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The Secular and the Sacred

Complementary and/or Conflictual?

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Preface

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP) annual seminar, held in Washington in the Fall of 2008, provoked such on ongoing debate that it was impossible to call it to an end. Thus, the topic, *The Secular and the Sacred: Complementary and/or Conflictual?* was carried over to the 2009 seminar. The discussion, indeed, debate, never ended. It is still raging. The seminars brought together over 35 scholars from different countries. This volume collects their papers.

Each seminar unfolded over a six week period and was framed by insights from Charles Taylor, John Rawls, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jurgen Habermas and in constant dialogue with different religious and cultural traditions. Nonetheless, the practical, political, and social implications of the issue were always, and sometimes dramatically and graphically, on the table. Discussions were often fierce but always friendly.

The editors express gratitude to Edward Alam, Notre Dame University, Lebanon, for his leadership of the seminars and to a number of eminent scholars who sat in on the discussions and greatly added to the quality of debate and the clarity of conclusions, Sef Donders, John Farrelly, Abdolkarim Soroush, Gholan Reza Aavani, John Kromkowski, and William McBride.

The editors also express thanks to Maura Donohue for her sage editorial work on some of the chapters.

John P. Hogan
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Introduction

The Secular and the Sacred: Hermeneutical Thread – Conflict or Complement?

JOHN P. HOGAN & SAYED HASSAN AKHLAQ

Introduction

About 25 years ago, while working in development in Africa, one of the editors attended a meeting of a community co-op and credit union. The large meeting involving the whole village took place in a remote area and was attended by a number of Northern European donors who were supporting the local effort. When the meeting was called to order, the local community leader, a middle-age woman, stepped to the front and began with a prayer. At the end of the meeting, one of the donors approached the woman and in a sincere, polite manner inquired, "Why would you begin a community meeting with a prayer?" The woman hesitated, and then in an equally sincere and polite manner responded, "How else would you begin a community meeting?" That memory sticks in consciousness as we reflect on the current relation between the secular and the sacred and the changes in that relation brought by globalization, mass communication, and pluralism. That moment reflects two very different worldviews and resonates well with Charles Taylor's three senses of secularity, especially his third sense. He states: "[T]he change I want to define and trace is one which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others" (*A Secular Age*, p.3).

The discussion around the sacred and secular, in relation or in opposition, has been the stormy background for debate, not only in Religious Studies and Theology, but also in Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology, Political Science and Legal Studies. Ever since Max Weber reinitiated the debate with his phrase borrowed from Schiller, "disenchantment of the world," a vast library on the debate has been spawned; some relatively recent Western modern classics stand out: Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* and *The Sociology of Religion;* Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion;* Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations;* John

Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism;* and Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*. The last, in particular, along with the hermeneutical perspectives of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jurgen Habermas with insights from the world's religions were the most proximate framers and dialogue partners for the papers collected here.

Indeed, the issue of secular vs. sacred can no longer be perceived as only theoretical or abstract; it has become fodder in our "culture wars." Viewpoints surrounding the debate, in recent years, have taken on vital political and even, at times, life-threatening dimensions. The deeper implications of the discussion can be perceived in many current global problems: cultural identity, multiculturalism and interculturalism, nationalism, economic inequality, race, terrorism, migration, hospitality, public education, climate change and even, in the U.S. at least, gun control.

Challenge: Conflict or Complement?

Today achievements in secular terms raise issues of meaning and fulfillment which point to the sacred horizons of human life. Yet if conceived in terms of opposition, sacred commitments can distract from, or even impede, the realization of essential secular concerns.

This makes it inadequate to compromise either the sacred or the secular in order to make room for the other, or simply to recognize the validity of each sphere in an alternating progression of both. It now becomes ever more urgent to discover the proper and complementary relation between the two so that both can be promoted through mutual collaboration. Within nations this becomes a condition for assuaging mutual suspicion and achieving social and political solidarity. It holds the possibility of mobilizing the full range of the sensibilities and capabilities of all citizens to confront human challenges. Can the secular and the sacred work together in this endeavor?

Moreover, if each great civilization is founded on a great religion then the possibilities of living together in peace depends on understanding how secular concerns are pervaded by the sacred and how this in turn can render more porous the boundaries set by the secular principles of self-interest. Can the horizons of unity and comity at the heart of the spiritual and religious dimension of humanity achieve peaceful interchange and cooperation between peoples in their daily lives?

In search of positive answers to these questions it is necessary to explore: (a) how the secular does not entail a closed secularism, but requires a legitimate – indeed essential – attention to proper human concerns, and (b) how the sacred with its absolute attention to Truth and Goodness opens rather than closes, minds and hearts to the concerns of all peoples and lays grounds for the principles by which diverse peoples can live together locally as well as globally.

Two main challenges appeared for a new paradigm of unity in diversity for our global times. The first danger lies on the secular side and is found in the present paradigm of a world of radically single individuals and peoples competing or even conflicting in terms of their separate self-interests. The second danger lies on the side of the religious and cultural heritages of the world when conceived exclusively as conflicting among themselves and with the secular.

The 2008 seminar noted that in recent times key thinkers have begun to find that this calls for a renewed participation of cultural and religious voices in public debate and planning. Jürgen Habermas notes the importance of the substantive and experienced truth content of such voices on for example, human dignity and solidarity. As resources for the creation of meaning and identity, these are keys to contemporary social development. A deeper complementary and enriching cooperation between secular and religious citizens may now be possible, and indeed urgently needed.

But as Gadamer noted, it is not possible to imagine a kind of "blank tablet" as a point of departure in the Lockean or Cartesian sense. Rather, all are born into their own culture and language which provide a basic world-view and a rich resource of fundamental values. In our global times these civilizations now meet one another in ways that only a few years ago were unimaginable. In turn, they encounter a secular age with its own proper and appropriate focus on human fulfillment. Thus, the challenge of developing a new paradigm for philosophizing that enables the sacred and the secular to be lived fully, creatively and cooperatively so as to build a viable global whole.

Response – Interwoven Process

The 2009 seminar built upon the above as well as on the Islamic seminar on "Living Faithfully in Changing Times." Special attention was devoted to appreciating both the unique differences and the relatedness of the world's religious cultures, their relation to the

achievement of secular goals, and vice versa, the positive contribution of secular concerns for living religion fully in this world. The search was for a paradigm that enables mutual understanding and communication in which peoples and cultures, both sacred and secular, can be positively complementary.

This requires attention to the triple threat that arises from conceiving the world's religious and secular cultures in abstract and exclusive ways: (a) isolating cultural and religious heritages from human experience and thus rendering them irrelevant to life in our times; (b) understanding the secular exclusively in ways that exclude the unique creativity and contribution of each culture to public discussion of the common good, and (c) seeing both the sacred and the secular as essentially in contrast and by implication, conflictual, and hence dangerous to the common good.

To respond to this threefold threat the 2009 seminar sought to open the way for a lived existential sharing of the many cultures, religious and secular. It explored how the world's great cultures and religions, lived fully and each in their unique manner, can develop resources of respect for other individuals, peoples and cultures. The search was for a mutual complementarity and enrichment of the sacred and secular traditions.

To do this, the gathered scholars explored the philosophical undergirdings of the cooperation of faith and reason in the search for the human dignity of each person. They also examined the respect due to their societies, cultures and civilizations, as well as to nature. Additionally, they took up the challenge of Habermas to find ways in which this can be brought to bear on public discussion of the common good, so that secular and religious persons might find areas of deep cooperation. In this they sought to respect the genuine concerns of secular thought while bringing to the table meanings rooted in cultures and religions that deepen, enrich and extend mutual concerns.

In dialogue with Taylor's *A Secular Age*, participants set out to articulate and describe a new paradigm for philosophizing that enables the sacred and the secular to be lived fully, creatively, and cooperatively in order to construct a more viable global whole. They sought to better understand and meet the major threats to such an understanding which can, and often do, emerge from either the secular realm or the sacred realm. They suggested ways of

overcoming these dangers so that a new paradigm of unity in diversity could emerge bringing the sacred and the secular into a more positive interrelation.

In this effort, it is important to note both the distinction and complementarity between Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" and Habermas' insistence on cultivating a special concern for achieving public consensus. The positions are not the same but they may be complementary. Even with Gadamer's "fusion of horizons," there is a need to constantly plumb the depths of metaphysical resources in cultures and civilizations to avoid a "leveling out or a secularization of the sacred."

Outline of Chapters

The volume is organized in seven parts, moving from phihosophical foundations to cultural applications, with clarifying hermeneutical reflections in between. Part I, 'Foundations," begins with Anna Drabarek's insightful use of Charles Taylor to ferret out a 'new sacred,' based on fundamental values and the 'revival of an intuitive cognition of goodness.' Chapter 2, by Dursun Ali Aykit, unfolds the rather unique role of Philo of Alexandria (336-323 B.C.) and how he, as a Jew, managed and reacted to the political, social, and cultural environment of the great diaspora. Chapter 3, on Maximus the Confessor by Keith Lemma, mines the Patristic period to reawaken the sense of the "Cosmos" in Christian thought. Maximus' cosmic vision offers deep insight into the sacredness of the secular as well as practical ecumenical and inter-faith suggestions. In Chapter 4, Armando Riyanto unpacks Hobbes' *Leviathan* to get to the nature of human nature. He acknowledges the lack of any spiritual aspects in Hobbes but responds to this by drawing him into dialogue with Taylor. Chapter 5, by Peter Collins, follows through on the "I and Thou" of the great Jewish thinker Martin Buber. Collins examines his texts, especially on Hasidism and dialogue, to highlight the positive interrelation Buber developed between the sacred and secular. In Chapter 6, on politics and personal freedom, Mamuka Dolddze presents a phenomenology of political philosophy revealed in art, literature, and science. He draws on Plato, Merleau-Ponty, and Leo Strauss to defend a process of "individuality of being that leads to the unity of the world."

Part II "Sacred and Secular: Complement or Conflict?" moves to the current not-so-smooth relation in our pluralistic and globalized world. Chapter 7 by Tadeusz Buksinski takes on the rapidly evolving situation in Eastern Europe. The author describes the Communist sanctification of the secular-profane and subsequent societies' profanation of the sacred and their negative effects on society. When artists seek to 'naturalize God,' the outcome for humans is 'drastic and a 'bitter sign of our time.' In Chapter 8, John Farrelly seeks to lay out a coherent approach to Christian humanism in our time, analyzing some of the scriptural, historical and philosophical tensions. Indicting both the positive and negative in some aspects of humanism today, he concludes by showing how Christian faith and hope integrate and fulfill human history, 'without being reduced to history.' Chapter 9 by Edwin George looks at the thorny question of secularism from the perspectives of American philosopher Fred Dallmayr and Indian theologian Raymond Panikkar. Can religion respond to the juggernaut of secularism, without getting ground-up in political power battles? Both thinkers help articulate a response, which is link to a 'dialogic-power-kenosis' model close to that of Gandhi. John Farina, in Chapter 10, discusses the problems a liberal democracy faces when dealing with religion. Framed by the 2005 debate between Jurgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, Farina seeks to unpack some of what goes into an honest dialogue between liberalism and religion. He illustrates his post secular perspective with reference to two contentious Supreme Court cases involving the display of religious symbols on public land. Chapter 11 by Richard Khuri brings the reader into an intense conversation about time. From the Greeks, especially Epicurus and Heraclitus, through Proust, and down to Kierkegaard and Marcel, we are called beyond the 'banality of the clock.' We can come to grasp the inner nature of time, the sacredness of time as an experience pointing 'somewhere deep within ourselves…to the Beginning." Chapter 12 by Jonathan Bowman analyzes "Religion as Friend or Foe?" by comparing the E.U. and the U.S. With Charles Taylor as guide, the author looks at different applications of secularity. How could the two major centers of liberal democracy be so different in dealing with religion in public life? The author aligns himself with the position of José Casanova that American pluralism provides a 'nova effect' and is better at incorporating the world 's religions because it does so in the way it

incorporated the religions of its old immigrants. America's religious diaspora is a catalyst for the transformation of religions. Chapter 13 by Gian Luigi Brena takes up the volume's central theme, secular-sacred, from conflict to complement. He outlines the approach used by Taylor in *A Secular Age* and points the way toward a new way of doing philosophy, less conflictual and more open, where Western science and philosophy become able 'to understand the living sense of other traditions.' In Chapter 14, Plamen Makariev discusses what a self-consistent liberal viewpoint vis-à-vis religious believers should look like in a free democracy. Fair and open interaction can only be peacefully attained and lived out when co-existence is defined in a procedural manner, and not through a substantive approach. 'The only unity of worldviews which is necessary in order to develop a sustainable just social order is the one of reasonability.'

Part III "Hermeneutics" seeks to find the hermeneutical thread in this complex carpet and present the theoretical foundations for an interpretive framework for understanding and giving due validity to both secular processes and institutions and to sacred processes and institutions. The objective and challenge of this philosophical search is finding the clarification allowing for a unity in diversity. Chapter 15 by Arifa Farid explores the hermeneutical thinking of Heidegger, Gadamer and Apel. The author sees Heidegger's triad of Being-*Dasein*-Time as opening the way to possibilities for interpretation. Temporality, drawn from *dasen*, as filtered through Dilthey, Apel and Gadamer, becomes the key for closing the gap of distance between Western humans and tradition. In Chapter 16, Agnieszka Lenartowicz calls for a new hermeneutical reading of the "sacrum" in our day. The opposition between sacrum and rationality is heralded in our world. But, need it be so? The author claims that in our current 'crisis," we need both – myth and sacrum *and* rational and secular in order to bridge the "poles of opposition." Chapter 17 by Alois A. Nugroho takes on the problem of intercultural communication in our pluralistic age. Building on Taylor, Gadamer and Rawls, he moves beyond the notion of 'clash' between the sacred and the secular, and carefully tries to carve out space for Gadamer's "center" of "understanding and harmony." In Chapter 18, Sayed Hassan Akhlaq outlines a creative and critical approach to grasping the deeper meaning of Shariah Law in our global age. He skillfully aligns the secular with the rational but stresses the often-overlooked rationality of Shariah and the need to

join this rationality to modern hermeneutical understandings. Chapter 19 by Augustin Domingo Moratalla opens with the "careful conversation" between Jurgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger and their attempt to bring us back to a dialogue between faith and reason and sacred and secular. He leads the reader through Habermas, Taylor and Ricoeur to recover the need for a deeper translation that 'puts us in the hermeneutical age of morality." Chapter 20 by Robert Badillo returns to the Habermas – Ratzinger dialogue and pushes further toward a "World Ethos" buoyed by the genetic metaphysics of Fernando Rielo and his conception of an ontology of relation between the "Absolute and human persons."

Part IV "African Traditions" brings the discussion to and from the African environment. In Chapter 21, Workineh Kelbessa explores the relationship between tolerance, religious pluralism, and public culture in Africa. The paper highlights the impact of pluralism and intolerance on politics and community life and calls for the need to accommodate religious and cultural diversity and to reexamine the role Religion might play in public life. Chapter 22 by Maduabuchi Dukor, discusses the "interplay of free will and determinism… and…Africa's attempt to emancipate itself technically." What role does tradition play? The author clearly sees the need for a religious perspective in riding the waves of science, technology, and globalization. In Chapter 23, Hippolyte Ngimbi Nseka continues the debate with a direct question to Africans: "Which Sacred Can Save Us?" He examines the diversity of expression of the sacred in African cultures and the impact on communal life – both positive and negative. He concludes by expressing the need to "achieve or re-achieve a central focus…" That "unique necessary" being is "revealed to be love."

Part V moves to some South Asian traditions. Chapter 24 by Abdul Wahab Suri, takes on deontological liberalism, with its "priority of right over Good," as expounded by John Rawls. The author rejects this approach to justice as an "attempt to impose an abstract system of rights which has been derived from a culturally specific and historically determined conception of Good." In Chapter 25, Suri continues his argument with an emphasis on the "rights-Good" debate in human rights and its impact on the nation-state. He decries what he understands as a Western-liberal imposition "which reflects the moral intuition of a particular community." Chapter 26 by Indra

Nath Choudhuri advocates for a position that builds on the Indian "Advaita Vedanta" which allows for a valid autonomy for the secular but still knows, sees, and feels the presence of God in all of reality. Sacred and secular are not in opposition to each other but rather, intimately intertwined. In Chapter 27, Saral Jhingran unpacks the radical division between the scared and the secular that has grown up since the Enlightenment and the Protestant Reformation. The author's claim is that only in Western Christianity has the dichotomy taken root. After surveying Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, Jhingran makes constructive suggestions as to the need and role of religion in our current global, technical world.

Part VI "Chinese Traditions," moves from ancient Chinese thought down to the present to assess relations between the sacred and secular and the role of religion in society. Chapter 28 by Yan Xin traces the influence of the Confucian tradition on the historical relation between the sacred and secular in Chinese society. He pursues the tradition down to the present and discusses the need for new ideas given globalization, the growth of religion and the influence of different cultures on modern China. In Chapter 29 by Jia Limin the sacred-secular relation is compared to the notion of harmony between *Tian* (heaven) and humans in Confucian thought. The author describes a dependency of the secular on a "spirit world" that acts as a 'guidepost." Chapter 30, by Hsien-Chung Lee, advances the discussion to the current global era. Lee begins by noting that the causes of secularity in the East and West are very different. Nonetheless, sacred and secular are "two sides of the same coin." This is illustrated by turning to the relation of *Yin*/*Yang* and tracing that relation through various Chinese schools, especially Daoism. Humans in our global world need a wholistic understanding of self and that may be found in a complementary grasp of *Yin*/*Yang* and sacred/secular.

Part VII "Islamic Traditions" raises important questions that touch virtually every aspect of modern life for believing Muslims. In Chapter 31, Burhan Ssebayigga provides a detailed overview of the meaning of secularity in an Arabic context – particularly within Egyptian intellectual circles. Ssebayigga highlights the intellectual and political challenges faced by secular scholars encountering Islamic thought and belief. In Chapter 32, Abdul Rahim Afaki examines Ricoeur's notion of appropriation of a text as an

autonomous structure and compares it with the Indian exegete Farahi's view of the autonomy of Qur'anic discourse under the *Nazm al-Qur'an* approach. Chapter 33 is by Saeed Anvari. This brief paper emphasizes the different roles played by teleology and epistemology in examining the sacred and the secular in the context of Islamic orthodoxy. Anvari allows only limited space to secular concerns. In Chapter 34, Sayed Hassan Akhlaq articulates a different perspective. He studies the common and multiple meanings of rationality in the Islamic primary sources by examining fundamental doctrines, the Qur'an, and the Sunnah. Akhlaq's research opens considerable space for the rational/secular in Islamic scholarship. From there, he explores a path for a modern dialogue between the sacred and the secular.

Conclusion

Life today calls for a paradigm and metaphysics of the "whole" to enable mutual understanding and communication among and between cultures, religions and races. It is now all the more urgent to appreciate not only essential differences, but also the similarities and relatedness of the world's cultures and peoples. How the secular and the sacred interact is key for such a mutual understanding – one might even say, the needle pulling the hermeneutical thread. Realizing the interwoven process of the sacred and the secular allows for a mutual appreciation of cultures and enables their most basic and characteristic pursuits to meet in a conscious convergence, echoing Gadamer's "fusion of horizons." We need that meeting – but how should we call it to order? It is this needed convergence, communication and cooperation which the papers collected below seek to illustrate.