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Because what is understood by *religio* changes with time and place, even in those places dominated by western European languages the use of the term is bound to specific cultural politics. When examining the possible future of religion, then, place matters. In the West, I argue, modes of believing and the structure of sensibilities are morphing following the new visibility of religion in the public sphere. The transformation will have long-reaching effect upon both the study and the practice of religion.

IT IS A MATTER OF where we are, who that “we” consists of and who is naming the “we.” Furthermore, this question of where is as much about time as place. But what is understood by “religion,” how the word is used, changes where the geography changes and where the historical trajectories of any culture change. And that means the study or reflection upon religion changes, as we will see. Let us put aside for the moment the enormous translation difficulties involved with the word “religion” as a universal concept. Let us simply look at the employment of that term in those countries which are the inheritors of the Latin term *religio*—western Europe, and the English, Spanish, Italian, German, Portuguese, and French-speaking worlds. Each of these places has histories of the use

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of *religio* and its vernacular translation, because that which “religion” names is bound up with values, practices, cosmologies, institutions, texts, and symbols not only as they appear at one moment but as they are continually being transformed over time. Subsequently, how the term is used say in Italy by Marsilio Ficino (in 1474 C.E.), Calvin in Switzerland (in 1533 C.E.), Cranmer in England (in 1552 C.E.), and Grotius in Holland (in 1632 C.E.) is each a nonidentical repetition of *religio* or “religion” (in the case of Cranmer). Furthermore, no term exists in splendid isolation, so the word “religion” is also part of a network of other words. For example, in Augustine’s *De vera religione* (389 C.E.) religion is part of a semantic system that would include faith, piety, worship, and the ethics and aesthetics of the Good and the Beautiful. Today, on the other hand, religion is part of a semantic system that would include myth, spirituality, mystical experience, reenchantment, holistic notions of health, and self-help.

So, what we are treating with the term *religio*, even in a given period of time, in Western Europe and their former colonies, is at best a set of family resemblances. And yes that does mean that the employment of the term is fraught with certain cultural politics; enmeshed in ideologies, if you will. In his book *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, Timothy Fitzgerald proceeds as if the term has been used naively, as an objective, scientific label, and he now is exposing the politics of such usage. But anyone with any insight into the history of the term, any knowledge of its embedded employment in a given culture, recognizes that never is religion or the labeling of what is religious nonideological. The countless arguments that have been conducted over the centuries concerning the “true religion” are enough to indicate that we are treating with the study of religion a field of tense passions and convictions in which friends are sought and enemies identified. That does not mean we should now declare the use value of the term redundant and seek to employ it no longer—which is the conclusion of Fitzgerald’s argument. And I have the experience of certain fields of studies of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism (treating South East Asia, for example) that do seek to avoid using the term, on the grounds that there is no cognate translation in the languages of these countries, and to impose the Latinate word is a further act of western cultural imperialism. But I would argue for the continuing usefulness of the term on two counts. First, while the old colonial languages of western Europe remain culturally dominant, the various vernacular forms of *religio* will continue *de facto*. Words do not disappear. They may go out of use for a time, but they always remain potentially employable because they are part of the vocabulary of the language. In fact, the conscious intention to suppress a certain use only heightens awareness of its existence.

The word “religion” is here to stay, with all it has come to be associated with in its history through late Antiquity Latin to the European vernaculars, to the development of “the study of religion” in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But because its semantic field is changing what is being understood by religion (or presupposed by those who use the word) is changing also. Second, the idea that by dropping the term we become less ideological is nonsense. As thinkers like Louis Althusser and Foucault have demonstrated, there is no ideology-free zone. One of the more remarkable aspects of the French government’s appeal to the 1903 law of *laïcité*, in banning religious symbols like the Muslim veil, the Jewish Kippur, and the Christian cross from public places, is that it has only accentuated in Europe the ideology of liberal secularism. There is no view from no where—religion is always studied from embodied perspectives, concrete situations, and specific standpoints.

So when we ask about the future of this word we have to go back to that fundamental axiom: it is a matter of where we are, who that “we” consists of and who is naming the “we.” If again we examine only those inheritors (admittedly not easily definable) of the Latin *religio*, we begin to face the multiplicity of cultural and historical situations in which that word is currently employed. Common, I suggest, is a history in which Christendom came to an end. Common are the ways different cultural and national histories still live out that Christian legacy—a legacy that dramatically changes with the advent of Protestantism and the rise of nonconformism and evangelicalism. Common is a new plurality linked to colonization and various patterns of migration through which that Christian legacy is being culturally and politically negotiated. Common also is the dissemination of secular values, the rise of the scientific worldview, and instrumental rationality. But as the 1999 European Values Study has shown—to be “religious” (leaving aside the complexity of defining what this might be) in Denmark or Greece, Britain or France is not the same thing because the historical and cultural situations in these countries are very different. Some countries have national churches, for example, others do not. Some have state and local government policies on *laïcité*, some do not. Some have strong non-Christian faith communities (like the Muslim community in Germany or the Jewish community in Britain), some have not.

Place matters then when we begin to think of the future of religion. The history of the governments and religious institutions in those places matters. A specific cultural ethos emerges such that generalizations can be made: that the US is more religious than France; that Greece is more religious than Turkey or Italy, that Denmark is as religious as Britain. But it does seem to me that the future of what it is to be religious in these countries

lies not simply internally with transformations in those government and religious institutions and their relationship with each other. The survey points to a rise in Europe of those who hold religious beliefs. Of course, what counts as a religious belief is extremely nebulous, and the questions asked by those conducting the European Values Study tended toward abstractions like "Would you consider yourself to be a religious person." So while certain sociologists (Steve Bruce, for example) still insist on telling us that the death of God continues (and they have their statistical evidence to prove it in the decline of participation in the very institutions that maintain religion), the maintenance of this secularist theory is being undermined by other sociologists. Sociologists, like Peter L. Berger, Zygmunt Bauman, or, more recently, Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor are pointing toward a new cultural landscape and employing terms like "post-secular" to describe it. Their evidence is not so much the positivist data provided by censuses but wider cultural phenomena within which other forms of deinstitutionalization and nonparticipation are taking place. But with these thinkers we move from simply defining where in terms of geography and defining where in terms of temporality.

The signs of the times (and it really does not matter whether we define these times as postmodernity, late capitalist, late modernity, or post-Fordist) index changes in what I would call the modes of believing and the structure of sensibilities. Such changes can be registered by means of empirical data but are in themselves profoundly anti-positivist. For they concern a return to mythological modes of thinking and imagining. Cultural analysts like Mark Edmundson view the changes in terms of a new gothic—and certainly if one looks to American cinema, pop videos, computer games, and interactive cyber sites, the influence of the celtic and mediaeval imagination is pervasive. Though it is not just the magical and sacramental realities of the European past that are being consumed. One thinks of the series of films that have followed Ang Lee's celebrated *Hidden Tiger, Crouching Dragon*—films like *Hero* and *House of Flying Daggers*. The virtual reality that sits on so many people's desks or laps is one aspect of a new techno-mysticism most spectacularly presented to us in the use of special effects in blockbuster films. This is ironic given that Weber saw the rise of instrumentalism in science as fundamental to the disenchantment of the world. Science is now at the forefront of a multimillion dollar business of enchanting the world. Anthropologists like Sherry Ortner and James W. Fernandez facilitate an examination into cultures by distinguishing what they call its key symbols or its root metaphors. I am unaware of whether any anthropologist has tried to use these distinctions to define the key symbols and root metaphors of contemporary western living, but I would suggest (and

here the sociologist's statistics have their place) that popularity is a strong indicator of dominant cultural thematics. What phenomena are the crowd-pullers that outstrip all marketing expectations? In the world of books there is Harry Potter; in the world of film (and books) there is *Lord of the Rings*; in the world of television there is *Deep Under*, *Angels in America* and the funeral of the late Pope. If these phenomena are in any way indicative of where we are temporally, then it is little wonder that there is talk of the "post-secular" (what ever that might mean) and increasing discussion of the new visibility of religion in the public sphere.

Let me elucidate further my claim concerning changes in the modes of believing and the structure of sensibilities. What we believe and the practices that produce, reinforce, and modify that believing are historically and culturally embedded. Walter Benjamin gave eloquent expression to this in his meditations upon early cinema and mass reproduction. Technologies affect our perception and experience of the world. The advent of the internet, for example, is not just one more means for accelerated telecommunication. The internet, the means of interactivity it requires affect the nature of communication itself and what is being communicated. Most specifically, they alter senses of time and place. In turn, these alterations and others more subtle affect the kinds of people we see ourselves to be; for they shape our dreaming and aspiration—that is, what we hope for and what we appreciate as possible. The belief in the operation of angels, demons, and the appearance of ghosts was a mediaeval commonplace, the object of enlightenment ridicule and is again finding support in certain contemporary sections of western society. The cultural *a priori* that makes any belief believable are constantly changing. So I am suggesting that certain *a priori*, once dominant (like the soul/body dualism, empiricist "explanations," and liberal humanism) are now declining and being replaced with other *a priori*. What requires much further analysis is exactly what these new *a priori* are, and then what social consequences they might have. Because we see the world *as*, we never just see the world, changes in the modes of believing will alter the structure of sensibilities—that is, the acceptable range and interrelated network of emotional responses to the world. Both these changes will further impact upon the way we behave—that is, our moral, political, and aesthetic activities (and their legitimation).

Space allows only one example. In modernity, the argument for the dignity of all persons (that led politically to the development of democratic polity in the eighteenth century and human rights and led culturally to the development of the *Bildung* tradition and the call for better education made available to all) was founded upon the soul/body dualism. When a new holism (orientated not toward a transcendent,

that is, divine order, but a purely immanent and contingent one) begins to dominate how we think about ourselves and others, it could generate new universal sympathies (such as the emphasis upon our “interdependence” at Live 8). But it could also generate new levels of social indifference, even intolerance: for the more the question what it is to be human is rendered ambivalent, the less individuals view themselves as agents (indifference) and the more a space becomes available for asserting superior and inferior modes of being human (intolerance). Allied with the exponential divide between the richest and the poorest, the potential effect of such changes of belief upon the structure of sensibilities is enormous. There is something slightly illogical when we shout and sing about “interdependence” and the redistribution of wealth, when and the people articulating it most vociferously are the fabulously wealthy pop stars, movie actors, telly journalists, and media organizations.

So what are the consequences for the future of religion and religious studies? I would predict the following trajectories are going to become more evident:

First, if I am right then we are going to see a rise in Western Europe in those wishing to study religions and a new cultural respect for such study among academics and intellectuals more generally. This has already been a trend in certain quarters: the interest in religion by the likes of Judith Butler, Terry Eagleton, Slavoj Žižek, Giorgio Agamben, and Gianni Vattimo, for example. The study of religion rather than being marginal in many faculties of humanities or disregarded in many faculties of social science will be increasingly seen as necessary; necessary, that is, for the interdisciplinary analysis of our contemporary situation. Such analysis is not just academic; it will concern policy making. Recently, discussions with an agency concerned with training institutions in racial awareness, with large grants from the European Union, brought to light that it had no one who could advise the people concerned about religion while they were continually being faced with the difficulty of separating religion from ethnicity.

Second, the assumed relationship between secularity and neutrality will be increasingly questioned. This will not take place only in the universities, it will take place in other public spheres. Governments throughout Europe are discussing the need for new laws on immigration and discrimination, religion (its nature, its institutions, and its practices) is playing a key role in the discussions concerning such laws. Grant-awarding bodies who have traditionally funded research projects in the humanities and social sciences will increasingly come under pressure to be more transparent as to why theological projects are currently disfavored (in

Europe, at least). They will have to be more accountable for their supposed “neutrality.”

Third, there will be an increasingly polarization between those who talk of spirituality and those who talk of faith. As religion becomes more culturally pervasive, the more it becomes commodified and the more it becomes in Taylor’s term post-Durkheimian. That is, rather than functioning as an integrating factor in the life of a society, religion will develop forms of hyper-individualism, self-help as self-grooming, custom-made eclecticism that proffer a pop transcendence and pamper to the need for “good vibrations.” By means of this “spiritualism”—that is sensation hungry and the counterpart to extreme sports—a collection of religious people will emerge (are already emerging) who are unable to tell the difference between orgasm, an adrenalin rush and an encounter with God. Furthermore, in becoming indistinguishable from its commercialization, the line between the aesthetic and the anaesthetic in religion will be much more difficult to draw. For this media-orientated consumer spirituality is inseparable from the desire to be diverted, entertained, live the designer life, and become one’s own designer product. Ultimately, such spirituality is depoliticizing in two interrelated senses. First, it is socially atomistic (compare it with the stoic understanding of civic virtue, where the self is formed with a view to the common good). Second, because in its goal of personal satisfaction it is disenfranchising and threatening to democratic participation itself. For democratic participation requires critical engagement in public fora, and this contemporary spirituality is another take on the home-cinema. The public fora will be staged, televised, and watched from a detached distance. Walter Benjamin already noted the association between aesthetic mass production and fascism. This commodification is nothing new. Many of the great Mediaeval churches in Europe are built on the funds of the commodification of religion in terms of endowing chantries to sing masses for souls following death. What is new is the technology that can facilitate a global systematization of this commodification. Now all and any specific religious tradition (whatever the tradition’s geographical origins) can be branded and sold worldview—Christian angels, Jewish kabbalah, the Hindu *ars erotica*, Confusian meditations, Haitian voodoo dolls, Islamic tiles, celtic blessings.

In *True Religion* I called this new commodification “religion as special effect.” The defense against this, on the part of those who live out a commitment to their faith, that in its demands upon them, forms them, disciplines them, will be to define the walls of orthodoxy ever more clearly. At one point in John Bunyan’s allegory *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, the hero, Christian, suddenly encounters two fellow travelers who have joined him

on the way. Where have you come from? He asks them. In fact, they have climbed over the walls on either side of the way rather than enter by the narrow gate. The Christian metaphors are deeply resonant here, but the point I wish to make is that the faith communities of the future will increasingly concern themselves with defining what it is to belong. They will increasingly wish to distinguish between those who are in the way and those who may seem as if they are in the way and who are not in the way at all. And I am not talking about fundamentalism here. Fundamental theologies (whether Christian, Jewish, Hindu, or Islamic) have always defined themselves as groups separated from the "world," its influences, its errors, and its temptations. In the past other, more "liberal," more "free-thinking" trends within these faiths have defined themselves against the "hard-liners," the "conservatives," the "purists." This will change. To establish the authenticity and value (social and personal) of their religious convictions, believers of whatever school within a major faith grouping will have to define themselves over against those who consume religion as a special effect. This will cause divisions among the liberal camps themselves. Some may become increasingly eclectic and disappear beneath the rising tides of a vague but phosphorescent spirituality. Others will define their practices and beliefs systems more tightly (while still wishing to avoid the literalisms and coercions of fundamentalism). These groups will increasingly be forced to denounce "religion as special effect" as the soft and undisciplined option; the road that leads to shops selling scented candles, yoga-focused fitness centers, and dot-com companies trading in *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* memorabilia.

And so *religio* and its study morph once more, as times, places, and peoples change. In this transformation the discipline itself will pay more attention, I believe, to socially and historically embedded practices and their inter-association with (and even in their avowed disassociation from) other practices. In brief, attention will be paid to what the new historicist Stephen Greenblatt calls the circulation of social energies within which any cultural phenomenon appears (or fails to appear). In turn this will force us to develop phenomenologies, anthropologies, and genealogies of believing that have far more general application than religious studies but within which the study of religion will play a paradigmatic role.