after death. Yet professional atheists inevitably pull these sidesbars into their arguments. Some believers in the Mystery have no religion. Many theists do not believe in Jesus. Some do not believe in personal immortality.

### References


6. See Xenophanes 6–5 bce, Fragmenta (Silli et de natura facer) 15, cf. also Stanley Feldman and Fred Rosenbaum (2002: 68, 68 note 4): ‘Our religion then, is anthropocentric as well as anthropomorphic. It mirrors us, and, until astronomers proved otherwise, it literally revolved around us … If cattle and horses, or lions, had hands, or were able to draw with their feet and produce the works which men do, horses would draw the forms of gods like horses, and cattle like cattle, and they would make the gods’ bodies the same shape as their own.’ Xenophanes (ca. 670–ca. 475 bce) Fragment 15. Montesquieu (1688–1755) paraphrased geometrically: ‘If triangles had a god, he would have three sides. This remark of Charles de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, a seventeenth to eighteenth century French social commentator and political thinker during the Era of the Enlightenment, was translated into English by C.J. Betts (1733:108). ‘It has been very well said that if triangles were to make a god for themselves, they would give him three sides.’

Bishop John Robinson, in his ground shaking little book, “Honest to God,” called for a moratorium on the god-word. He was perceptive. There is no word in the religious lexicon with so much baggage. Perhaps we should also temporarily place words like theism and atheism on the disabled list. Bishop John Spong has already made the term “theism” suspect, using it disapprovingly for the human-like god who looms over humanity as accuser, judge and jury.7

In a fair world, atheists and theists would dialogue. Instead they argue past each other. … I … would urge professional atheists to read some modern theology such as Marcus Borg’s “The God We Never Knew”8 And I wish both would stop being so dogmatic, righteous, snide and judgmental.

Not all believe atheists are selfish, self-indulgent and destined for hell. Some theists don’t even believe in hell. And not all atheists think they are superior to us benighted believers who need the god crutch to deal with life’s harshness. Although to listen to the Brights Movement9 you might think so. The Brights Movement embraces a world view free from all supernatural, mystical and divine elements. The word “Brights” by which they proudly describe themselves implies that believers are dim-witted.

Institutional religion cannot remain untouched by this dialogue in the public forum. It simply cannot maintain the status quo in a postsecular world. The logical consequence, however, would not necessarily be that religion must come to an end and be replaced by spirituality. By being religious, we have, in the words of Jacques Derrida, returned (religare) to the roots of our (Christian) religio (Caputo et al. 2005:33), and it has happened not in a metaphysical-theistic sense ‘out there’ in another sphere of time and space, but right here in our world (saeculum).

Derrida states many times that since techno-science enlarges the religious realm even in opposing it, the secular culture is a religious culture, without dwelling on the other implications that arise here – that there is no religious culture that is not secular through and through.

(terada 2007:252)

During the pre-modern mythological age, the Latin word religare, which means to ‘bind’ or ‘to keep in protective custody’, was used to denote the experience of being in awe of transcendent forces (Simpson 1966:51), positively experienced as trust and negatively as fear. In the Hebrew Bible, ‘fear’ (irad) implies a...
Postsecular spirituality, engaged hermeneutics, and Charles Taylor’s notion of hypergoods

respects for the immanent manifestation of the transcendent God (Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:400). The Latin for ‘trust’ is fides (Simpson 1966:62), in Greek it is pistis (Liddel & Scott 1961:1408), and in Hebrew it is ‘amnā (Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:62). It is this ‘trust’ or ‘faith’ that fills the void which is simply part of being human. Postsecular spirituality still consists of the longing for the divine saturation of ‘emptiness’.

This longing is simply part of being spiritual, and the more the void is filled, the more one can share the spiritual gifts with others, especially in our secular age. Being religious today is to de-secularise our world by living in the presence of God as a Spirit-filled person. Such transcendence in everydayness implies living in a (Christian) moral manner.

Postsecular spirituality does not, therefore, have to imply the end of religion, but rather the end of exclusive humanism. Within the framework of Walter Brueggemann’s understanding of postliberal engaged hermeneutics, I would still like to model my appreciation of Charles Taylor’s notion of the ‘ethics of authenticity’ – which emphasises the love of God and ethics of justice – on a ‘biblical metaphor’. Similarly to the charismatic Paul appealing to Christians on issues about spirituality in ancient Corinth (see his chapter on charismatika in 1 Cor 12), it continues to be a matter of life and death for us too: ‘So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love’ (1 Cor 13:13; Revised Standard Version).

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