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Theophilanthropy: Civil Religion and Secularization in the French Revolution

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THEOPHILANTHROPY:
CIVIL RELIGION AND SECULARIZATION IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how the implementation of Enlightenment ideas in the French Revolution gave birth to a new secular conception of the state and the invention of a new religion. I argue that Jean-Jacques Rousseau, representing shared assumptions across the Enlightenment, interpreted religion to be a human construct and thus subject to human intervention. With the onset of 1789 revolutionaries employed this conception to reorganize the Gallican Church and institute the radical Cults of Reason and the Supreme Being. When these endeavors failed revolutionaries refocused on two solutions: the secular laws of 1795 and Theophilanthropy. Revolutionary secularization separated Church and state and confined worship to the private sphere. Consequently Theophilanthropy acquired an independent status and the Revolution acted as a catalyst for the invention of a new religion based on Enlightenment principles. This study explores how Theophilanthropy stood at the foundation of French secularization, modern civil religion and subsequent New Religious Movements (NRM). The historical significance of Theophilanthropy was critical in its own time and bequeathed a legacy that long outlasted the Revolution.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Theophilanthropy was one of the revolutionary religions of the French Revolution and the most historically influential. It emerged during the period of the Revolution called the Directory and was the brainchild of Jean-Baptist Chemin-Dupontès. Inspired by the political philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau; Chemin-Dupontès sought to unite religion and revolutionary politics in the aftermath of the Terror. Responding to the failure of the Worship of Reason and the Supreme Being his major work *Manuel of Theophilanthropes* (1796) proposed the creation of a new civil religion for France. Theophilanthropy was a natural religion, a set of beliefs that held the truths of religion could be acquired through the investigation of nature using human reason.¹ Based on these assumptions Chemin-Dupontès claimed Theophilanthropy was not new, but a return to the original religion of the earth and thus encompassed all religion.² This universalism would allow all citizens of the Republic to participate regardless of confession or affiliation.

Theophilanthropy was a natural religion in theory, but one born in the crucible of Revolution. It was an attempt to combine elements of natural religion with the values of republicanism.³ Theophilanthropy was based on two dogmas, the existence of a Supreme Being

¹ Jean-Baptiste Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilanthropes, ou, adoreurs de Dieu, et amis des hommes* (Paris: n.p., 1796), 7.

² *Ibid*, 8-9.

³ James Livesey, *Making Democracy in the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 206; Zina Weygand, *The Blind in French Society from the Middle Ages to the Century of Louis Braille* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Martyn Lyons, *France Under the Directory* (Cambridge, Mass: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 113.

and the immortality of the soul.⁴ Leading male members of the community took on the role of ministers, conducting its austere and simple ceremonies.⁵ The motivation behind the establishment of Theophilanthropy and the overriding concern for Chemin-Dupontès was the cultivation of virtue and education of children within the family.⁶ He emphasized that the purpose of religion was not conflict, but social and political unity.⁷

This study of Theophilanthropy centers on the intersection of three themes: religion in the Enlightenment, the concept of civil religion in the West and the origins of secularization in the French Revolution. The thread uniting these themes was the eighteenth-century interpretation of nature. Thinkers in the Enlightenment, responding to the upheavals of the Religious Wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries developed a concept of nature as an autonomous realm independent from revelation or politics. “Nature” could transcend religious conflicts and provide a new basis for social and political stability. As a conceptual realm, “nature” provided a flexible foundation for theoretical and practical experimentation on religion.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, one of the most widely read and influential authors of the Enlightenment, provides the basis for this discussion. In *Émile*, Rousseau judged the religions of the world to be the outward and varied expressions of a universal interior essence based in nature. This “natural religion” was the origin of all religion. Hence there were no “false” religions, making toleration necessary. In *Du contrat social*, Rousseau further interpreted the outward forms of religion to be malleable human creations which could be molded to suit the needs of society and politics or civil religion. Viewing religion as a human construction also

⁴ Albert Mathiez, *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire, 1796-1801 essai sur l'histoire religieuse de la Révolution* (Paris: Alcan, 1904), 93; Lyons, *France Under the Directory*, 111.

⁵ Andrew Jainchill, *Reimagining Politics After the Terror: The Republican Origins of French Liberalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 85; Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988), 270; Lyons, *France Under the Directory*, 111.

⁶ Mathiez, *La théophilanthropie*, 84.

⁷ Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilantropes*, 10.

opened up another possibility—only realized in the French Revolution—the removal of religion from public and political life.

These theoretical concerns found practical expression in a debate during the latter part of the Revolution over the role of religion in the Republic. Partisans on one side of this debate sought to bind all French citizens together by establishing Theophilanthropy as a multi-confessional civil religion. The other side sought to resolve the conflicts of the radical period by outlawing all forms of public worship (law of 7 *Vendémiaire* Year IV-September 1795). While both these efforts ultimately failed with the institution of the Concordat under Napoleon; they would foreshadow the later development of *Laïcité* (French secularization) in the Third French Republic. Yet secularization was not the inevitable outcome or legacy of the Revolution; it was the result of an experimental process of trial and error. Secularization, treated here as the removal of religion from public life, was only one of many options.

Theophilanthropy was at the flashpoint of critical innovations in the modern relationship between religion and politics. Therefore a study of Theophilanthropy helps to explain contemporary issues in France and Europe involving the interaction of religion and politics and exposes the contingent and experimental nature of secularization.

Historiography

The historiography of Theophilanthropy is a product of the revolutionary history of France. Following the First French Revolution, the subsequent revolutions in 1848 and 1870 would see new Theophilanthropic societies emerge. These new movements excited interest in the history of the religion. The first of these efforts came in 1854 when Henri Carle founded the *L'Alliance religieuse universelle*.⁸ His organization sponsored a new iteration of

⁸ Mathiez, *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, 712.

Theophilanthropy and Carle restated Chemin-Dupontès's work as *Qu'est-ce que la théophilanthropie?* in 1868.⁹ This new activity elicited a response when Émile Gachon wrote a critical history of Theophilanthropy in 1870. Gachon was a pastor in the French Protestant Church and aimed to refute Carle and his compatriots on religious grounds. Gachon's book coincided with the creation of the Third Republic and a renewed debate over the compatibility of Christianity with revolutionary values.

Gachon emphasized the inadequacies of Theophilanthropy vis-à-vis Christianity. He described the rise and fall of the religion as a curiosity, which faded over time.¹⁰ He emphasized that on matters of dress and conduct Theophilanthropy modeled itself on Protestantism and was a rehash of Robespierre's Worship of the Supreme Being.¹¹ Gachon concluded that during the latter Revolution, the atheism and indifference of those who ruled France, spurred a general rejection of all religion. This did not allow Theophilanthropy a real chance at success.¹² In summation Gachon stated that Theophilanthropy was too abstract and had no founder such as Judaism or Christianity. As a result Theophilanthropy had abandoned the long traditions of Christianity and this was its undoing.¹³ Gachon's book did not put Theophilanthropy to rest, however, as a new movement appeared in the late 1880's.

After the creation of the Third Republic in 1870 a revival of ideas originating in the First Republic permeated the political culture of France. It should be no surprise then that a new Theophilanthropic society accompanied the consolidation of the Third Republic in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. In 1883 Joseph Décembre (under the name Décembre-

⁹ Henri Carle, *Qu'est-ce que la théophilanthropie* (Paris: Aux bureaux du journal La Libre Conscience, 1868); Mathiez, *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, 715, 716.

¹⁰ Émile Gachon, *Histoire de la théophilanthropie, étude historique et critique* (Paris: J. Cherbuliez, 1870), 23

¹¹ Ibid, 30, 51, 52.

¹² Ibid, 61.

¹³ Ibid, 62, 63.

Alonnier) started a new Theophilanthropy. In 1885 he began publishing a newspaper called *La Fraternité universelle* and also republished many of Chemin-Dupontès's works.¹⁴ As with the first iteration, this Theophilanthropy positioned itself as an opponent of materialism (positivism) and Catholic "superstition."¹⁵ The movement was brief and relatively small, but was nonetheless attacked by Francisque Sarcey, a Protestant thinker.¹⁶ Sarcey viewed Theophilanthropy as a conspiracy to destroy Catholicism and as an attempt to institute a Reformation in France. Sarcey may have felt the need to respond to Theophilanthropy so that Protestants would not be implicated in such a scheme.

This new Theophilanthropy declined at the turn of the century, helped by the institution of *Laïcité* in 1905 which outlawed public worship. An interesting aside is that in 1900 the historian Albert Mathiez interviewed Décembre. There is not much to note here, other than that he repeated the main points of Theophilanthropy first described by Chemin-Dupontès.¹⁷

Décembre stated that he was a believer in Deism, that God was necessary for morality, but positioned himself against Catholicism, its clergy and dogmas.¹⁸ Interestingly the first comment by Mathiez about Décembre was that he did not have the "...auréole prophétique qui rayonne, paraît-il, des fondateurs de religion." (...the prophetic aura which radiates, it seems, from the founders of religion) indicating a degree of skepticism for Décembre as the founder of a new religion.¹⁹

¹⁴ Comité central théophilanthropique de Paris, *Almanach de la Fraternité universelle* (Paris: Comité central théophilanthropique de Paris, 1885); Mathiez, *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, 715, 716.

¹⁵ Mathiez, *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, 716, 718.

¹⁶ Charles Moiset, "La Theophilanthropie dans Yonne," *Bulletin de la Société des sciences historiques et naturelles de l'Yonne* 52, no. 2 (1898): 233; Mathiez, *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, 719.

¹⁷ Mathiez, *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, 720-722.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 721.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 720.

The latter half of the nineteenth century also saw the institutionalization of revolutionary studies at the Sorbonne under Alphonse Aulard and his student, Albert Mathiez. Both were interested in the issue of religion and the Revolution.²⁰ Aulard discussed Theophilanthropy in a positive light, emphasizing its nonpolitical character and desire to avoid conflict. He approved of its elite focus because this did not animate the mob like the Worship of Reason.²¹ Aulard also supported Danton against Robespierre for this reason. Generally Aulard characterized the conflict between Christianity and the Revolution as unnecessary. It was a patriotic response to foreign aggression.²²

Aulard and Mathiez fought over the legacy of the Revolution. Whereas Aulard held Danton as the paragon of the Revolution, Mathiez celebrated Robespierre. When Mathiez gained the chair on the study of the Revolution at the Sorbonne, the transition from Aulard's "liberal" interpretation gave way to the use of social theory and socialist history. For Mathiez the conflict between Christianity and the Revolution was central. Like Aulard, Mathiez viewed it as unnecessary and ultimately inspired by foreign influence and internal plots.²³ Mathiez focused on the Civil Constitution of the Clergy as the original source of this conflict and blamed the Pope for rejecting the Civil Constitution.²⁴ On the matter of de-Christianization, the most extreme expression of this conflict, Mathiez suggested that foreigners such as Anarchis Cloots,

²⁰ Alphonse Aulard, *Christianity and the French Revolution*, trans. Lady Frazer (London: Ernest Benn, 1927); Albert Mathiez, *Les origines des cultes révolutionnaires (1789-1792)* (Paris: G. Bellais, 1904).

²¹ Alphonse Aulard, *The French Revolution; A Political History, 1789-1804*, trans. Bernard Miall (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), 4: 68.

²² *Ibid*, 3: 160-162.

²³ Albert Mathiez, *The French Revolution*, trans. Catherine Alison Phillips (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 413.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 112.

alleged foreign agent Fabre d'Églantine and Jacques Hébert sponsored anti-Christian radicalism.²⁵

Mathiez's perspective on the revolutionary religions was one of the more interesting aspects of his contribution to the historiography. Even while Mathiez viewed the conflict between Christianity and the Revolution as unnecessary, he nevertheless exhibited sympathy towards the revolutionary religions.²⁶ Mathiez took pains to defend Robespierre by saying that he was not an enemy of Christianity, but an adherent of "neo-Christianity" and was a stalwart against de-Christianization.²⁷ Mathiez also stated in his general history that the Revolution itself was a kind of religion.²⁸ Mathiez came to this conclusion based on the theoretical writings of Émile Durkheim.

The ongoing debate over the future of religion in France in the Third Republic inspired Mathiez's interest in Durkheim and the study of Theophilanthropy. In 1903 Mathiez finished his doctoral thesis, *La Théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, which used the work of Durkheim from the journal *Année Sociologique*.²⁹ A year later Mathiez published his book on Theophilanthropy. In the same year he also authored a work on the origins of the revolutionary religions that was heavily indebted to Durkheim's theories.³⁰ When Mathiez published *La Théophilanthropie* Durkheim had yet to fully lay out his ideas. He would do so in the 1912 *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. In this work Durkheim interpreted the fundamental

²⁵ Ibid, 409-411.

²⁶ The "revolutionary religions" were the Worship of Reason, the Worship of the Supreme Being and Theophilanthropy.

²⁷ Bernard Plongeron, *Conscience religieuse en révolution. Regards sur l'historiographie religieuse de la Révolution française* (Paris: A. et J. Picard, 1969), 102.

²⁸ Mathiez, *The French Revolution*, 118.

²⁹ Albert Mathiez, "La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire, 1796-1801; essai sur l'histoire religieuse de la révolution" (PhD diss., Sorbonne, 1903); Émile Durkheim, "De la définition des phénomènes religieux," *L'Année sociologique* 1, no. 2 (1898): 1-28.

³⁰ Albert Mathiez, *Les origines des cultes révolutionnaires (1789-1792)* (Paris: G. Bellais, 1904).

question of philosophy and theology to be whether reason is divine or experiential. He resolved this problem by imbedding reason within society.³¹ Durkheim thus reimaged religion as a social construction and the manifestations of a “collective effervescence.”³² Mathiez interpreted the revolutionary religion along these lines.

For Mathiez the problem posed by Theophilanthropy and indeed the entire Revolution was whether a society could govern itself using the dictates of reason. And if so could this type of society successfully incorporate religion?³³ For Mathiez the question cast a cloud over the Third Republic. The establishment of a society ruled by reason had been achieved; the future of religion within this society was in doubt. Mathiez noted that the “luminaries” of the nineteenth century lamented the “fatal divorce” between the Revolution and the Church. Consequently they occupied themselves with finding a resolution.³⁴ Mathiez specifically mentions Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte who both sought to create a universal religion which would function as a civil religion in a future society (one ruled by reason). One century later we may add Durkheim and Mathiez to the list of “luminaries” who attempted to harmonize religion and Revolution. Their efforts failed when the political program of *Laïcité* emerged victorious.

Mathiez’s use of social theory inaugurated a shift in thinking about the Revolution, which remains central in the French academy to this day. A series of prominent historians at the Sorbonne such as George Lefebvre, Albert Soboul and Michel Vovelle adopted a structuralist approach, drawing inspiration from the theories of the Annales School and Marxism.³⁵ Both

³¹ Émile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman, ed. Mark Sydney Cladis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 17.

³² *Ibid*, 171.

³³ Mathiez, *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, 705.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 705.

³⁵ Georges Lefebvre, *The Coming of the French Revolution*. Princeton (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988); Albert Soboul, *The Sans-Culottes; The Popular Movement and Revolutionary Government, 1793-1794*, trans. Remy Inglis Hall (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1972); Michel Vovelle, *Piété baroque et déchristianisation en*

theories used a three tiered metaphor, which placed economic relations at the foundation of human reality. Ideas and events were, in the parlance of Marxism, “superstructure” or in other words reflective of or incidental to material conditions. Issues related to religion became important only in so far as they represented a shift in material conditions or underlying economic relationships. The driver of change was Marx’s concept of class struggle. This theory transformed the Revolution into the victory of the capitalist bourgeoisie over feudalism. This so-called classical interpretation came to dominate the scholarship at the Sorbonne, including a recent work on Theophilanthropy by Samuel Ronsin.

Ronsin begins his study of Theophilanthropy by distancing himself from Mathiez’s “political religious” interpretation.³⁶ The phrase “political religious” is a reference Durkheim, for whom political participation can be interpreted as a kind of worship. Ronsin stakes out his own position as an amalgam of the Annales School’s concept of *mentalité* and Marxist analysis.³⁷ *Mentalité* is a theoretical concept, which posits that ideas are manifestations of social structures. Ideas therefore cannot be understood except as outgrowths of social conditions. The Marxist component of this interpretation is that the social origins of ideas are also representative of a particular social class. For Ronsin Theophilanthropy was focused on social and family relations and therefore represented the values of the bourgeoisie.

Ronsin identifies the purpose of Theophilanthropy as the creation of a new type of social order aimed at eliminating conflict and consolidating the Revolution.³⁸ He states that the

Provence au XVIIIe siècle; les attitudes devant la mort d'après les clauses des testaments (Paris: Plon, 1973); Robert C. Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: Norton, 1978); Lynn Hunt, “French History in the Last Twenty Years: The Rise and Fall of the Annales Paradigm,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 21, no. 2 (Apr., 1986): 209-224.

³⁶ Samuel Ronsin, “Recherche sur la théophilanthropie (an V-an X): Fondements et contenus d'une morale et d'un culte naturels” (Master’s thesis, Sorbonne, 1994), 4.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 5.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 6-7.

revolutionaries did not abandon the idea of regeneration in the later Revolution.

Theophilanthropy was representative of this program of regeneration, which for Ronsin was a break from the Christian past.³⁹ Ronsin therefore interprets Theophilanthropy as part of an incomplete rupture with Christianity. Its incompleteness was signaled by the continued presence of Jesus, a positive attitude towards Protestantism and similarities with the Worship of the Supreme Being.⁴⁰

Finally Ronsin suggests that Theophilanthropy was not an intellectual movement, but a social one, focused on the interests of the bourgeoisie. He further states that the ideas of Theophilanthropy were not original, but derivative and part of the “*goût de jour*.”⁴¹ Meaning Theophilanthropy was merely a representative of the general tastes or trends of the day. This is certainly true, but serves to illustrate the importance of Theophilanthropy as an amalgamation of many aspects of the Enlightenment such as its pretensions at universalism, perspectives on religion, Masonry, its focus on education and encyclopedias. In this way Theophilanthropy was the praxis of the Enlightenment.

The historiography regards Theophilanthropy as an afterthought. It was a pale repetition of the Worship of the Supreme Being or one last delusion before the Concordat. In reality Theophilanthropy surpassed the importance of the brief experiments of the radical period and the immediate context of its birth during the Directory. I argue that Theophilanthropy was at the center of three major developments in the early modern period; the Enlightenment “construction” of religion, modern civil religion, and the emergence of secularization.

³⁹ Ibid, 12.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 62-63, 69-70.

⁴¹ Ibid, 71.

The Enlightenment “construction” of religion held that religion was a human creation. The modern understanding of civil religion was that both religion and politics were human institutions and thus rationalized new claims of the state over religion. Theophilanthropy combined assumptions about religion as a human creation stemming from the Enlightenment and the discourse of civil religion reaching back to antiquity. In doing so Theophilanthropy represents a critical innovation, the willful invention of a new religion. This innovation would have a profound impact on what scholars call New Religious Movements (NRM). The prospect of creating a new religion, once realized spawned a proliferation of new religions into the twentieth century. The notion that religion was a human artifice also rationalized a state-directed initiative to forcibly remove religion from politics and public life. At the height of its power Theophilanthropy vied with the secular polices instituted in 1795 and this revolutionary dispute prefigured *Laïcité* and contemporary attitudes in France in regards to Islam.

The second chapter details the intellectual background of Theophilanthropy. The third explores how changing views of religion in the Enlightenment based on “nature” set the stage for the creation of a practiced “natural religion.” Chapter four focuses on the new concept of civil religion as it appeared in the work of Rousseau and in the early Revolution. Chapter five surveys the work of Chemin-Dupontès, the founder of Theophilanthropy. Chapter six examines the competing discourse of secularization during the transition from the Thermidorian Convention to the Directory. Chapter five focuses on Theophilanthropy as the unofficial civil religion of the Republic. The seventh chapter details the legacy of Theophilanthropy to the present day.

CHAPTER 2

THEORY

An exploration of Theophilanthropy requires an extensive engagement with the themes of religion in the Enlightenment, civil religion and secularization. This chapter begins with the so-called Enlightenment “construction” of religion which has defined the ways in which scholars have approached the study of religion from the eighteenth century to today. This debate is central because the emergence of the category of “religion” and the invention of a new religion are inextricably linked. This is followed by an investigation of civil religion which charts the concept that religion is a human invention from antiquity to the eighteenth century. Finally this chapter considers theories of secularization. This discussion sets the stage for the later investigation of the specifically French variant of secularization, which emerged during the first French Revolution as a political program proscribing public worship based on the assumption of the Enlightenment and implemented by the state.

The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment “construction” of religion has become a central concern in scholarship on religion.¹ This “construction” encompassed the philosophical, scholarly and

¹ For further information regarding the debate on the Enlightenment “construction” of religion see: Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); David Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014); Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology*, trans. William Sayers (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Peter Harrison, *'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, and W. W. Mijnhardt, *The Book That Changed Europe: Picart & Bernard's Religious Ceremonies of the World* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010); Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Wilfred

scientific study of religion.² The conceptual tools for this study consisted of the allegedly universal categories of reason and nature. This perspective sought to transform religion from a source of conflict to a source of unity. Enlightenment thinkers effected this transformation by defining religion as a universal essence with a multitude of historical and contingent expressions. They held such expressions to be human creations and thus within the domain of politics. These assumptions became the basis for efforts in the French Revolution to create a civil religion for the Republic called Theophilanthropy.

The debate about the concept of a “religious enlightenment” is crucial to understanding the Enlightenment perspective on religion.³ This debate emerged from the thought of J. G. A. Pocock who envisioned plural enlightenments that varied by region and content.⁴ One of these iterations was a more “conservative” and “religious” enlightenment located in England, which contrasted with a more radical French variant. Some like Jonathan Israel, continuing the earlier work of historians like Peter Gay, seek to recover a monolithic Enlightenment from this regional pluralism and insist upon its unified character.⁵ Israel does account for differences with a description of a “moderate” and “radical” Enlightenment, but ultimately sees the radical as the

Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion; A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York: New American Library, 1964).

² In one sense the word construction means a set of ideas, but it can also be a kind of structural metaphor indicating an act of fabrication which assumes certain truth claims about the nature of religion. Being that its meaning is not self-evident and that it is not clear what meaning many theorists are using I have enclosed it in quotation marks.

³ The debate surrounding the Enlightenment is extensive, for a starting point see: Ryan Patrick Hanley and Darrin M. McMahon, *The Enlightenment: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies* (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁴ J. G. A. Pocock, “Post-Puritan England and the Problem of the Enlightenment,” in *Culture and politics from Puritanism to the Enlightenment*, ed. Perez Zagorin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 91-112; J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁵ Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966); Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1-22.

most important. Others like David Sorkin highlight instances of “religion” and “enlightenment” existing together in mutual agreement.⁶

Both positions have elements of truth. The Enlightenment was a series of closely related propositions across geographical and linguistic boundaries. Both “moderates” and “radicals” shared assumptions about a “natural religion.” What transpired was not plural enlightenments, but different factions within a larger Enlightenment discourse. These factions also appeared in the Revolution. A war of ideas played out in the course of the Revolution as certain factions attempted to suppress or eliminate others. In this way the Revolution can be understood as the praxis of the Enlightenment.

Historians attempting to save the Enlightenment from association with the more unsavory aspects of the Revolution see a discontinuity between the two or believe that the Revolution “betrayed” Enlightenment values.⁷ This anachronism singles out one faction as being more or less representative of the Enlightenment than another. There was no betrayal; each faction was simply advancing the values of the Enlightenment/Revolution that they believed to be true. The Revolution was a crisis which allowed an intellectual war to spill into the streets. Its peaceful nature in the salon culture resulted from relative prosperity and the fact that almost all of its participants were from the same elite circles. This is what Habermas’ calls the ideal public sphere, a rational, collegial and respectful engagement with ideas.⁸ When crisis destroyed the privileges of the aristocracy and democratized the values of the Enlightenment, the war of ideas manifested itself in bloody conflict. The historian Roger Chartier states that the Revolution

⁶ David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 6.

⁷ Robert Wokler, “The Enlightenment, the Nation-State, and the Primal Patricide of Modernity,” in *The Enlightenment and Modernity*, ed. Norman Geras and Robert Wokler (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 162, 171-177.

⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1989), 175-195.

“produced” the Enlightenment.⁹ Yes and no, revolutionaries who “constructed” the Enlightenment did so because they were the victors. The diversity of the Enlightenment was present in the Revolution. Its subsequent unity, as described by Chartier, was achieved through a series of purges.

Thinking on religion during the Enlightenment was quite radical. However, this perspective was not on the whole in the service of denying religion, but in its redemption.¹⁰ Gay and Israel have misunderstood its purpose, or extrapolated the whole from a minority part. The mainstream Enlightenment perspective on religion was at its very core a desire to rescue religion and divinity from repudiation. The Enlightenment’s wholesale reconfiguring was in many ways, a religious reformation.¹¹ Critical elements of the Enlightenment reformation continued into the French Revolution.¹² This helps to explain what Alexis de Tocqueville famously described as the “religious” character of the Revolution.¹³

Holy War and “Nature”

The historians J. G. A. Pocock and Perez Zagorin have notably explored how the Reformation and the Religious Wars provided the impetus for the experimentation on religion in

⁹ Roger Chartier, *The cultural origins of the French Revolution*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), 5.

¹⁰ The Enlightenment does not represent a phase of secularization, but different understanding of religion.

¹¹ For some other works on this topic see: Michael Printy, “Protestantism and Progress in the Year XII: Charles Villers’s Essay on the Spirit and Influence of Luther’s Reformation (1804),” *Modern Intellectual History* 9, no. 2 (2012): 303-329; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Lectures on the Philosophy of History,” in *Political Writings*, ed. Laurence Winant Dickey, trans. Hugh Barr Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Charly Coleman, *The Virtues of Abandon: An Anti-Individualist History of the French Enlightenment* (Stanford : Stanford University Press, 2014).

¹² While many thinkers explored in this dissertation come from a Protestant background and although this new concept of religion was a reformation of sorts; it was not a protestant one. These thinkers did not advocate one religion over another, but a universal understanding of religion which would transcend and encompass all religion.

¹³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955), 10.

the eighteenth century.¹⁴ The terrible experiences of these Wars demanded political solutions such as the Peace of Westphalia and the French system of absolutism. The Wars exposed a theological problem fundamental to monotheism: how to reconcile the notion of a monotheistic God with a fractured and diverse religious experience. How could the manifestations of a single beneficent God produce not only a confusing array of ideas and beliefs, but also terrible religious conflict? The universality inherent in monotheism was as yet unrealized. Past attempts to bring all humanity under the banner of a universal faith had resulted only in holy wars and internecine conflict.

The reconciliation of the rupture wrought by the Religious Wars was one of the central concerns of what scholars term the Enlightenment “construction” of religion. The advocates of this new understanding of religion sought to banish the dark fanaticism of the past with an era of *lumière*. For Enlightenment thinkers the Religious Wars were ever present and the threat of fanaticism remained real. Episodes like the Calas Affair highlighted the continued struggle for tolerance.¹⁵ The danger that Europe was experiencing only a respite and could well descend into another catastrophic war over religion motivated thinkers to search for a permanent solution. In the intellectual sphere the means of overcoming the heritage of the Religious Wars and preventing another slide into the abyss was the elaboration of nature as a transcendent realm

¹⁴ Knud Haakonssen, *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2; Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, 1: 7, 2: 2-3; Perez Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

¹⁵ Some of the concepts highlighted here fall under the issue of tolerance which has an extensive historiography: John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration, and Early Enlightenment Culture: Religious Intolerance and Arguments for Religious Toleration in Early Modern and "Early Enlightenment" Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Ourida Mostefai and John T. Scott, *Rousseau and "L'Infame": Religion, Toleration, and Fanaticism in the Age of Enlightenment* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009); Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

which could encompass religion and politics.¹⁶ This conception of nature, formed in the course of the Religious Wars and brought to fruition in the eighteenth century, legitimized a series of related ideas such as the contract theory of government, natural rights and natural religion.

Imbedded within this concept of nature was an eschatology which held that the secrets of creation lay hidden in an immemorial golden age.¹⁷ This realm was not temporal, but conceptual. It was accessible at all times using reason. In this understanding “natural religion” was the elucidation of an ancient primordial religion which subsequently evolved (or devolved) into the various religions of the world. All religions were descendants of this single ancient religion. Using reason one could return to the precepts of this original religion and also uncover a single kernel of truth within contemporary religions. Thus it would be possible to ascertain a universal religion of nature, encompassing all the religions of the world.

In the process of their study, Enlightenment thinkers also created “religion” as a category of analysis for the purposes of investigation and experimentation. Dissected and its component parts separated out for study, religion became an object of scientific inquiry. These thinkers defined and compared religion by a set of propositions which were testable against both human reason and nature. When analyzed the commonalities between religions produced a set of universal characteristics. Enlightenment thinkers reconceived the differences between religions as contingent and relative, nothing more than the outward expressions of temporary historical needs and circumstances. This duality between the essential and contingent elements of natural

¹⁶ For more explorations on this understanding of nature see: D. G. Charlton, *New Images of the Natural in France: A Study in European Cultural History, 1750-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Jean Ehrard, *L'idée de nature en France dans la première moitié du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1963); Daniel Mornet, *Le sentiment de la nature en France de J.-J. Rousseau à Bernardin de Saint-Pierre: essai sur les rapports de la littérature et des mœurs* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1907); Céline Spector, “Naturalisation des croyances, religion naturelle et histoire naturelle de la religion: le statut du fait religieux dans L'Esprit des lois,” in *Montesquieu, l'État et la religion*, ed. Jean Ehrard (Sofia: Éd. Iztok-Zapad, 2007), 40-78.

¹⁷ Jean Delumeau, *History of Paradise: The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition*, trans. Matthew O'Connell (New York: Continuum, 1995), 226.

religion created an understanding which was both universal and plural; a universal set of essential characteristics expressed in a multitude of variations. I call this the *Interpretatio Europa*, a schema for conceiving of a universal religion by incorporating all the religions of the world into a single model.¹⁸

Natural religion was more than a type of religion although it could be conceived as such; it was a means to interpret all religion.¹⁹ Therefore dividing different perspectives on religion into sub-categories of natural religion, “reasonable” Christianity, Deism is less helpful than extracting the common set of assumptions present in all these positions. It is likewise difficult to separate out different positions along the spectrum of the “religious” Enlightenment. “Liberal” or “enlightenment” Christianity and natural religion were at times indistinguishable.²⁰

Scholars and the Enlightenment

Scholars approaching the legacy of the Enlightenment “construction” of religion have focused on its origins and those who challenge its assumptions. This is relevant for two reasons; the assumptions of the *Interpretatio Europa* are embedded in the academic study of religion and theories of secularization depend upon a definition of religion.

¹⁸ This phrase is taken from the Greco-Roman tradition of *Interpretatio Graeca* and *Interpretatio Romana*. It was the tradition in antiquity of associating divinities from different regions and peoples of the world with each other.

¹⁹ The two labels most often associated with these sets of ideas are Deism and natural religion for further reading on this topic see: Peter Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism* (London: Routledge, 1989); Peter Gay, *Deism; an Anthology* (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1968); Paul Hazard, *The European Mind, 1680-1715*, ed. J. Lewis May (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964); Wayne Hudson, *The English Deists: Studies in Early Enlightenment* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009); Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); John Stephenson Spink, *La Libre pensée française de Gassendi à Voltaire* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1966); Stanley Tweyman, *Hume on Natural Religion* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996); Kerry S. Walters, *Rational Infidels: The American Deists* (Durango: Longwood Academic, 1992); John W. Yolton, *Philosophy, Religion, and Science in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1990).

²⁰ Raf Geenens and Helena Rosenblatt, *French Liberalism from Montesquieu to the Present Day* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Helena Rosenblatt, *Liberal Values: Benjamin Constant and the Politics of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

One of the first to critique the Enlightenment view of religion was Friedrich Schleiermacher who condemned the perspectives and actions of the French Enlightenment and Revolution. Schleiermacher addressed the “cultured despisers” of religion in the work *On Religion*. He stated that the Enlightenment was hardly unique in its critique of religion and that, “At all times but few have discerned religion itself, while millions, in various ways, have been satisfied to juggle with its trappings.”²¹ Speaking to his own era, he stated that the open war against religion focused only on superficial subjects. “You start with the outside, with the opinions, dogmas and usages, in which every religion is presented. . . .wherefore religion generally can be nothing but an empty pretense which, like a murky and oppressive atmosphere, has enshrouded part of the truth.”²² Consequently the “despisers” of religion have shunned all religion, from those marked by “human follies” (human sacrifice) to the most “refined deism.”²³ Ultimately Schleiermacher believed the opponents of religion had not apprehended the true essence of religion, which for him was an interior reality.²⁴

Being a contemporary with the Enlightenment and the French Revolution informed Schleiermacher’s criticism. Scholarly interest in the “construction” of religion, however, would not emerge until the twentieth century. This was in part because throughout the nineteenth century those studying religion accepted many of the assumptions developed by the Enlightenment. It was not until Wilfred Cantwell Smith and later scholars, some influenced by post-modernism, did academics more effectively challenge the Enlightenment “construction” of religion.

²¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.

²² *Ibid*, 14.

²³ *Ibid*, 14.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 15.

Smith, a scholar of comparative religions, was among the first to describe how the Enlightenment concept of religion developed.²⁵ In *The Meaning and End of Religion*, echoing a point made by Schleiermacher, Smith states that the Enlightenment, "... stressed an intellectualist and impersonal schematization of things."²⁶ Part of this scientific project was the creation, "... of a generic 'religion' to designate as an external entity the total system or sum of all systems of beliefs, or simply the generalizations that they are there. This is a concept primarily formulated and used by men who are weary of the clash or suspicious of the whole enterprise."²⁷ The "construction" of religion for Smith was twofold, the creation of a generic "religion" for investigation and the elimination of religion as a source of conflict in society. Like Schleiermacher, Smith maintains that "religion" is not a system of ideas or a compendium of beliefs about a particular group of people, but an interior reality. "Neither religion in general nor any one of the religions, I will contend, is in itself an intelligible entity, a valid object of inquiry or of concern either for the scholar or for the man of faith."²⁸ Ultimately Smith rejects the Enlightenment category of religion on the grounds that faith is beyond the realm of scientific investigation.

Peter Harrison, using Smith as a jumping off point, explores how the Enlightenment created "religion" and "religions" as categories of analysis. Harrison writes in *'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* that, "The concept of 'religion' involved the relocation of religious faith into a new sphere, a sphere in which the presumed substance of religion could serve as an object of rational investigation. The new context for 'religion' was the realm of

²⁵ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 45.

²⁶ Ibid, 40.

²⁷ Ibid, 43.

²⁸ Ibid, 16.

nature.”²⁹ This perspective claimed that nature was not just the arena of study, but the actual substance of religion in an ontological sense. Religion no longer constituted a divine (miraculous, interventionists or prophetic) reality, which proved religion through a relationship between God and the world, but was the product of “natural processes.”³⁰

This methodology defined not only the parameters of the experiment, but also the object of inquiry. Borrowing from the philosophy of science, Harrison states that “...the intellectual construct ‘religion’ is to a large measure constituted by the methods which are supposed to elucidate it.”³¹ For Harrison this led to the transformation and reduction of religion into a set of propositions proven through reason and the observation of nature. “The creation of a propositional religion enabled discussions of the merits of other ‘religions’, conceived to exist similarly as sects of beliefs. The religions so constructed could then be impartially examined and compared with each other, and evidence for or against their truth could be accumulated.”³² This “scientific” enterprise created the classification of “religion” which had universal implications.

The “construction” of religion is also raised in a recent book written jointly by Lynn Hunt, Margaret Jacob and Wijnad Mijnhardt titled *The Book that Changed Europe*. The work focuses on the encyclopedia *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les pueples du monde* by Bernard Picart and Jean Frederic Bernard. Through these two thinkers, Hunt, et al., chart the changing definition of religion in Enlightenment Europe. Picart and Bernard based their work on a method of equal comparison and scientific investigation. Hunt, Jacob and Mijnhardt trace this

²⁹ Harrison, *'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*, 5.

³⁰ Ibid, 5, 16.

³¹ Ibid, 14.

³² Ibid, 26.

attitude to the Reformation and Religious Wars, the discovery of the New World and the Scientific Revolution.³³

Some scholars have rejected the category of religion altogether starting that the Enlightenment invented religion. Scholars Jonathan Z. Smith and more recently Russell T. McCutcheon suggest that the category of religion was created by the method used to study it. Consequently the object “religion” does not exist outside this category.³⁴ In other words “religion” is not *sui generis*, a thing in itself. McCutcheon states that “...the methods and theories employed to conduct research and generate hypotheses—actually creates or constructs the phenomenon itself.”³⁵ This is overstated. The Enlightenment thinkers who “constructed” religion did not simply gather together a disparate collection of ideas and practices and label it “religion.” The category of religion born in the Enlightenment transformed pre-existing concepts. “Religion” was “constructed” or more precisely reimagined out of something prior.³⁶

McCutcheon, coming from a sociopolitical perspective, is interested in the intersection of society and power relationships present in the study of religion particularly in an academic setting. “This wide-ranging discursive field (discipline of religion) is established and maintained by such ideological and rhetorical strategies as dehistoricization, universalization, and decontextualization, all of which generate and guarantee the autonomy, integrity, and priority of not simply the phenomenon of religion but also the profession of interpreting it.”³⁷ He rejects the notion that religion represents an independent and autonomous field of study. He labels this

³³ Hunt, *The Book That Changed Europe*, 4-8.

³⁴ Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 2-18.

³⁵ McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, 8.

³⁶ Thinkers such as Locke, Rousseau and Kant systematically transformed Christianity in their efforts to construct a universal understanding of religion based on reason and nature. Picard and Bernard used the assumptions of Christian monotheism to interpret other “religions” of world. Jean Frederic Bernard, *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (Amsterdam: J.F. Bernard, 1728), vi-xii.

³⁷ McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, 28.

assumption “sui generis religion” and explores how it obscures rather than explains “religion” or rather those human behaviors which have come to be associated with “religion.”³⁸

As McCutcheon sees it, sui generis religion is an autonomous field that requires a specially trained class of academics who use unique methods to investigate religion. This rationalizes the existence of and support for academic departments of religion, which have obscured their own origins and “manufacturing” (a reference to Noam Chomsky).

McCutcheon’s work explores how “...sui generis religion is a constructed, analytical tool with an occluded manufacturing (portrayed, understood and represented) history and disguised material implications.”³⁹ While he has a problem with the sui generis and universal concept of religion he does not necessarily have a problem with the use of religion as a category. “...the taxonomic category of religion is useful inasmuch as it is but one conceptual apparatus employed to investigate an aspect of historical human behavior and beliefs from the vantage point of one theoretical position.”⁴⁰ Religion then is no longer the subject of analysis, but becomes merely an analytical tool.

McCutcheon’s solution is the use of an interdisciplinary approach based on “testable, naturalist theories.”⁴¹ He proposes that scholars could still employ the category of religion, but must do so with clarity and without recourse to the sui generis concept. He advocates the study of religion as a category in much the same way that contemporary social theory treats categories

³⁸ Some of McCutcheon’s positions are mirrored in the work of Talal Asad. Asad’s primary critique is from the anthropological perspective and challenges the universal category of religion devised by Clifford Geertz. Asad sees the universal definition of religion as part of a colonial discourse. His position within the postcolonial tradition seeks to explore how the universal category of religion is part of a program of control. In this vein he proposes that colonial regimes must establish a kind of universal rhetoric to rationalize their imposition over other societies and one of these rhetorical devices is the language of universal religion. Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 27-48.

³⁹ McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, 5.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 19.

⁴¹ Ibid, 6.

like race, class and gender.⁴² Another conclusion based on his work is that scholars could conceivably study those aspects of human society which had previously been described as “religious” using other methods and so the category of religion could be completely discarded. McCutcheon’s principle aim is to eliminate the concept of religion as an interior essence and therefore unapproachable through a “naturalistic” methodology. He attacks the interior concept in the work of Schleiermacher, Eliade and Smith.⁴³

Final Thoughts

The problematic legacy of the Enlightenment understanding of religion remains unresolved and the debate continues. Even the historiography while criticizing the Enlightenment perspective employs some of its basic assumptions and truth claims. This expresses itself in the use of anthropocentric and industrial language (manufacturing and construction) representing assumptions about the nature of religion as a human invention. A different perspective is needed. The word religion, from the Latin *religio* and those things associated with it such as notions of divinity have been understood differently in different ages. This does not, however, say anything about what “religion” might actually be. Theories of religion whether they are from the era of the Enlightenment or its progeny in the contemporary academy emphasize certain facets of “religion” and neglect others. The point McCutcheon makes about the study of religion “constructing” the object of its inquiry comes from the philosophy of science so perhaps that is where the issue can be clarified.

Werner Heisenberg in his book *Physics and Philosophy* elucidates the problem: “What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning.”⁴⁴ This quote

⁴² Ibid, 130.

⁴³ Ibid, 128-130.

⁴⁴ Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science* (New York: Harper, 1958), 58.

constitutes one part of the Heisenberg principle that the study of nature is influenced by the very act of observation. Literally speaking, the instruments used by scientists to observe and study nature have an influence upon nature itself and therefore impact the experiment. Philosophically speaking Heisenberg understood that the most important instrument in the study of nature is the human intellect. The person(s) conducting the experiment shape the object of inquiry and even prefigure the conclusions by the types of questions and methods they use.

From this perspective the study of religion exposes certain aspects of religion while obscuring others. Over time the method used to interpret religion may change. As the method changes, religion is reimagined. During the Enlightenment reason and nature were used to “construct” religion as a product of nature. During the nineteenth century Émile Durkheim reimagined religion as a social construction.

Each method exposes different aspects of religion and discards or obscures others. Does that mean that those elements exposed constitute the essence of religion while those aspects discarded no longer exist? Does this mean that the object itself ceases to exist? Moreover is the study of religion a process of refinement in which the substance of “religion” is being gradually revealed? Or are these various “constructs” simply solipsistic inventions, figments of the human intellect exposing only self-referential realities, which speak more to the aims and programs of their authors than to any supposed “truth?” Furthermore is more of the “truth” exposed with each new iteration of scholarly work on religion? No, I think the opposite is quite true. When these perspectives reimagine religion, adding hermeneutical layers of obscurity, they only serve to conceal the object behind various theoretical edifices and readings.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Garrett Barden, John Cumming (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

Different perspectives on religion depend upon the method of questioning and the exigencies of the time. The Enlightenment interpretation of religion was rooted in a response to the Reformation and Religious Wars. Attempting to eliminate conflict, Enlightenment thinkers redefined religion as a universal category within nature discoverable through reason. Religion could be defined so that its basic character could be agreed upon and the conflicts generated by theological disputes or competing religious communities could be eliminated. This same motivation was at work in the French Revolution. Theophilanthropy was to be a universal foundation where all Frenchman regardless of confession could join together in a unity defined by the nation. The truth claims of the Enlightenment were an artifact of a particular time in history and should not be the basis for making any claims beyond this specific context. The solution is to root oneself in the sources, not anachronistic theoretical frames.

Civil Religion

This section explores the origins and trajectory of the idea, that religion is purely a human creation. In European Civilization this idea is in constant tension with the opposite position that religion is a divine reality. At critical points in Western Civilization these two positions have battled. In ancient Rome religion was held to be an invention of the state. Jews and Christians rejected this position. Pervasive and destructive conflict ensued, only ending with the ascendancy of Christianity and the assertion of religion as a divine reality. Further periods of tension followed, first in the Renaissance and then in the Enlightenment where the modern idea that religion is a human creation re-emerged. The French Revolution being the praxis of the Enlightenment represented the birth of the modern iteration of this idea and its two principle manifestations; the modern concept of civil religion and secularization.

The topic of civil religion speaks to an enduring concern in human society regarding the interaction of religion and politics.⁴⁶ The issues of civil religion center on the question of unity. First, are religion and politics united or separate and what is the nature of their interaction? Secondly, what is the relationship of religion to social cohesion? How is religion used to bind people together and how does religious conflict or the perceived decline of religion impact social cohesion? These points of interaction between religion and politics are in continual tension, but periods of crisis are decisive. During crises the bonds of the existing order dissolve and new solutions emerge to restore the social and political fabric.

The study of civil religion is guided by two themes; crisis and foundations. Exploring periods of crisis in European history becomes an essential component in understanding the historiography of civil religion. In moments of crisis the relationship between religion and politics becomes fluid and the underlying assumption which bind the state together are visible. In these periods of flux theorists of civil religion arise to confront the challenges of their era by offering critiques of the established order and solutions for its renewal. Foundation is the second essential theme as it represents how thinkers have approached the study of the origins of states. Theorists of civil religion propose that at the foundation of a state, the secrets for the correct

⁴⁶ For scholarship on civil religion see: Ronald Beiner, *Civil Religion: A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Robert Bellah, *The Robert Bellah Reader*, ed. Steven M. Tipton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Bruno Bernardi, "La religion civile, institution de tolerance?," in *Rousseau and "L'Infame": Religion, Toleration, and Fanaticism in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Ourida Mostefai and John T. Scott (Amsterdam: Rodopi 2009); Sébastien Fath, *Dieu bénisse l'Amérique la religion de la Maison-Blanche* (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 2004); Mark Goldie, "The civil religion of James Harrington," in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagdan (Cambridge: University Press, 1987); Robert Linder, "Civil Religion in historical perspective: the reality that underlies the concept," *A journal of church and state* 17, no. 3 (1975): 399-421; John Markoff and Daniel Regan, "The Rise and Fall of Civil Religion: Comparative Perspectives," *Sociology of Religion* 42, no. 4 (1981): 333-352; Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Leroy Rouner, *Civil Religion and Political Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986); Mark Silk, "Numa Pompilius and the Idea of Civil Religion in the West," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72, no. 4 (2004): 863-896; Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli's God*, trans. Antony Shugaar (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Sergey Zanin, "Rousseau, Montesquieu et la religion civile," in *Montesquieu, l'État et la religion*, ed. Jean Ehrard (Sofia: Éd. Iztok-Zapad, 2007), 186-212.

establishment of order reveal themselves. For some the foundation also represents a primordial golden age, a time of harmony in which religion and politics were united. Additionally the founder figure is present at the origins. For theorists of civil religion this founder often represents an amalgam of the human and divine. The founder bestows legitimacy and unites religion and politics in the establishment of a new order.⁴⁷

The eighteenth century was such a time of crisis in European civilization. This crisis manifested in the twin developments of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Together they established a new order that held religion to be a human creation, inverting the previous principle. This ontological reversal remains imbedded in modernity. Critical to this transition was the experimental process of the Revolution and its principle achievement the invention of a new religion or Theophilanthropy.

The Ancient Civil Religion

The greatest exemplars of the ancient civil religion⁴⁸ were the second King of Rome, Numa Pompilius and the arch-theorist of Roman civil religion Marcus Terentius Varro.⁴⁹ Numa combined two key elements of Roman civil religion, the union of religion and politics and

⁴⁷ To this day “religion” is bound up with a founder figure (even when there is not a clear analogy as in the case of some Eastern traditions). This has Abrahamic precedents, but it also has a trajectory tied to the civil religion discourse and its evolution in the modern period. Lionel Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions & Universal Civilization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

⁴⁸ One could argue that the first theoretical exposition of civil religion in the ancient world was the “noble lie” concept in Plato’s Republic. In Plato’s ideal polis the state crafted a series of myths to tie the people together. Religion served as an auxiliary of state power, used for the good of citizens and the maintenance of order. Plato, *The republic*, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari, trans. Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 107-108.

⁴⁹ For more works on the importance of Numa in Roman religion see: Jesse Benedict Carter, *The Religion of Numa, And Other Essays on the Religion of Ancient Rome* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1906); Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, ed. John Dryden, trans. Arthur Hugh Clough (New York: The Modern library, 1932); Mark Silk, “Numa Pompilius,” 864-865; Livy, *The Early History of Rome: Books I-V of The History of Rome from Its Foundations*, trans. Aubrey De Sélincourt (London: Penguin Books, 2002); A. Willi, “Numa’s Dangerous Books: The Exegetical History of a Roman Forgery,” *Museum Helveticum* 55 (1998): 139-72.

thinking about religion as a human artifice.⁵⁰ Roman civilization recognized no separation between religion and politics though politics was primary.⁵¹ Historian Mark Silk states, “In his biography of Numa, written a century after Livy, Plutarch associates the king with other ancient lawgivers, or *nomothetes*, who feigned supernatural support for their legislation— Zaleucus, Minos, Zoroaster, and Lycurgus of Sparta.”⁵² In this tradition founders presented themselves as an amalgam of the human and divine. They founded what Ronald Beiner calls “theocratic civic orders.”⁵³ Some Roman thinkers also reversed the founder concept and proposed that the gods of the Pantheon were humans raised up to godhood in some time immemorial.⁵⁴ The elevation of Romulus to divine status as Quirinus was an example of this process. Romans further emulated the elevation of human paragons into godhood in the Empire with the tradition of deifying emperors and the institution of the imperial cult. With the good of the Roman state as its rationale the divinity of the emperor provided the basis for an imperial patriotism.⁵⁵ The prospect of men becoming gods (the inversion of the divine founder) became further evidence that religion was a human institution.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Numa was central to Renaissance thinking about religion as a human institution, exemplified by Machiavelli. Numa also appears in the *Encyclopédie* in the section on religion under the sub heading on Greek and Roman religion. This section reproduced many of the themes of Machiavelli and of course Livy. It focused on Numa and his role in the establishment of ancient Roman religion. Denis Diderot, Jean le Rond d'Alembert and Robert Morrissey, *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project, 2013), 14:83

⁵¹ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On the commonwealth ; and, On the laws*, trans. James Zetzel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 96, 100; W. Warde Fowler, *Roman Ideas of Deity in the Last Century Before the Christian Era: Lectures Delivered in Oxford for the Common University Fund* (London: Macmillan, 1914), 85-87.

⁵² Silk, “Numa Pompilius,” 866; Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, 84.

⁵³ Beiner, *Civil Religion*, 29.

⁵⁴ Fowler, *Roman Ideas of Deity*, 82.

⁵⁵ In an increasingly diverse empire establishing a sense of unity became a central concern and the Emperor provided the solution. The *Interpretatio Romana* was made possible practically through the divine emperor because patriotic loyalty could be expressed in the Imperial cult (worship) regardless of one’s affiliation to a particular worship or religion. However, Jews and Christians refusal to participate was tantamount to treason.

⁵⁶ Augustine discussed this in relation to Alexander and the Egyptian high priest Leo. Leo related to Alexander that the gods were merely men who through their great deeds were raised to the status of godhood. Leo instructed Alexander to burn any of evidence of this deceit as its fiction was necessary to maintain order. Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 318; Brian

Numa's story began with the new King bringing religion to the Romans, civilizing and forging them into a nation. Numa credited his directives to the water nymph Egeria thus giving his reforms divine sanction.⁵⁷ Upon his death Numa's writings detailing the willful invention of Roman religion were interred with his body, but after four hundred years a heavy rain uncovered the gravesite. When opened, the coffin contained only the writings. Having read them, the praetor Petilius decided it would be best to have them burned.⁵⁸

The anecdote raised questions about the existence of Numa and authenticity of his reforms. As Silk notes these questions facilitated a discussion thereafter on religion as artifice. "The pious fraud involving Egeria is essential to understanding the extent of subsequent interest in Numa. Had the story simply told of a king who got his spiritual marching orders from a goddess, it would have been no more than an agreeable myth about the divine origins of religious observance. As it was, the deception invited reflection on religion as a human institution designed for social betterment."⁵⁹ The intellectual elite of Rome and chroniclers of its religion such as Cicero, Varro and Plutarch accepted that the very foundation of Roman religion was artifice. They nevertheless viewed this "deception" as necessary and useful for a well ordered state.⁶⁰

The Numa story exemplifies two fundamental characteristics of modern civil religion: a utilitarian interpretation of religion as a tool of social betterment and the invention of religion for

Harding, "The Use of Alexander the Great in Augustine's *City of God*," *Augustinian Studies* 39, no. 1 (2008): 113-128.

⁵⁷ Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, 88; Livy, *The Early History of Rome: Books I-V*, 52-53

⁵⁸Ibid, 101.

⁵⁹ Silk, "Numa Pompilius," 866, 867.

⁶⁰ One is reminded of Ovid in his *Ars Amatoria* (The Art of Love) during the same era. *Expedit esse deos, et, ut expedit, esse putemus.* (It is expedient that there are gods and, as it is expedient, let us suppose it is so). Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* I: 637. An eighteenth-century parallel being Voltaire's *Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer* (If God did not exist it would be necessary to invent him). Voltaire, *Epitre à l'auteur du livre des trois imposteurs* (Paris: n.p., 1769).

that purpose. The utilitarian argument is common throughout history, but the notion that one could create a religion was unique. Not until the French Revolution did efforts to consciously invent a new religion reappear, embodied in Theophilanthropy.

Varro and Augustine

Marcus Terentius Varro, the greatest theorist of Roman civil religion, lived through the Caesarian Civil War and the rise of the Principate under Augustus. The reforms of Roman religion under Augustus provided the context for Varro's exploration of Roman civil religion.

Varro described the basis for Roman civil religion in *Antiquitates rerum divinarum*.

Unfortunately only fragments remain.⁶¹ Thankfully the historian can acquire a basic knowledge of Varro's ideas by reading Augustine of Hippo's *City of God*.⁶² Augustine devoted much of his work to a refutation of Roman religion and used Varro as a foil. Augustine's purpose was to characterize Roman religion in a negative light, but by reading past this bias it is possible to uncover Varro's perspective.⁶³

Varro began his work by dividing Roman religion into mythical, natural and civil theologies. Mythical theology concerned the popular myths among the people. Natural theology was what today is called classical philosophy. Civil theology according to Augustine was, "...that which the citizens in their towns, and especially the priests, should know and administer. In this kind is contained the knowledge of which gods are to be worshiped publically, and what rites and sacrifices are appropriate to each."⁶⁴ Varro held natural theology in high regard, but criticized mythical theology. Like other thinkers of his age such as Cicero and Seneca, Varro

⁶¹Marcus Terentius Varro, *Antiquitates rerum divinarum*, trans. Burkhart Cardauns (Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1976).

⁶² Augustine's *City of God* was, in part, a thorough refutation of Roman civil religion and its arch theorist Varro

⁶³ The kind of analysis one finds in: Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁶⁴ Augustine, *The City of God*, 248.

condemned popular forms of worship as superstition.⁶⁵ Part of Varro's purpose was to outline an ideal if perhaps unattainable expression of Roman civil religion. He stated that if he could reinstitute the worship of the Pantheon it would be "according to the principles of nature."⁶⁶ He believed this "natural religion" would provide the necessary elements for social and state stability without "superstition."⁶⁷ Ultimately these reforms would have been a state-directed enterprise wherein the state functioned as a final arbiter over religion.

The reformist impulse of Varro turned on the interplay between truth and falsehood. While Varro condemned mythical theology as false, the veracity of civil theology was less clear. Speaking of Varro, Augustine notes, "I should be suspected of conjecture here had he himself, speaking of religious observances in another place, not plainly said that there are many truths which it is not useful for the common people to know, and, moreover, that there are many false views which it is expedient that the people should take to be true."⁶⁸ The utilitarian argument of Roman civil theology surfaces through Augustine's critique. Varro judged civil theology by a standard which put the good of the Roman state above truth. Augustine interpreted Varro's rationale as nothing more than satanic deception, but even so Augustine well understood the purpose of civil theology, "...men like demons—have persuaded the people in the name of religion to accept as true those things which they knew to be false: they have done this in order to bind men more tightly, as it were, in civil society, so that they might likewise possess them as

⁶⁵ Augustine, *The City of God*, 182-183, 241 and 261 (referencing Seneca).

⁶⁶ Ibid, 182.

⁶⁷ Was Varro attempting to define a "reasonable" Roman religion? For an interesting take on Varro's attempt to meld Roman tradition and philosophy see: Peter Van Nuffelen, "Varro's Divine Antiquities: Roman Religion as an Image of Truth," *Classical Philology* 105, no. 2 (2010): 162-188.

⁶⁸ Augustine, *The City of God*, 182.

subjects.”⁶⁹ The use of deception or a “noble lie,” to bind citizens and the state together was a potent perspective in the Greco-Roman world.

What was deception for Augustine was for Varro simply the representation of a worldview which held religion to be a human creation. Augustine related that Varro in *Antiquitates* divided his work between things human and divine.⁷⁰ “When Varro confesses, then, that he wrote of human things first and then of things divine because these divine things were instituted by men, he gives this as his reason: ‘Just as the painter exists before the picture and the builder before the building, so do cities precede the things instituted by cities.’”⁷¹ For Varro religion and state were united, but the state was primary. The purpose of religion was related to legitimacy and the establishment and maintenance of social order. For Varro the state itself created religion or at the very least wielded religion as an instrument. This worldview and its civilization died out and give way to a new civilization with an altogether different view of divinity.

The transition to Christian based understanding of theology in the work of Augustine dispensed with the utilitarian line of reasoning and reversed the human/divine distinction of Varro. Augustine’s sought to strip away the utilitarian argument leaving only the lie. He used the very arguments of Varro as support, tearing at the foundations of Roman religion and exposing it as false.

I see, indeed, why the mythical theology should be distinguished from the civil: because the former is false, vile and unworthy. But to distinguish the natural from the civil: what else is this but to confess that the civil theology itself is a lie? For if the other theology is natural, what is there in it worthy of blame, that it should be excluded? But if the theology is called civil is not natural, what merit has it that it should be admitted? This, in truth, is the reason why Varro wrote of things human first and of things divine

⁶⁹ Ibid, 184.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 243.

⁷¹ Ibid, 245.

afterwards: because in treating of things divine he did not follow nature, but the institutions of men.⁷²

In reference to Varro's categorization the word "civil" signified artifice. One of Augustine's aims in *City of God* was to promote the Christian community apart from the Roman state and against the Roman tradition of religion as artifice.

In Augustine's time the "heavenly" and "earthly" cities were intertwined; Christianity was the official religion of the Roman Empire. Christianity might well be treated like the previous Roman religion, simply a tool of the state. Augustine argued against this and for the primacy of the heavenly city. For Augustine the Christian community of believers had precedence over civil and state power. In this formulation things divine preceded all things, so it was not the state that created religion but the Supreme God. In the end, the Roman system was cast down and European civilization underwent an inversion in its understanding of religion from a human to a divine institution embodied in the Church.

Though the divine origin of religion was ingrained within Christian Civilization, tension between Church and state surfaced periodically in the European Middle Ages. In the civil religion tradition this tension is best exemplified by Dante Alighieri. In *Monarchy*, Dante interpreted temporal power or "empire" to be under human dominion.⁷³ For Dante the power of kings was independent from "spiritual power" of the Church.⁷⁴ "Thus I say that the temporal realm does not owe its existence to the spiritual realm, nor its power..."⁷⁵ For Dante the spiritual and temporal powers worked in concert, but the universal monarchy he envisioned was under

⁷² Ibid, 248.

⁷³ Dante Alighieri, *Monarchy*, trans. Prue Shaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 32-33.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 72.

human authority and used the Roman Empire under Augustus as a model.⁷⁶ The distinction between human and divine power present in Varro's thought and Augustine's response remained imbedded within European civilization.

Machiavelli and Hobbes

Before the concepts of the ancient civil religion fully resurfaced in the Enlightenment they appeared in the Renaissance exemplified by Niccolò Machiavelli. He combined classical republicanism and civil religion with a focus on Christianity. He made crucial innovations and prefigured later positions held by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Machiavelli's work criticized Christianity, articulated a utilitarian interpretation of religion, proposed that changes in religion were rooted in human will and asserted the importance of a paragon in the establishment and reform of religion.

When discussing the role of antiquity in the Renaissance, historians of the eighteenth century refer to the "classical republican discourse" first identified by J. G. A. Pocock.⁷⁷ In what Pocock calls the "Machiavellian Moment," Christianity and classical republicanism combined together in an eschatological framework which defined reform as a return to foundations.⁷⁸ The essence of this argument may be found in the first chapter of Book III of Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy*.⁷⁹ The heart of the issue was a synthesis of Christian eschatological time and

⁷⁶ Ibid, 28.

⁷⁷ J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), vii-x.

⁷⁸ For other prominent works on this topic see: Parker, Harold Talbot, *The Cult of Antiquity and the French Revolutionaries; A Study in the Development of the Revolutionary Spirit* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965); Eric Nelson, *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); John Shovlin, *The Political Economy of Virtue: Luxury, Patriotism, and the Origins of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Johnson Kent Wright, *A Classical Republican in Eighteenth-Century France: The Political Thought of Mably* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 128-152.

⁷⁹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, ed., trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella, and Peter E. Bondanella (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 246-249.

the classical conception of time as eternal, cyclical and recurring.⁸⁰ The grand narrative of the apocalypse, beginning with Eden enduring corruption in the Fall and ending with redemption became transposed into a cyclical conception of time. Thus the flow of history was composed of perpetual cycles which followed a narrative of foundation, decline and renewal with renewal predicated on a return to the foundation representing a simulacrum of Eden. This eschatology became the core of the classical republican discourse as it continued to evolve into the modern period.

In *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli stated that Numa, the founder of Roman religion was greater than Romulus, the founder of Rome itself. Machiavelli proposed that Numa had “...turned to religion as something absolutely necessary for maintaining a civilized society...”⁸¹ Machiavelli preserved two fundamental aspects of civil religion; the founder figure and the establishment of religion for a political purpose. His aim was to use the lessons of Roman history to explore the validity of Christian republicanism. While Machiavelli lamented the failures of Christianity in his own time, he blamed contemporary Christian practice and not the essence of Christianity.⁸² For Machiavelli the issue was a matter of institutional failures and false interpretations.⁸³ These interpretations according to Machiavelli, “Lower(ed) value on worldly honour,” “glorified humble and contemplative men” and “defined the supreme good as humility, abjection, and contempt of worldly things...”⁸⁴ He concluded that these misunderstandings brought ruin to Christian states and made Christianity thoroughly unsuitable

⁸⁰ For examples of this see: Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Martin Hammond (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 42, 48, 88-89; Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 50-92.

⁸¹ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 50-52.

⁸² Ibid, 54; Viroli, *Machiavelli's God*, 163.

⁸³ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 55, 159.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 158-159.

for a republic. Machiavelli believed a reform of Christianity would make a successful synthesis with republicanism possible.

In Renaissance Florence there was a pervasive desire to see reform of Christianity.⁸⁵ In terms of this reform, Machiavelli viewed changes in religion as commonplace in history. “Those (changes) originating with men are changes in religious sects and in languages.”⁸⁶ Machiavelli tied the emergence of religion to human actions and not to divine dictates. In doing so he revived Varro’s dictum that “divine things were instituted by men” and harkened back to the ancient understanding of religion as a human creation. This supposition amounted to an expansive mandate for reform. Machiavelli drew upon an eschatological frame when he defined reform as a return to the foundation. However, the foundation for Machiavelli was not a return to some imagined golden age where the connection between God and man could be restored, but to Numa and the willful manipulation of religion for a political purpose.

Machiavelli held that the best means of renewal was through institutional regeneration, but failing this a paragon was necessary.⁸⁷ The founder figure remained an essential part of the civil religion tradition from ancient Rome, to the Renaissance and into the eighteenth century. The founder was an essential part of *The Social Contract*. During the American and French Revolution the *nomothetes* or “lawgiver” was a critical influence for understanding the creation of a republic. The founder was also fundamental for how Chemin-Dupontès organized Theophilanthropy as a universal religion. After his initial publication of the *Manuel*, he developed other auxiliary compilations incorporating many philosophical, religious and ethical systems of the world. Each one focused on the teachings of an individual paragon.

⁸⁵ Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, vii, 83-113; Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli's God*, 61, 75-76, 86-87, 206-207.

⁸⁶ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 168.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 248-249.

Christianity did undergo a Reformation (one which had its own eschatology and so sought to return to a pure original Christianity). Protestant and Catholic renewals associated with the Reformation continued to assert that religion represented a divine reality and submerged the notion of religion as a human creation. However, the Religious Wars, one of the unfortunate products of the Reformation, would spur on new thinking about religion as a human artifact. This perspective, enunciated by Thomas Hobbes, saw a rebirth of the notion that religion was a human creation. In this work, the conceptual realm “nature” would be essential.

In terms of the development of Christian republicanism the legacy of the Reformation would be mixed. In England the Wars of Religion resulted in the English Civil War which briefly united Puritanism and republicanism in a revolutionary upheaval.⁸⁸ Later in America both classical republicanism and Christianity provided critical source material for the American Revolution.⁸⁹ In France, Montesquieu maintained the utilitarian perspective on religion and the benefits of Christianity.⁹⁰ However, the lessons of the Wars of Religion for Rousseau would cleave republicanism and Christianity apart.⁹¹ This divergent path was one of several options during the Revolution. It was not inevitable, but dictated by the course of events and a process of experimentation, trial and error which ultimately played the greatest role in the split between Christianity and the Revolution.

⁸⁸ Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 333-505.

⁸⁹ Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 506-552; Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 22-54; Viroli, *Machiavelli's God*, 12-13, 15.

⁹⁰ Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, *The spirit of the laws*, trans., ed. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller and Harold Samuel Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 459; Beiner, *Civil Religion*, 190-191; Dan Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Right Republicanism, the Cult of Nature, and the French Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 9.

⁹¹ Viroli, *Machiavelli's God*, 9, 19-20, 257-258; Robert Wokler and Bryan Garsten, *Rousseau, the Age of Enlightenment, and Their Legacies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 30.

The Religious Wars provided the catalyst for the return of the idea of religion as artifice during the Enlightenment. The work of Thomas Hobbes was a forerunner of the Enlightenment perspective and influenced the ideas of Rousseau. Responding to the English Civil War, Hobbes sought to restore order through a union of religion and politics in an absolute state or the Leviathan. His solution began with the same desire as Machiavelli, to reform Christianity, but ended quite differently.⁹² Richard Tuck situates Hobbes within the project of this dissertation very well.

Hobbes argued (in *De Cive*) that ‘natural’ religion is an inevitable feature of human psychology: it is a recognition of the existence of a first cause, and a feeling of awe and wonder at the power of such a cause to produce the universe (a close later parallel would be Kant’s sense of wonder at the starry heavens above). This natural religion does not straightforwardly result in conventional theism – we know nothing of the nature of the first cause; but conventions in different societies about the expression of awe and wonder give rise to theological language, though such language is purely emotive in character and has no truth values. (A similar argument is found in chapter 31 of *Leviathan*.) The sovereign is therefore the key figure in deciding how this awe should be expressed; all religion is thus in principle ‘civil’ religion, a claim contemporaries associated with Machiavelli and deeply distrusted.⁹³

While Machiavelli’s used a utilitarian perspective to harken back to antiquity, Hobbes proposed a new concept of civil religion based on nature. The relationship between “natural religion” and civil religion enunciated by Hobbes connects nicely with Rousseau who employed the same formula. In doing so Rousseau established a civil religion on the foundation of “nature” and returned to the idea of religion as human creation.

Rousseau is discussed at length later, but for the purposes of this exploration of civil religion a brief paragraph will suffice. It was in the last chapter of *The Social Contract* where Rousseau grappled with the issue of civil religion. The central thrust of the chapter posited that

⁹² The leviathan was an absolute monarch invested with power over religion, enough in Hobbes mind to hopefully end conflict and disputes based on confession. Machiavelli of course was interested in a republican Christianity.

⁹³ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), xxii.

the transition from Roman to Christian Civilization was a historic calamity because Christianity was by its very nature a bad civil religion. Its otherworldly focus made it antisocial and its separation of religion and politics destroyed the unity of the state. This rupture resulted in various maladies in the relationship between religious and political authority thereafter. Rousseau's purpose in *The Social Contract* was to seal this rupture by uniting religion and politics. Furthermore he stated that Christianity was completely incompatible with a republic and the implications of this statement would permeate the Revolution.⁹⁴

Secularization

Based on the intellectual assumptions of the Enlightenment, secularization emerged in the course of the French Revolution. The secular interpretation of religion as a human creation which could be forcibly removed from public and political life was an experiment in a new way of living. This origin has been obscured by various theories of secularization which posit that other historical forces were responsible for the advent of a secular worldview. One must grapple

⁹⁴ After the Revolution the civil religion debate was defined by 1848 and Alexis de Tocqueville's advocacy for Christian republicanism. There was also renewed interest in the issue of civil religion with the birth of the Third Republic in 1870. Durkheim and Mathiez are central here, but these efforts gave way to another solution that of *Laïcité*. Secularization would increasingly define interest in civil religion along a dichotomy; America religious, Europe secular. When the issue of civil religion did surface in the European twentieth-century, it did so with a secular guise. Here the work of Carl Schmitt and the concept of Political Theology are crucial. Subsequently war became a central trope for the discussion of civil religion. Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin in the post-war period are important voices. Later Robert Bellah reinvigorated the debate on civil religion. Responding to the Vietnam War, Bellah incorporated Rousseau's idea of civil religion and Durkheim's notion of the social to write about American civil religion. This work spurred a great deal of work which continued to focus on the European/American distinction such as by Sébastien Fath, Mark Noll and Jürgen Gebhardt. Robert Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in a Time of Trial* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975); Sébastien Fath, *Dieu bénisse l'Amérique la religion de la Maison-Blanche*; Jürgen Gebhardt, *Americanism: Revolutionary Order and Societal Self-Interpretation in the American Republic*, trans. Ruth Hein (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993); Alec Hargreaves, John Kelsay and Sumner B. Twiss, *Politics and Religion in France and the United States* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007); Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*; Carl Schmitt, *Political theology: four chapters on the concept of sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985); Leo Strauss, *History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Library of America, 2004), 332; Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, 7; Eric Voegelin, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

with and challenge these traditional theories to better understand the true origins of secularization in the Revolution. Jose Casanova, a prominent theorist in the sociological study of religion, proposes three definitions of secularization; a decline in religious belief and practice; the privatization of religion; and the separation of religion from other spheres of human activity such as politics.⁹⁵ This section systematically challenges each of these definitions and offers an interpretation of secularization based on the sources of the French Revolution.

The traditional secularization thesis or “disenchantment” states that religion is in terminal decline.⁹⁶ This perspective describes secularization as a historical process, grand in scope and irresistible in purpose. The basis for these ideas was a materialistic interpretation of history. There were gestures at this perspective in the mechanistic theories of Thomas Hobbes and in the atheist track “treaties on the three imposters.”⁹⁷ Not until the nineteenth century was a fully formed theory regarding the human origins of religion realized. The foundational thinkers of this interpretation were Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud.⁹⁸ They had significant differences, but all developed variations of the projection theory, that religion was a delusion of a fearful and immature humanity. This perspective insisted that as modernization and scientific understandings advanced, religion would disappear.

The projection theory was difficult to maintain given the persistence and resiliency of religion. In the early twentieth century Max Weber and Émile Durkheim formulated more subtle theories. Weber defined disenchantment as the gradual abandonment of religion in favor of modern concepts of rationalization and bureaucracy. “The fate of our time is characterized by

⁹⁵ Jose Casanova, “Rethinking secularization: a global comparative perspective,” *The Hedgehog Review* 8, no. 1-2 (2006): 7-22.

⁹⁶ The definition of disenchantment here refers to its use by Max Weber and more recently Marcel Gauchet.

⁹⁷ Anonymous, *Traité Des Trois Imposteurs* (Amsterdam: M.M. Rey, n.d.).

⁹⁸ Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*; Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1989); Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 46.

rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world’. Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct human relations.”⁹⁹ Weber, however, offered a more complex interpretation of the process. Religion was not simply dying out as the modern age ascended; religion actually gave birth to the modern world through the process of disenchantment. “Many old gods ascend from their graves; they are disenchanted and hence take the form of impersonal forces. They strive to gain power over our lives and again they resume their eternal struggle with one another.”¹⁰⁰ So even as religion declined, its legacy continued to exert a powerful influence on the world.

Weber was not optimistic about the outcome of modernization. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* described how the Protestant theology of pre-destination mutated and gave birth to the modern capitalist system, which entrapped the world. Weber famously compared this system to an “iron cage.” As the scholars H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills state, Weber was a, “nostalgic liberal, feeling himself on the defensive,” in relation to the negative consequences of the process of rationalization.¹⁰¹ Weber believed secularization was irresistible, but would not necessarily result in a better world.

Émile Durkheim sought to explore both the apparent decline and persistence of religion. Initially believing that the influence of religion was receding, he modified this perspective after observing the “religious” basis of the Dreyfus Affair.¹⁰² Consequently Durkheim advanced an interpretation, which connected religion, culture and politics as manifestations of a social

⁹⁹ Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans., ed. Hans Heinrich Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 51, 155.

¹⁰⁰ Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, 149.

¹⁰¹ H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, introduction to *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, 50.

¹⁰² Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, xiii.

essence. While religion was only one of many social expressions, it was for him the best for illustrating his theory.¹⁰³ Durkheim saw religion as an inherent part of human expression, which challenged the projection theories being forwarded at the time.¹⁰⁴ Religions were not illusions, but, "...rooted in reality and are an expression of it..."¹⁰⁵ Therefore religion would exist as long as society did.

Durkheim saw the nineteenth century as an era of decline, but did not see this as part of the inevitable death of religion. He instead interpreted this decline as a prelude to a future renewal.

If we have some difficulty today imagining those festivals and ceremonies of the future, that is because we are in a period of transition and moral mediocrity. The great things of the past, those that inspired our fathers, no longer excite the same ardour in us, either because they have entered into common usage to the point where we take them for granted, or because they no longer answer to our current aspirations; and yet nothing has come along to replace them.¹⁰⁶

And again reminiscent of Weber, "In short, the ancient gods grow old or die, and others are not yet born."¹⁰⁷ The old gods would not rise again as haunting specters as they did for Weber, but wither away.¹⁰⁸ In time, however, the eternal impulses of society would find expression in a new faith. "A day will come when our societies will once again experience times of creative effervescence and new ideas will surge up, new formulas will arise that will serve to guide humanity for a time."¹⁰⁹ Religion interpreted in this way was like a vessel. "Secularization"

¹⁰³ Ibid, 17.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, xvii.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 322.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 322.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 323.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 323.

may drain one vessel, but society would invariably fill another. The cyclical aspect of Durkheim's work has much to commend it.¹¹⁰

Revisions and modifications of the secularization thesis continued. New developments focused on; secularization as exceptional and the correlation between ideas of transcendence and secularization. Responding to the persistence of religion worldwide, exceptionalist arguments focused on secularization as a development inherent to and unique to Western Christianity. The focus on transcendence equated notions of a transcendent divinity with a vision of God slowly withdrawing from the world. This withdrawal set the stage for a secular world devoid of divine influence.

In the nineteen sixties Peter Berger challenged the traditional notion of secularization as a corrosive force slowly depleting religion of vitality. He views religion not as a passive object, subject to outside forces, proposing instead that secularization was a development internal to Christianity. He roots secularization in the Reformation objectification of religion, which evolved into a secularizing impulse.¹¹¹ Marcel Gauchet also interprets disenchantment as a process originating from and unique to Christianity saying it is, "... a religion for departing from religion."¹¹² Disenchantment for Gauchet is an irreversible process, but he deviates from the traditional thesis. "Religion's demise is not to be ascertained by declining belief, but by the extent of the human-social universe's restructuring. Though this restructuring originated within religion, it escaped from and reversed its original religious orientation...."¹¹³ The modern

¹¹⁰ Weber and Durkheim work was ground breaking because they hinted at one of the crucial questions in the modern world— the apparent religious dimensions of the new secular order. There is also a sense of mediocrity and pessimism. Secularization is not optimistic or hopeful, but a desperate response to a deteriorating age.

¹¹¹ Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy; Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), 105-126.

¹¹² Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, trans. Oscar Burge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 4

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 3.

secular world is the result of this restructuring. So religion does not simply die or wither away, but provides the building blocks for a new human centered cosmological order.

Gauchet's conception of disenchantment focuses on a two stage development inherent to Christian monotheism. According to Gauchet the monotheistic concept of a transcendent deity separated the divine world from the human world. God receded from the world making it the domain of human destiny.¹¹⁴ The introduction of monotheism disenchanting the world through an iconoclastic impulse. "Deepening God's subjective plenitude destroys the vestiges of the ancient hierarchical cosmic vision, expels any residual occult forces from the material essence of things, and ultimately leads us to conceive a series of phenomena rigidly determined by sufficient reason."¹¹⁵ Monotheism eliminated intermediaries between God and man by destroying the supernatural forces and beings which suffused and inhabited the world. According to Gauchet this first disenchantment prefigured the later one which resulted from the particulars of Christianity.

For Gauchet disenchantment developed in the West because of the Christian concept of the Trinity, established Christ as both God and man. Christ as the incarnated Word established the world as an autonomous realm, apart from divine reality.¹¹⁶ "It (the Word Incarnate) represented the human order's potential independence from the divine order, and hence the full Christian legitimacy of a power incarnating the plenitude proper to the human sphere. Monarchs strongly resisted this breach and blindly rushed to fill it."¹¹⁷ As secular power advanced it had to create its own legitimization, initially as divine right and absolutism. Within monarchical power, however, was imbedded its inversion, democratic power. "This invisible

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 51, 57.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 62.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 77.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 89.

revolution contained the beginnings of modern politics.... which would ultimately arise to an astonishing innovation: representative power.”¹¹⁸ And again, “The reversal was itself derived from the primordial core of Christian reality and was totally specific to the Western Middle Ages.”¹¹⁹ Although Gauchet's perspective is teleological in the sense that an original idea produces an inevitable conclusion and the end is inherent in the beginning, there is also an element of contingency related to the specific doctrine of the Trinity.¹²⁰ So secularization retains its inevitability, but as an exceptional development unique to Western European societies.

Another work which locates the origins of secularization to internal developments in Christianity is *The Theological Origins of Modernity* by Michael Allen Gillespie. Gillespie proposes that the origins of modernity and secularization are rooted in centuries old conflicts within Christianity associated with the Nominalist-Scholastic debate.¹²¹ This conflict resurfaced in the Reformation and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries where the solution to resolving the debate was to look to nature as an independent realm. “What actually occurs in the course of modernity is thus not simply the erasure or disappearance of God but the transference of his attributes, essential powers, and capacities to other entities or realms of being. The so-called process of disenchantment is thus also a process of re enchantment”¹²² Secularization reinterprets God and man “naturalistically” which infuses the natural world with divine attributes. Secularization simultaneously reduces man to a mere animal and raises him up to godhood. However, “reenchantment” was not a teleology stemming from a nominalist debate, but a willful reinterpretation. Enlightenment thinkers like Rousseau transferred attributes

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 142.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 161.

¹²⁰ Clearly there is influence between Gauchet and Furet (who were interlocutors) with the idea that the end is inherent in the beginning. For Furet it was the Terror which was inherent in the beginning (1789).

¹²¹ Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

¹²² Ibid, 298.

previously associated with divinity into the conceptual realm “nature.” Modernity continued this practice into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by elaborating new fictive realms such as society, culture etc.

Theories of disenchantment, which rely on inherence and exceptionalism, stand on a precarious foundation. Inherence denies authorship and absolves the state from guilt or responsibility for the coercion necessary in the domestication of religion. Appeals to exceptionalism are the last bastion of a dying theory. When challenges to a general theory abound its proponents resort to exceptional arguments. This is the last stage before a paradigm shift and the old theory dies out.¹²³ One of the biggest problems regarding both the inherence and exceptional arguments is the supposed difference between Europe and America. The dichotomy: Europe secular/America religious has been an often discussed trope in the study of secularization.¹²⁴ The answer to the origin of secularization is simple, choice. Europeans are more secular because they chose to be. They have embarked on an experiment no less radical in its scope and aims than the previous eras of European ideology.

Transcendence and Withdrawal

The central point of these theories is how concepts of withdrawal are tied to theologies of transcendence, with the Reformation being the principal example. This perspective creates an equivalency between transcendence and withdrawal, which conflates two distinct concepts, each with unique origins and subtleties. Concepts of transcendence are inherent to monotheism, but are intensified in reform movements. These reformations seek to remedy perceived abuses in the worship of God and are in response to particular contexts. The primary means that reformists use to remedy these alleged abuses is to assail intermediaries between the divine and human

¹²³ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹²⁴ Jose Casanova, “Rethinking secularization,” 12.

world. This theological strategy has a specific purpose in mind; to sanctify divinity in the face of a world which reformers believe has become rife with corruption and degraded religion. As a consequence concepts of transcendence generally and particularly during periods of reform may take on an iconoclastic character. Therefore desires to sanctify divinity may appear to “secularize” certain practices such as those branded by reformers as superstition or false worship.

The purging of intermediaries is central to reform. In the Reformation and the Enlightenment reform was undertaken not through some inevitable playing out of the concept of transcendence, but as a specific response to circumstances. The advocates of the Reformation rejected the Catholic Church as an intercessor of grace.¹²⁵ Likewise in the Enlightenment, revelation and revelators were rejected as a source of divine guidance. Both of these examples had their impetus in perceptions that the world had become a place of error. In the case of the Enlightenment, thinkers like Rousseau associated erroneous convictions about the role of revelation as the principal cause of the Religious Wars, as the third chapter of this dissertation shows.

Furthermore reformers do not seek to detach God from the world, but to witness his presence in it. In part the reformist impulse is a longing to return to a pristine past, a golden age ideal where God and man mingled together. This ideal yearns to see God imminent in history, not distant. This is certainly true of the Reformation as well as the Enlightenment. In the Enlightenment “nature” was the focus of this longing. Even in the case of Deism which appears to posit a remote conception of God, one intermediary is simply being exchanged for another. For adherents of natural religion, nature replaced revelation as a manifestation of God’s presence in the world. Nature took on a divine character and as such the laws of nature become universal

¹²⁵ The issues at stake in the Reformation were wide spread and complex so I do not want to be simplistic here, but I do think that framing the Reformation as an attack against mediating bodies is a principle feature.

and inviolable. To live one's life in accordance with nature was the highest ideal. Theorists like Rousseau attacked revelation as an intermediary not in an attempt to make a break with God, the Religious Wars had already made rupture a reality. Enlightenment reformers were attempting to restore the tie which bound the divine and human worlds together using nature as the bond.

The interpretation of this reform as a "secularizing" impulse creates an ironic mode of emplotment.¹²⁶ It posits a formula, beginning with desires to elevate God, but ending in dismissal. Reform therefore is interpreted as a prelude to secularization. Movements to redeem divinity from the perceived follies of the human world are not unique to Western European history, to Christianity or even monotheism.¹²⁷ Either these efforts at reform are not a form of secularization or if they are then secularization is phasic and in a continual ebb and flow with religion. If there exists a pervasive feeling that God is remote, it is not the result of an inevitable logic of dismissal related to notions of transcendence, but the result of a world filled with human suffering. These sentiments give voice to the lamentation for God to show himself in history. When it appears there is no response then man must contemplate a world without God; a world of human destiny and human misery.

The "Secular"

Another critically important aspect of secularization theories is how scholars investigate the secular as an object of scholarly study. This perspective emphasizes the mutual interplay between "religion" and "secular" as well as the contingent nature of secularization. Jose Casanova postulates plural secularisms and modernities and regional differences in their

¹²⁶ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

¹²⁷ This same thought appears in the works of Plato and Cicero. In Monotheism iconoclastic episodes are common, a recent example being the Wahhabi movement in Islam.

interaction. He describes modernity, religion and secularism as intertwined concepts, at times in conflict, but also in a mutual relationship.¹²⁸

Talal Asad studies of the interaction between secularization and religion and concludes that religion and the secular ebb and flow in a mutual relationship.¹²⁹ He also critiques secularization theories by challenging their definition of religion. Asad focuses on the anthropological definition of religion to investigate how theories of secularization define religion as part of a program of control. “Historians of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe have begun to recount how the constitution of the modern state required the forcible redefinition of religion as belief, and of religious belief, sentiment, and identity as personal matters that belong to the newly emerging space of private (as opposed to public) life.”¹³⁰ The removal of religion from public life is not an unconscious process proceeding imperceptibly through history, but a deliberate program of transformation. In this transformation secularists “construct” religion to rationalize its confinement or even predict its extinction. The so-called “construction” of religion in the Enlightenment was an integral part of the program of secularization as implemented by the state.

In the modern state secularization represents a political platform which adopts laws and uses policing powers to enforce them with the goal of removing religion from public life. Secularists mask their coercion by using the rhetoric and tools of a legalistic state apparatus. It was revolutionaries under the guise of “public order” who instituted state terror against their opponents during the course of the Revolution. The laws regarding the prohibition of public

¹²⁸ Jose Casanova, “Rethinking secularization,” 10.

¹²⁹ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 1-20.

¹³⁰ Quoted in Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, 158; Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 205.

worship were no less brutal. One penalty for disobedience was deportation to Guyana which for the vast majority of victims meant death.

More recently, Charles Taylor in the book, *A Secular Age*, charts the history of secularization as a contingent development within Christianity.¹³¹ Taylor proposes that Christian humanism aided in the development of new spheres of human “flourishing,” which increased available options. He describes this as a nova effect, an explosion of different ways to understand the world. The nova in the eighteenth-century was, “... an ever-widening variety of moral/spiritual options, across the span of the thinkable....”¹³² This diversity produced many possible but not inevitable options including secularization. These options proliferated in the twentieth century in what Taylor calls the “supernova.” The two world wars and the subsequent crisis of civilization culled the diversity of the supernova and resulted in the contemporary “secular age.” The advance of scientific explanations of reality along with the crisis of civilization produced the “immanent frame.” The “...immanent order can thus slough off the transcendent. But it doesn’t necessarily do so.”¹³³ Therefore secularization was and is not inevitable, but contingent. Living within this frame does not preclude one from being a devotee, yet even those who choose to participate in religion do so within this new frame. All remain inescapably linked to this frame and it becomes unquestioned.¹³⁴

The notion of a “nova” is a useful means of exploring the Enlightenment perspective on religion and the experimental process of the French Revolution. David Sorkin in *The Religious Enlightenment* points to a diversity of possible options in the Enlightenment’s relationship with religion. Some sought a union of Enlightenment values and religion whereas others were hostile

¹³¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹³² Ibid, 299.

¹³³ Ibid, 543.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 549.

to religion.¹³⁵ How did this diversity of options work itself out, why was one option followed over others? Taylor is correct to tie the reduction of available options to crises. For him the two World Wars stand out, but the era of the French Revolution was also a time of crisis. The crisis of the Revolution was a working through of different options with a form of secularization, embodied in laws restricting religious worship, emerging in the late Directory.

Privatization and Secularization

The next crucial definition of secularization is the privatization of religion which describes the withdrawal of religion from public life and its relocation to an inner spiritual life or confinement to the domestic space. The idea that religion is or should be an internal matter of conscience is a value which secularists and some believers share. For the most part theorists address privatization as a secondary manifestation of the larger secularization process. Believers assert the existence of an interior spiritual reality, unapproachable through science, as the true substance of religion.¹³⁶ Treated on its own without reference to grand theories of secularization privatization seems more apolitical, but it is primarily used to justify and provide concrete evidence for disenchantment.¹³⁷ Aside from its more subtle and less politically charged intervention in the secularization debate, the privatization concept also has some significant deficiencies.

The starting point for a discussion on privatization of religion begins with how one defines “religion”. Theories of secularization must invariably adopt an understanding of religion as a starting point and this is where the problems of the privatization concept become apparent.

¹³⁵ David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment*, 5-6.

¹³⁶ Schleiermacher, Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade and Cantwell Smith are part of this tradition.

¹³⁷ Michel Vovelle uses the decline in votary candles to emphasize this point. Vovelle, *Piété baroque et déchristianisation en Provence au XVIIIe siècle; les attitudes devant la mort d'après les clauses des testaments* (Paris: Plon 1973), 9, 322.

The discussion of Durkheim and McCutcheon earlier exposes a conundrum, where “religion” can be conceived as either everything or nothing. When Durkheim embedded religion within society, he created the possibility that all manner of behavior could be interpreted as religious. As his concept of society was universal, it encompassed political, cultural and ideological practices. In this way “religion” could define almost any conceivable aspect of human experience. If one takes the point of McCutcheon then the opposite possibility opens up. For McCutcheon “religion” being a scholarly artifact can be employed or discarded like any other theoretical frame. One may make use of “religion” or abandon it altogether. The everything/nothing conundrum quite literally obliterates the traditional secularization thesis. If religion is an artifact of the academy then what does this say about secularization which requires a definition of religion to serve as its base? If McCutcheon’s “religion” is an artifice then so is secularization.¹³⁸

These theoretical manipulations blur the distinction between public and private. If secularization is described as the privatization of religion yet political and social behavior can be describes as religious then religion is not in decline or retreating to the private realm. On the contrary, religion is resurgent, animating the great upheavals and movements of the modern age. On the other hand eliminating the “manufactured” category of “religion” means that defining what exactly is being privatized in secularization becomes unclear. These ambiguous definitions are particularly vexing when attempting to decipher the differences between public and private activities in historical context.

¹³⁸ Expansive definitions of “religion” have destroyed the traditional secularization thesis. In response secularists have opened up a new front. Instead of attempting to resurrect a conception of secularization reliant on a definition of “religion” they now seek to eliminate the object itself. If “religion” does not exist then the catastrophic defeat the purveyors of secularization have endured is rendered moot. McCutcheon and his cadres represent a new battlefield in the long and enduring debate.

In the French Revolution the definition of religion related to the distinction between private and public is crucial. Are civic festivals in the French Revolution “religious” even when revolutionaries desired that they be devoid of religious content (particularly during the de-Christianization movement)? Were the *decadi* system of festivals or the revolutionary calendar, which owed as much to efforts at rationalization and utilitarianism as to de-Christianization, “religious” because they were public endeavors driven by the nation state?¹³⁹ When exploring the privatization of religion it would seem to be necessary to employ an array of arbitrary distinctions and theoretical abstractions. Revolutionaries defined religion in certain ways and sought to limit and proscribe religion based on their understanding. Focusing on the sources is therefore the wisest course of action.

Separation

The third definition of secularization is the separation of certain aspects of civilization into autonomous essences. In this sense religion is separable from other spheres of human activity, primarily politics. Although religion and politics had been joined together to various degrees in the past they are now separate entities each with its own autonomous existence.¹⁴⁰ The separation thesis offers a more descriptive analysis of the current interaction of religion and politics and therefore does not make any claims about the future extinction of religion. However the concept of separation conceals the reality that separation is not an accident of history, but a willful experiment in a new way of living. Mark Lilla in the book, *The Stillborn God*, illustrates the concept of the “Great Separation” as an experiment in reimagining the role of religion in the

¹³⁹ This was Mathiez interpretation, using Durkheim. He uses the “culte decadiare” in the title of his book on the *decadé* and Theophilanthropy. I have no found uses of the phrase “culte decadaire” in the sources. This is most likely embellishment by Mathiez due to his use of Durkheim. Mathiez as well outlines a large number of “cultes” to describe the revolutionary attitude towards the family, the constitution and so on.

¹⁴⁰ Casanova, Jose “Rethinking secularization,” 11.

world. It entailed the separation of religion and politics in the eighteenth century and the abandonment of Christian “political theology” in the twentieth.

Lilla uses the work of Carl Schmitt to define political theology as the desire to connect politics with a sense of transcendence.¹⁴¹ Political theology was also, “...oriented toward the future...as a time of redemption”¹⁴² In moments of crisis political theology interpreted events in an eschatological manner (i.e. WWI). Within this mindset, crisis took on the character of a redemptive apocalypse and amplified the destructive potential of events. The Great Separation was initially the rejection of a Christian political theology, which Lilla describes as “...a primordial form of human thought and for millennia has provided a deep well of ideas and symbols for organizing society and inspiring action, for good and ill.”¹⁴³ Restating Nietzsche's attacks, Lilla views the “stillborn god” as the product of nineteenth-century “liberal theology.” The rejection of this theology compelled Europeans to search for a new political theology. This set the stage for the two World Wars and ideologies like Nazism and Communism. The horrors of the twentieth century were the result of both the failure of Christian political theology and its successors.

Lilla defines the Great Separation as a choice, but theories of secularization obscured this fact as they attempted to explain the decline of Christian “political theology”. They thus conceived of this separation as an inevitable historical process, calling it “secularization” or “disenchantment”. This undermined the fragile nature of the Great Separation and allowed political theology to return in a secular guise. Lilla posits that political theology is ever present and often reappears in moments of crisis. He invokes Rousseau to claim that there is a

¹⁴¹ Lilla, Mark. *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Knopf 2007), 8.

¹⁴² Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, 10.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 6.

“theotropic” impulse imbedded within the human psyche which must be expressed. If this impulse is not satisfied—by liberal theology for example—then it will find inspiration elsewhere. For Lilla this search is dangerous and separation is preferable.

Political theology is a rather tortured concept. It has been used and abused by scholars hoping to make a variety of grandiose claims. In its most literal and straightforward interpretation the concept loses much of its magical power.

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 idea of the modern constitutional state triumphed together with deism, a theology and metaphysics that banished the miracle from the world. This theology and metaphysics rejected not only the transgression of the laws of nature through an exception brought about by direct intervention, as is found in the idea of a miracle, but also the sovereign's direct intervention in a valid legal order. The rationalism of the Enlightenment rejected the exception in every form.¹⁴⁴

The most basic understanding of political theology is simply a description of the various ways different political systems make claims about divinity. In short each political system has a political theology. Schmitt's primary focus is liberalism which he connects to Deism. He was not the first thinker to suppose a connection between theology and different political systems. Tocqueville noted in *Democracy in America* that pantheism was suited to democracy.¹⁴⁵ Schmitt's critique of liberalism was a byproduct of a particular time in German history, the constitutional crisis of the Weimar Republic. To see this as a means to implicate religion in the greatest evils committed in history is nonsensical. Equating religion with the genocidal ideologies of the twentieth century requires some profound mental gymnastics.

¹⁴⁴ Carl Schmitt, *Political theology*, 36.

¹⁴⁵ Schmitt was himself a student of Tocqueville. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 512, 513; Carl Schmitt, *The crisis of parliamentary democracy*, trans. Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press 1985), 23.

The idea of the “Great Separation” is not a theory of secularization. Firstly Lilla proposes that narratives of secularization are “fairy tales” which obscure the choice inherent in the Great Separation.¹⁴⁶ Secondly he concentrates his work on the political sphere using the theory of disjunctive spheres described by Daniel Bell.¹⁴⁷ Attacking the narratives of secularization Lilla states, “Rather than view the Great Separation as an experiment in thought whose success has depended on unpredictable historical events, European thinkers continue to engage in mythical thinking about the impersonal historical forces that supposedly gave birth to our world.”¹⁴⁸ For Lilla the awareness of choice is necessary because it inoculates humanity from embarking on dangerous quests at uniting religion and politics. The Great Separation is therefore not inevitable or an idealized end state, but in constant tension with religion and desires to associate politics with transcendence. This establishes the contingent and experimental nature of the Great Separation, which historically speaking, is the exception.¹⁴⁹

The use of the word secularization in this dissertation derives from the cyclical aspect of Durkheim, secularization as a program of control from Asad, Taylor’s notion of the supernova and finally Lilla’s description of secularization as a choice. The choice is a byproduct of a large number of available options which are explored through a revolutionary process of trial and error with new solutions being devised as others fail or are discarded. The history of religion in the course of the French Revolution is a reflection of this feverish experimentation. Furthermore, what is conceptually possible is not always implemented. Secularization may well be informed by a view of the world established in the Enlightenment. Its realization, however, is not found in

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 7.

¹⁴⁷ Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, 191; Daniel Bell, “The Disjunction of Cultural and Social Structure: Some Notes on the Meaning of Social Reality,” in *Science and Culture; A Study of Cohesive and Disjunctive Forces*, ed. Gerald James Holton (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965).

¹⁴⁸ Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, 188.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 190.

mystical forces moving invisibly through history or in the logic of some teleology, but in human action. Secularization is ultimately the result of a willful and conscious act. To understand secularization the historian must endeavor to understand why, in this case, revolutionaries chose to establish a secular regime.

CHAPTER 3

INTERPRETATIO EUROPA

What follows is an exploration of several prime examples of what I call “the Enlightenment interpretation of religion” with a focus on Deism and natural religion. The purpose of this exploration is to define the intellectual climate which preceded the Revolution and bring to light the intellectual sources the founders of Theophilanthropy drew upon.¹ Deism proposed a set of assumptions about God and the natural world.² Natural religion was more varied encompassing viewpoints from Christian theologians to atheists. Atheism was an outlier and generally Deism and natural religion aimed at establishing a universal understanding of God and religion which would delegitimize conflict. In the eighteenth century these ideas resulted in a new revolutionary proposition. Religion was a universal phenomenon; but its outward expressions were variable and more than this were malleable. This theoretical proposition found practical expression in the experimentation on religion in the French Revolution. Knowledge of this heritage assists in understanding the religious history of the Revolution, from the Civil Constitution to the Worship of Reason and the Supreme Being, Theophilanthropy and finally the Concordat.

Simply defined Deism proposed the existence of a monotheistic God. Abstract and universal, the proofs of this theology were established through reason alone. As the scholar Peter Byrne notes, Deists discarded dogmas and doctrines which might result in theological

¹ Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilantropes*, 7.

² Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion*, 52-78; Gay, *Deism*, 9-26; Hazard, *The European Mind*, 291-305; Hudson, *The English Deists*, 1-27; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 599-627.

disputes.³ Furthermore Deism defined the relationship between God and the natural world in noninterventionist terms. God had created the natural world and could therefore be known through the observation and study of nature, but Deists discarded revelation, understood as the direct involvement of God in human affairs. In abandoning revelation and its apparent theological and geographic limitations Deists interpreted reason and nature as universal and perfect or near perfect. In tandem reason and nature would be applicable everywhere and provide a perfect basis for a universal conception of religion.⁴

The universalism inherent to monotheism was theoretical, but not historical as it seemed to find expression in a multitude of revelations such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The universal religion of the Enlightenment was both an optimistic and uncompromising premise. In its rejection of revelation it also rejected the need for a divine intermediary.⁵ Figures like Moses, Jesus and Muhammad were interpreted as important teachers, but ultimately just men. The most common means of reinterpretation was the historicization of these figures as founder-legislators.⁶ As lawgivers they were lauded for their contributions to the history of law and shared this honor with other legislators both “divine” and human.⁷

Natural religion like Deism similarly proposed that the knowledge of God could be deciphered through a study of the natural world. While Deists were natural religionists not all those who professed belief in natural religion were Deists. Christians also sought to incorporate their own concepts of divinity with natural religion. This had a long history. Byrne associates the idea of natural religion with Thomas Aquinas who advocated the study of nature as a means

³ Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion*, 23.

⁴ *Ibid*, 54.

⁵ *Ibid*, 56.

⁶ Roger D. Masters, *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 354; Ourida Mostefai, *Rousseau and "L'Infame"*, 182-184.

⁷ A good example of this is the United States Supreme Court Building where “lawgivers” like Moses, Muhammad and Lycurgus are denuded of their religious content.

to approach God. Aquinas called this natural theology, which was a companion, but ultimately inferior to revelation.⁸ In the Middle Ages notions of natural theology were also bound up with such concepts as *philosophia perennis* (eternal philosophy) and *prisca theologia* (ancient theology) which posited the existence of a primordial and universal theology. The spectrum of positions in natural religion was wide; including thinkers like Aquinas who sought the use of reason to provide proofs of the Christian Revelation to those who saw in reason a means to eliminate the necessity of revelation like Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Atheists as well, such as Sylvain Maréchal, would look to reason and nature for an ethics devoid of God.⁹

The heritage of these ideas is old, traceable to classical philosophy. Their impact was profound, influencing theology and philosophy from antiquity to the Enlightenment and beyond.¹⁰ The Enlightenment view of natural religion, while influenced by earlier concepts, was grounded in the political and philosophical concerns of the time. Its central purpose was to redefine religion in such a way as to ensure its basic parameters could be agreed upon and the conflicts resulting from dogma or competing monotheisms could be resolved. The phrase “natural religion” will be used hereafter to encompass the diversity of thought on religion in the Enlightenment and Revolution.

The English Enlightenment

John Locke’s thinking on the acquisition of knowledge and the use of reason had a profound influence on the Enlightenment interpretation of religion.¹¹ He was part of a continuing debate in England between Christian apologists and Deists.¹² Locke’s influence

⁸ Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion*, 1.

⁹ Sylvain Maréchal, *Culte et loix d'une société d'hommes sans Dieu* (Paris: Éditions d'histoire sociale, 1967).

¹⁰ Hudson, *The English Deists*, 29-39.

¹¹ John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration, and Early Enlightenment Culture*, 1-14.

¹² John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity: As Delivered in the Scriptures*, ed. John C. Higgins-Biddle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), xv-xlii; Hutton, “Lord Herbert of Cherbury and the Cambridge Platonists,” 20-42.

resided primarily in his epistemology, which centered on the interaction between reason and sense experience. Locke's epistemology asserts that the human mind is a blank slate (*Tabula Rasa*) possessing little innate knowledge and few preconceived notions. In this proposition ideas are acquired by sense experience and the truth or falsehood of said ideas is discovered by reason.

Locke's epistemology was developed in *Essays on the Law of Nature*, *The Conduct of Understanding* and most famously *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke defined reason as "...the discursive faculty of the mind, which advances from things known to things unknown and argues from one thing to another in a definite and fixed order of propositions."¹³ Sense experience and the observation of nature provided reason with the raw data necessary to decipher truth. For Locke, reason was near perfect in its operation and acted as an indispensable companion to revelation.¹⁴ Reason's only limitation was the conscious efforts at sabotage through willful ignorance, "...natural reason, is spoiled and lost only by affirmed prejudices, overweening presumption, and narrowing our minds."¹⁵ This concept of reason, when applied to religion, created what the scholar of religion Peter Harrison calls a propositional religion.

Harrison describes the premise, "The truth or falsity of a religion had become a function of the truth or falsity of the propositions which constituted it."¹⁶ Religion when so constructed could be distilled down to a set of basic and universal principles, studied, compared and ultimately transformed. Locke's thought on religion found ultimate expression in the work, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, which stated that the law of reason and nature were the same.¹⁷ Using this proposition Locke encapsulated his theory of agreement between reason and religion

¹³ John Locke, *Essays on the Law of Nature*, ed. W. von Leyden (Oxford: Carendon, 1988), 149.

¹⁴ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. A.D. Woozley (New York: Meridian, 1964), 67.

¹⁵ John Locke, *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, ed. Francis W. Garforth (New York: Teachers College Press, 1966), 38-39.

¹⁶ Harrison, *'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*, 26.

¹⁷ John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, 13.

by stating that, "...under the Law of works (the Gospel) is comprehended also the Law of Nature, knowable by Reason as well as the Law given by Moses."¹⁸ In effect Locke sidestepped the issue of revelation as intervention from God by stating that Christianity was a pure natural religion.

Locke's reasonable Christianity was not orthodox, however. When confronted with the theological precepts of Anglican Christianity he analyzed and systematically transformed them using his understanding of reason and a close reading of Biblical text. He stripped away theologies such as the Trinity, dogmas such as original sin and rituals which in his view did not correspond to reason. Locke thereby created what he believed to be a "purified" Christianity. As David Sorkin points out, Locke's central assertion was that if someone had devised a religion through the use of reason and the observation of nature alone; that religion would be Christianity, albeit the one stripped of its historical and contingent elements.¹⁹ For Locke the purpose of this transformation was the cause of toleration. He sought to "discover" a set of essential Christian doctrines which all Christians could accept.²⁰

In the late seventeenth century the debate over a reasonable Christianity crystalized around Anglican clerics and their Deist opponents. Samuel Clarke is central here. He spoke against the "atheism" he perceived in thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza. Clarke firstly sought to prove the existence of God as a first cause through "reason" and an exposition on matter and motion. He challenged Deists by arguing that Christianity was a true natural religion. He proposed that Christianity was "reasonable" and in accordance with nature

¹⁸ Ibid, 18

¹⁹ David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment*, 11-12.

²⁰ John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration, and Early Enlightenment Culture*, 669-673.

more than any “scheme” devised by Deists.²¹ Clarke’s work was part of an important apologist tradition among Anglican clerics exemplified by the Cambridge Platonists and Latitudinarians.²² These clerics were principally engaged in a debate with Deist thinkers in England such as Herbert of Cherbury, Charles Blount, John Toland and later David Hume.²³ In France reference to Clarke appeared in Rousseau’s *Émile*, where Clarke is mentioned heroically in the Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar.²⁴ Due to his efforts at establishing a harmonious agreement between the principles of reason, nature and Christianity Clarke held a central position in the English and European Enlightenment.

The Francophone Enlightenment

In France, the Enlightenment effort to divide religion between its essential and contingent elements found fertile ground. Below are three wide-ranging, yet characteristic examples of the Enlightenment concept of religion in French context. The first discussed is the multi-volume *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les pueples du monde*, the second is the French *Encyclopédie* and the third is *Émile* by Rousseau. The authors of *Cérémonies* were Jean Fredric Bernard, member of an exiled Huguenot family and the Catholic-born Bernard Picard. They joined forces in Amsterdam where *Cérémonies* was first published. It was later published throughout Europe, including Paris. The *Encyclopédie* was edited by Denis Diderot and Jean-

²¹ Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God. 1705. A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion. 1706* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: F. Frommann, 1964).

²² Ernst Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, trans. James P. Pettegrove (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1953); Sarah Hutton, “Lord Herbert of Cherbury and the Cambridge Platonists,” in *British Philosophy and the Age of Enlightenment*, Stuart C Brown (London: Routledge, 1996); W. M. Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England, 1660-1700* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993).

²³ Charles Blount, *The Oracles of Reason* (1693; reprint, London: Routledge 1995); Herbert of Cherbury, *De Veritate*, trans. Meyrick Heath Carré (Bristol: University of Bristol, 1937); David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings*, ed. Dorothy Coleman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007); John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696; reprint, New York: Garland Pub, 1978).

²⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile: ou De l'éducation*, ed. Pierre Burgelin (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 405.

Baptiste le Rond d'Alembert.²⁵ It was widely published in France and was a central achievement of the Enlightenment. Rousseau's background was from Calvinist Geneva. The geographic and religious environment of the authors of the *Cérémonies* and Rousseau establish them as outsiders; the influence of their ideas on France was nevertheless powerful.

Published in 1728, *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les pueples du monde* highlights a more popular and accessible variant of the Enlightenment perspective on religion. The publication of this series had an immediate impact approaching 4000 copies sold in only a few years.²⁶ Further reprints appeared into the nineteenth century and also in English.²⁷ The book was influential in guiding attitudes towards religion in eighteenth-century France and Europe.²⁸

The influence of *Cérémonies* has been aptly summarized in *The Book that Changed Europe* written by Hunt, Jacob and Mijnhardt. *Cérémonies* compared world religions, "...on equal terms." Furthermore, it "...turned belief in one unique, absolute, and God-given truth into 'religion', that is, into individual ceremonies and customs that reflected the truths relative to each people and culture."²⁹ The Enlightenment interpretation of religion did indeed create a generic category of "religion," but a divine element was still essential. In *Cérémonies* the phrase "religious worship" was tied to the, "extraordinary practices men have put into usage to serve God." The word "religions" was a descriptor for the various ways human beings throughout the

²⁵ Denis Diderot, Jean le Rond d'Alembert and Robert Morrissey, *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project, 2013).

²⁶ Hunt, Jacob and Mijnhardt, *The Book That Changed Europe*, 298.

²⁷ Jean Frederic Bernard, et al. *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Several Nations of the Known World: Represented in Above an Hundred Copper-Plates, Designed by the Famous Picart, Together with Historical Explanations, and Several Curious Dissertations* (London: Printed for Nicholas Prevost, 1731).

²⁸ Hunt, Jacob and Mijnhardt, *The Book That Changed Europe*, 1.

²⁹ Ibid, 1-2.

world worshiped “Divinity” and was justified by a reference to the Catholic theologian Pierre Charron and his *De la sagesse* written in 1601.³⁰

The agenda behind Bernard and Picart’s work is also of critical importance. The central aim of *Cérémonies* was to further the prospect of toleration.³¹ Religious differences and discord were the norm in Europe. A universal religion, meaning a single religion to which all humanity could adhere was abandoned as practically impossible. In the Enlightenment conception of religion, difference was no longer explained as heterodoxy, schism, satanic aberration or temporary, but the natural state of religion in the world. From a monotheistic perspective this was a startling admission and one which demanded a wholesale reconfiguring of the meaning of “religion.” Whatever the content of systems of worship around the world the authors held that some notion of divinity was at its base, it was this connection defined “religion.”³² This belief reimagined the manifold systems of worship in the world as useful human creations.

Bernard and Picart, in separating religion into its component parts created a dichotomy between things of divine and human origin. This dichotomy expressed itself in a focus on ceremonies and customs, which they defined as the outward expressions of an inner reality. Here Hunt et al succinctly describe Bernard’s ideas. “Religious ceremonies also serve to disguise the real goal of religion. For most people religion is limited to the outward observance of customs and ceremonies, and they could not care less about the morality and spirituality that are, according to Bernard, the core of real religion.”³³ And from *Cérémonies*, “A great part of men would be ignorant that there is a God, if the worship which one must render to him was not

³⁰ Jean Frederic Bernard, *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*, preface 1.

³¹ Hunt, Jacob and Mijnhardt, *The Book That Changed Europe*, 21.

³² Bernard, *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*, preface 2.

³³ Hunt, Jacob and Mijnhardt, *The Book That Changed Europe*, 119.

accompanied by some exterior signs”³⁴ While Bernard believed “outward” practices were secondary, they were nonetheless necessary because they allowed men to approach God.

The goal of this conception of religion was toleration, but the means to this end was the discovery of a primordial religion of humanity, to which the origins of all the various religions of the world could be traced.³⁵ Hunt, Jacob and Mijnhardt again serve as the intermediary. “What may have begun as a search for an original true religion has sent Bernard into an examination of every religion known to his age. It is clear from the opening essay that he has been canvassing the historical and travel literature looking for commonalities.”³⁶ Like their counterparts across Europe Bernard and Picart believed that the study of religion was a scientific enterprise. The authors of *Cérémonies*, “...sought to apply his own variety of empiricism to the study of religion.”³⁷ As such Bernard made truth claims about what he felt was the true and universal essence of religion.

This exposes something crucial about Enlightenment perspectives on religion, that philosophers and theologians considered “religion,” as it existed in the world, a public activity or at least that it had necessary public features.³⁸ Its public nature required its reformation because if religion became a source of conflict it could tear a society apart as the Wars of Religion had proved. If religious-based conflict were addressed by removing religion from public life then the content of a religion would not matter. The issues of improper, dangerous or bizarre worship would be concealed in the private realm and any deleterious effects mitigated or eliminated by this banishment. If religion was simply a private activity and people were free to engage in any

³⁴ Bernard, *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*, iii.

³⁵ Hunt, Jacob and Mijnhardt, *The Book That Changed Europe*, 120-121.

³⁶ Ibid, 124.

³⁷ Ibid, 130.

³⁸ Ibid, 131.

manner of worship they desired. Enlightenment thinkers were not attempting to “secularize” religion by removing it from public life or to confine in the domestic space. This Enlightenment interpretation was aimed at simultaneously maintaining the public influence of religion while jettisoning elements which could be a source of political and social conflict. The alternative of the forced privatization of religion and the de-legitimization of its public features was not yet formed.³⁹ Interpreting efforts at establishing a universal understanding of religion in the Enlightenment as part of a secularizing process is misguided.

The practical expression of a universal religion was however, unrealized as Hunt et al., state. “Incorporating all religions into one system with a single origin might be imaginable, but including all of them in one single regime of religious toleration was beyond anyone’s imagination.”⁴⁰ Yet Bernard and Picart’s project of a “universal and natural religion” was part of a larger current of Enlightenment thought and remained a potent idea in the intellectual atmosphere of Europe in the late eighteenth century.⁴¹ Hunt et al. chart the legacy of *Cérémonies* to the the work of Rousseau and his notion of a “pure natural religion,” which appears in *The Social Contract* and in *Émile*.⁴² The theoretical universal religion that Bernard/Picard and later Rousseau postulated may have seemed an impossible dream, but true to its utopian spirit the French Revolution saw attempts to realize such an endeavor. Theophilanthropy is the clearest example of the revolutionary experimentation in creating a universal civil religion based on nature.

³⁹ The prospect of “secularizing” religion by removing it from public and political life would be formed by the experimental process of the French Revolution.

⁴⁰ Hunt, Jacob and Mijnhardt, *The Book That Changed Europe*, 132.

⁴¹ Ibid, 132-133.

⁴² Hunt, Jacob and Mijnhardt, *The Book That Changed Europe*, 245; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, ed. Bruno Bernardi (Paris: Flammarion, 2001), 173; Rousseau, *Émile*, 249-254.

Encyclopédie

Another crucial influence in eighteenth-century notions of religion in France was the *Encyclopédie*, first published in 1751. Although initially expensive its later iterations were made accessible to a wide reading public before the Revolution. Robert Darnton and Daniel Roche have both forcefully described the influence of *Encyclopédie*. Roche in his article “Encyclopedias and the Diffusion of Knowledge,” relates that while initially the influence of the Encyclopedia was limited to elite circles. “Little by little, however, as each fresh edition appeared, new segments of French and European society came to be conquered.”⁴³ In Darnton’s book *The Business of Enlightenment*, he describes the publishing history of the Encyclopedia and shows that it had a wide impact on French society.

After reading the 50,000 letters exchanged by the STN (a publishing house) with booksellers everywhere in Europe, one comes away with the conviction that Voltaire and Rousseau did speak to an enormous public after all and that the history of *Encyclopédie*, when studied by the methods of the *Annales*, leads to Tocquevillian conclusions. The story of how the *Encyclopédie* became a best seller demonstrates the appeal of the Enlightenment on a massive scale, among the upper and middle ranges of French society, if not the ‘masses’ who made the Revolution in 1789.⁴⁴

The comment on Tocqueville is a reference to the famous statement in the *Old Regime and the Revolution* that the French Revolution happened in the mind before it became a reality.⁴⁵

Darnton’s comments give credence to the profound influence the *Encyclopédie* had on French society before the Revolution. He further observes that “The diffusion of the *Encyclopédie* among a general public of lawyers, officials, and local notables-the sort of men who led the Revolution-indicates the extent to which the value system of the Old Regime was

⁴³ Daniel Roche, “Encyclopedias and the Diffusion of Knowledge,” in *The Enlightenment: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies*, ed. Ryan Patrick Hanley and Darrin M. McMahon (London: Routledge 2010), 2: 342.

⁴⁴ Robert Darnton, *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie, 1775-1800* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1979), 528.

⁴⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, 13.

being undermined by an incompatible ideology.”⁴⁶ When put into practice by the Revolution this “incompatible ideology” would radically reimagine the Catholic Church, one of the central pillar of the Old Regime. Darnton does not seek to draw a straight line between the *Encyclopédie* and the Revolution, concluding only that, “It might not be safe to venture beyond the general proposition that the widespread diffusion of *Encyclopédies* systemized a widespread disposition to question the ideological basis of the Old Regime and, in some cases, to accept radical change.”⁴⁷ The *Encyclopédie* was consumed by a wide variety of persons ranging the entire political spectrum of the Revolution. The Enlightenment understanding of religion crossed these boundaries and provides evidence for its pervasive influence on the Revolution.

In the *Encyclopédie*'s entries on religion and worship (*culte*) are some of the clearest elucidations of the separation of religion into essential and contingent components within the larger Enlightenment interpretation of religion. Volume four and fourteen of the *Encyclopédie* provide the most important expositions on *religion* and *culte*. In volume four under the heading *Culte* — broken into the classifications of Theology, Morality and Natural Right — was an extensive exploration of the meaning of *culte*, written by Louis de Jaucourt the most prolific contributor of the *Encyclopédie*. He was author of 17,050 of the 60,660 articles, comprising 28% of the total.⁴⁸

Volume fourteen contains the entry for *religion*. The author is unknown, but the language shares similarities with Jaucourt's other work. Either the author was Jaucourt or the perspectives represent a set of assumptions shared by the authors of the *Encyclopédie*. As the

⁴⁶ Darnton, *The Business of Enlightenment*, 540.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 540.

⁴⁸ Richard Schwab, “The Extent of the Chevalier de Jaucourt's Contribution to Diderot's *Encyclopédie*,” *Modern Language Notes* 72, no. 7 (1957): 507-508; John Lough, *The 'Encyclopédie' in Eighteenth Century England, And Other Studies* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Oriol P, 1970), 25-70.

historian John Lough notes, Jaucourt was very much part of the larger group of thinkers influenced by the ideas of Deism and natural religion.⁴⁹ “*Religio* is the knowledge of the divinity, and that of worship which he is due... The foundation of all religion is that there is a God who has a connection to his creatures, which requires of them some worship. The different manner by which we arrive, whether at the knowledge of God, or that of his worship, are divided between natural and revealed religion.”⁵⁰ The importance of this statement lies in its clear differentiation of the concepts of *religion* and *culte*. Scholars who translate eighteenth-century French and exchange *religion* and *culte* are mistaken in my opinion. Only by understanding the difference between these two concepts can one fully appreciate the Enlightenment understanding of religion.

Culte was a component of a general conception of *religion*; the two were not interchangeable, but existed within a set relationship. *Culte* was a connection from God to man having both an intrinsic and social element. *Religion* was defined as the means by which we arrive at the knowledge of God. In the same volume under *Religion* (unclassified) appears another description of what the authors of the *Encyclopédie* believed about religion. “Religion, expresses more specifically a particular system of belief and worship which occurs in particular counties, sects or times.”⁵¹ *Religion* was a system of beliefs, of which worship was one element. *Religion* and *culte* were both general phenomenon, they existed everywhere, but had manifold expressions which varied by time and place. There were many religions and their associated systems of worship, but all religion had the same purpose, a means to know God. Thus religion was a single phenomenon with many variations.

⁴⁹ Lough, ‘*The Encyclopédie*’, 216.

⁵⁰ *Encyclopédie*, 14: 78

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 14: 83.

Under the heading *Culte*, Jaucourt divided worship into interior and exterior types.⁵² Jaucourt did not devise these terms himself, as the distinction between “*cultus interior*” and “*cultus exterior*” had a long history in Christian theology, dating at to Aquinas. Enlightenment thinkers such as Jaucourt, however, authored a shift in thinking on this perspective and transformed the distinction between *cultus interior and exterior*. *Cultus exterior* was reconceived as variable and the conclusions drawn from this separation had important implications for the role of religion in civil society. “One distinguishes two sorts of worship, interior and exterior. Interior worship is invariable and an absolute obligation. Exterior worship is no less necessarily for civil society although it sometimes depends on place and time.”⁵³ Jaucourt conceived of interior worship as an intrinsic element of the individual soul, whereas exterior worship was a component of civil society. Its necessity is affirmed, but it is defined as contingent and relative. Different forms of worship had always existed, but here they are understood not as a deviation from a correct form, but as the natural outgrowth of the manifold variations and exigencies in human society.

Establishing the division between essential and contingent definitions of worship, Jaucourt next sought to classify interior worship as implanted in the soul and as an instinct of nature. “Interior worship resides in the soul; the natural inclination of men to implore the succor of a Supreme Being in their calamities, the love and veneration which they understand by meditating on divine perfections, demonstrate that interior worship follows the light of reason and arises from an instinct of nature.”⁵⁴ This definition combined old and new understandings.

⁵² An interesting related issue described by the historian Mark Silk is the changing notion of “*cultus exterior*.” Silk mentions that John of Salisbury in the work *Policraticus* described *cultus exterior* in utilitarian terms. Mark Silk, “Numa Pompilius and the Idea of Civil Religion in the West,” 872-874.

⁵³ *Encyclopédie*, 4: 550.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 4: 550; In volume fourteen page eighty under the category “religion naturelle” the same idea was expressed using similar language; author unknown. *Encyclopédie*, 14: 80.

The notion that the human soul possessed an irresistible desire to worship God was a traditional Christian concept. Yet the new definition of this desire as an instinct of nature created an analogy between the instinct that eighteenth-century natural philosophers found in animals and the human desire to worship God, making worship a kind of biological imperative. Together these two notions (old and new) defined interior worship as an indestructible component of human beings, which had individual and public expressions. Rousseau would echo this idea by creating his own analogy between the instinct found in the animal kingdom and the “divine instinct” within the human soul.⁵⁵

The companion to the above ideas on interior worship was a critical interpretation of exterior worship which at best was treated as useful and at worst seen as the manipulations of malfeasant clerics. Jaucourt expressed this point later in the same section of *Religion*. “Priests once instituted, extend the visible apparatus of exterior worship. On the origin of ceremonies, they (priests) invent games and dances which the people confuse with religion.”⁵⁶ In the above quotation *religion* means “true” religion, implying that while exterior forms of worship were meant to aid in the worship of God, priests had created an “apparatus” of worship, which under the pretense of religion was actually “false” religion employed to manipulate, blind, and enslave.

The consequence of the corruption of exterior worship was clear for Jaucourt. “...the origin of exterior worship was very pure and innocent. The first men flattered themselves with grand ceremonies to produce the sentiments of the heart. It turned out quite differently; they took the symbols for the thing itself. It is no longer religion, which consists only in sacrifices, offerings and incense. That which had been established to excite and affirm piety served to

⁵⁵ Rousseau, *Émile*, 436- 437.

⁵⁶ *Encyclopédie*, 4: 550.

weaken and extinguish it.”⁵⁷ Religion under the regime of priests became nothing but empty ceremonies aimed at controlling an ignorant populace. The language is ambiguous enough to avoid a clear connection to any particular religion, but open-ended enough to provide an unmistakable critique of Catholicism. In this formulation differences in worship were not simply innocuous, but potentially harmful to religion and society. This critique was less about toleration than an exposé of false worship engineered by clerics.

Imbedded within the Enlightenment’s scientific study of religion was also a program of regeneration, which was conceived as a righteous defense of “true” religion. The primary purpose of this program was to protect divinity against the advances of atheism and defilement by fanaticism. The criticism of priestly influence was invoked in the name of tolerance, but owed much to a binary understanding of true and false forms of worship, which was more at home in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation than in an “enlightened” project. Of course if one views the Enlightenment as a “reformation” in its own right then the differences between the regenerative impulse in the Reformation and the Enlightenment appear less striking. Both sought to rescue religion from corruption and false worship. The regenerative impulse was also visible in the French Revolution.⁵⁸ The call to regeneration also did not dissipate with the fall of Robespierre, but endured till the end of the Republic.⁵⁹ The era of the Directory was particularly focused on a regeneration of morals.⁶⁰ Theophilanthropy was one of several proposals designed

⁵⁷ Ibid, 4: 550.

⁵⁸ Mona Ozouf, “Regeneration,” in *A critical dictionary of the French Revolution*, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf, 789; Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution / The Making of Modern Universalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

⁵⁹ Sepinwall’s description of the word regeneration and its counterpart degeneration being derived from Buffon’s biological studies provides another interesting connection between the uses of nature to reinterpret religious concepts much like Jaucourt and Rousseau used natural instinct to invoke an intrinsic element of worship. Sepinwall, *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution*, 59.

⁶⁰ Livesey, *Making Democracy in the French Revolution*, 198; Jainchill, *Reimagining Politics After the Terror*, 62.

to effect this transformation, which revolutionaries believed was necessary for the permanent establishment of republicanism.

The struggle against fanaticism in the *Encyclopédie* had two trajectories. It first rejected differences in public worship as a legitimate rationale for social and political conflict. Its second purpose was a project to reform abuses in the forms of public worship. Again Jaucourt elucidates the point. “Each people make for themselves a worship to their liking and from this division was born a dreadful disorder, equally contrary to the sanctity of primitive law and of the happiness of society. These different sects that form the diversity of worship conceive one for the other a contempt, animosity and hatred; hence the wars of religion, which has caused so much bloodshed.”⁶¹ Jaucourt defined the differences of worship among the peoples of the world as a natural outgrowth of cultural and regional particularities. More than this, differences of worship were also constructions; people actively crafted different systems of worship for themselves. Outer forms of worship were variable by time and place and thus malleable. Furthermore because differences in exterior worship could lead to catastrophe if tolerance did not prevail reforming them was imperative.

The conclusion for Jaucourt was to accept differences of worship as natural and toleration as necessary. The alternative was conflict and hatred. The memory of the Religious Wars did not dim with time, but remained just below the surface in eighteenth-century thought. Toleration and religious war existed in a binary relationship. Either toleration would be established or holy war was inevitable. One detects, however, a hesitation regarding the proliferation of different forms of worship in the above citation. This vision of toleration did not constitute the foundation for the modern attitude of pluralism. The French sought a relationship between politics and

⁶¹ *Encyclopédie*, 4: 550.

religion characterized by order and uniformity. As Keith Michael Baker notes of Montesquieu, the French had great reservations about emulating the anarchic English political scene.⁶² The tradition of toleration in the French Enlightenment did not mean an endless multiplication of different forms of worship celebrated for their diversity. The experience of England or America of a proliferation of different sects and denominations was not to be copied. The French believed that worship should be uniform along national lines and toleration ought to be confined to a national framework.

Jaucourt proposed that outward differences in the practice of public worship were both the potential source of great evil and necessary for the edification of human beings. The necessity of the public role of religion made abuses in their practice all the more problematic. The next phase of Jaucourt's arguments consisted in utilitarian explanations on the positive role of religion in society and therefore its necessary reform. "Although there is strange abuse in the practice of exterior worship, does it follow that it be rejected? Certainly not, because it is laudable, useful and very advantageous; nothing contributes more to edify the regime of piety than to have under the eyes examples and models. But these examples and models can only be drawn out by exterior acts of religion and the sensible demonstrations that they represent."⁶³ Jaucourt's primary purpose with this discussion was to emphasize the necessity of "exterior acts of worship" along utilitarian grounds.

Using utilitarian proofs was common in the history of Christianity, but Jaucourt's perspective added a critical innovation. The utilitarian argument was merely a jumping off point for a sweeping program of reform. In the Enlightenment concept of religion, exterior forms of worship were conceived as malleable; they may change over time and were at times willfully

⁶² Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution*, 173-185.

⁶³ *Encyclopédie*, 4: 550.

modified. It was a small step to propose a program of regeneration, which would modify religion toward “enlightened” goals. The scope and limits of such a program of regeneration was an important question and one which would become central in the French Revolution.

The intrinsic worship of God, however, was indestructible and immutable. It could never be eliminated — it was inscribed on the human heart — and so the reform of its outer forms became all the more necessary. Jaucourt emphasized the point.

It is certain that the abolition of exterior worship would be harmful to the good of human society in general and to that of civil society in particular. Even so interior worship could not be extinguished. I confess that God is self-sufficient, all our homages add nothing to his glory; nevertheless they serve to put us in a state to better acquit ourselves of our duties and works and so too our own happiness. In a word, the necessity of exterior acts of worship, though unfortunately have been abused, are nevertheless founded on the very nature of man and on the interest of society.⁶⁴

The key for reform was to make use of this instinct “within the very nature of man” for the benefit of society by ridding it of superstition and abuse, which would only destroy piety and engender conflict. These ideas could not conceive that this internal worship could be destroyed only that its outward expression could and indeed in some cases must change for the sake of preserving society. The wholesale rejection of external forms of worship was not a viable solution or even seriously entertained at least by the majority of thinkers in the French Enlightenment. There was, however, a mandate for reform which was integral to the Enlightenment understanding of religion. The object of this reform was to maintain the important role for religion in society while eliminating the elements within religion which had produced the Religious Wars.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 4: 551; Ibid, 14: 81.

The specter of cataclysmic conflict made the reformation of religion along enlightened lines imperative. So after having established the necessity of reform, Jaucourt next focused on providing limits to such efforts.

Finally, one is able to dispense with exterior acts of worship only in certain times and rare cases. For example when exposed in the exercise of some great evil, and when elsewhere their omission imposes neither abnegation to religion, nor any incidence of contempt for the divine Majesty. If the sage is citizen to all republics, he is not the priest of all gods. He must not renounce the worship of religion which agrees with his soul, nor trouble those of others. If their worship seems to his eyes mingled with superstitious practice and is blameworthy, he condemns this impure mixture, complains of the ignorance of those adopting it, and is tasked with enlightening, without ever forgetting that persecution is a fruit of fanaticism and tyranny which religion rejects. It remains for all the Christian nations to practice carefully an exterior worship of religion; and follow the genius of each (nation)...⁶⁵

Jaucourt's proposal suffered from an imprecision leaving unanswered the question of which elements of exterior worship were edifying or harmful and in need of elimination. He further stated that one could omit certain practices if this did not result in the denial of religion. This vague standard expanded the scope of reform considerably. Bearing in mind that the historian Lough describes Jaucourt as a proponent of natural religion is critical. If all that can be ascertained by reason and the observation of nature provided the true essence of religion, than all else can be discarded without denying "true" religion. The scope of this enlightening task could consequently grow ever larger to encompass a grand project of reimagining the proper conduct and content of religion in society.

The Enlightenment's nebulous program for the redemption of religion from false worship created the potential for an uncompromising iconoclasm, which would eliminate much of what one might call "traditional" religion. The mandate for "enlightened" reform recognized no limits for transforming outward religion leaving only interior worship untouched. And the agent for

⁶⁵ Ibid, 4: 551.

carrying out such a task was defined vaguely as a wise man or “sage”. Depending on the audience one might assume the sage to be a doctor of the Church, but I think considering the source it is more likely a reference to the *philosophe*. The only limitations placed on this enlightening work were words of caution to the potential agent of reform not to create a new breed of fanaticism and tyranny.

Reform in the French Revolution was equally as boundless as the reform imagined by Jaucourt and other *philosophes*. Appeals to toleration, however, failed to limit the scale of the Revolution’s endeavors and these efforts quickly spiraled out of control. What began as a reform of the Catholic Church in France devolved into increasingly more radical measures, ending in a fanatical war against Christianity. The Revolution also generated its own form of iconoclasm termed *vandalisme*.⁶⁶ Theophilanthropy as well, conceived as a means to unite all French people regardless of confession into one regime of civil participation, became a competitor with Catholicism and a participant in revolutionary conflicts.

The statement that the exterior practices of religion ought to “follow the genius of the nation” is important for the French Revolution and the emergence of nationalism. The notion that religion and forms of worship varied by place and time was already proposed by Jaucourt throughout this section, yet the vehicle for these differences was never discussed.⁶⁷ He establishes religion as theoretically universal, but its particular forms were national in character. The genius or spirit of a nation defined all sorts of characteristics—from political institutions to

⁶⁶ Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism Since the French Revolution* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997).

⁶⁷ Although unmentioned by Jaucourt, climate figured prominently in Enlightenment discussions of the variations in different societies. Montesquieu is a central here. Voltaire offered a clear description of how religion related to climate, “The religions have always turned (roulé) on two pivots; observance and belief (croyance); observances are largely due to climate; belief does not depend on it (la croyance n’en depend point). Using a different vocabulary Voltaire like his compatriots divides religion between two elements; belief which does not change (at least according to climate) and observance which is variable by geography and climate. Voltaire and André Versaille, *Dictionnaire de la pensée de Voltaire par lui-même* (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 1994), 265-267.

cultural traditions. Religion understood here was simply one of the secondary manifestations of a nation's genius. In this way the Enlightenment concept of religion was suspended in a dualism; a national religion within a universalist frame. These two impulses were not in conflict, but part of a single concept; albeit one divided by essential and contingent elements. This division would also be important throughout the Revolution. The Civil Constitution attempted to extract a national church from a universal one (Catholic). Likewise Theophilanthropy, using a universal understanding of natural religion sought to create a religion suited to the French nation. The failure of these endeavors may well provide clues to the inherent instability of the Enlightenment's concept of universal religion.

Émile

The influence of Rousseau on France before the Revolution cannot be understated. Darnton's comments about Rousseau speaking "to an enormous public" illustrate this point.⁶⁸ It is also indisputable that once the Revolution began Rousseau's ideas held a central position.⁶⁹ Chemin-Dupontès, the founder of Theophilanthropy, looked to the ideas on natural religion put forth in *Émile* and of civil religion as elaborated in *The Social Contract*.⁷⁰ The most important source of Rousseau's concept of natural religion was in a section of *Émile* titled "The Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar." The Vicar outlined his theology to the young *Émile* in a confessional style. The Vicar begins by criticizing the claims of religion and philosophy and offers a set of beliefs, which were the product of his (and one would assume Rousseau's)

⁶⁸ Robert Darnton, *The Business of Enlightenment*, 528.

⁶⁹ For a discussion of the historiographical debates surrounding Rousseau's influence on the Revolution see: Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 169-180.

⁷⁰ Rousseau. *Émile*, 401; Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 169.

personal spiritual journey. The study of Rousseau's thought is vast, but there are some core works.⁷¹

Sentiment and Will

The starting point for Rousseau's understanding of natural religion was human weakness. Departing from the "traditional" Christian view of original sin, Rousseau instead offered a more vague understanding of inherent human limitations. "I recognize that the insufficiency of the human spirit is the first cause of this prodigious diversity of sentiments, and that pride is the

⁷¹ There are those works concerned with the political theory and philosophy of Rousseau. Some focus on understanding Rousseau's thought such as those of Cassier, Grimsley and Melzer. Others offer more of an intellectual biography such as by Ducros and Masters. There are also more interpretative works aimed at deciphering Rousseau's complex ideas such as those by Shklar, Starobinski and Wokler. The second category follows a debate over the relationship between Rousseau and his Genevan origins. Rosenblatt is perhaps the best representative of this approach. Another series of works draws a connection between Rousseau and Plato's writings. Finally are those works on the subject of Rousseau's religion. The debate between Masson and Derathé is particularly important for defining Rousseau's thought as primarily theological or philosophical. Jeremiah Alberg, *A Reinterpretation of Rousseau: A Religious System* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Samuel Baud-Bovy, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1962); Pierre Burgelin, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la religion de Genève* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1962); Ernst Cassirer, *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. Peter Gay (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Guillaume Chenevière, *Rousseau, une histoire genevoise* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2012); Robert Derathé, *Le rationalisme de J.-J. Rousseau* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1948); Louis Ducros, *Jean Jacques Rousseau* (1908-18; reprint, New York: B. Franklin, 1967); Ronald Grimsley, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983); Ronald Grimsley, *Rousseau and the Religious Quest* (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1968); Ronald Grimsley, *The Philosophy of Rousseau* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973); Charles William Hendel, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Moralists* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934); Harald Høffding, *Jean Jacques Rousseau and His Philosophy*, trans. William Richards (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930); Pierre-Maurice Masson, *La religion de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (1916; reprint, Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 2012); Roger D. Masters, *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968); Arthur M. Melzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man: On the System of Rousseau's Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Ourida Mostefai and John T. Scott, *Rousseau and "L'Infame": Religion, Toleration, and Fanaticism in the Age of Enlightenment* (Amsterdam: Rodopi 2009); David Lay Williams, *Rousseau's Platonic Enlightenment* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007); Helena Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva: From the First Discourse to the Social Contract, 1749-1762* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Judith N. Shklar, *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau's Social Theory* (London: Cambridge U.P., 1969); Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, transparency and obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); John Stephenson Spink, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et Genève. Essai sur les idées politiques et religieuses de Rousseau dans leur relation avec la pensée genevoise au XVIIIe siècle, pour servir d'introduction aux Lettres écrites de la montagne* (Paris: Boivin & cie, 1934); Maurizio Viroli, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the "Well-Ordered Society"*, trans. Derek Hanson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Robert Wokler, *Rousseau on Society, Politics, Music and Language: An Historical Interpretation of His Early Writings* (New York: Garland, 1990); Robert Wokler, *Rousseau* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Robert Wokler and Bryan Garsten, *Rousseau, the Age of Enlightenment, and Their Legacies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

second.”⁷² Rousseau abandoned orthodox Christian perspective, but maintained a critical view of human capacity. Rousseau rejected human reason as a perfect instrument and this made his contribution to Enlightenment philosophy distinctive.⁷³ As a result of this weakness in the “human spirit” a multitude of competing ideas all vie for supremacy and obscure real truth.

Rousseau’s views on the inherent limitations of knowledge went so far as to challenge the very symbolic foundations of Western philosophy by refuting the Greek maxim, know thyself, “... we are ignorant of our own selves; we do not recognize our own nature or our active principle; we barely know if man is a simple or compound being; impenetrable mysteries surrounding us on all sides; they are above the region of sense; we believe we have the intelligence to pierce them, when we only have imagination.”⁷⁴ Rousseau did not single out religion, but challenged both the ideas of traditional theology and Enlightenment philosophy. Rousseau was an integral part of the Enlightenment yet one of its most strident critics.⁷⁵

The above passage also highlights the feeling of awe and wonder central to Rousseau’s vision of natural religion. This was a set of beliefs designed not simply for the purpose of expunging religion of its undesirable elements by reasoned calculation, but to revivify the “true” worship of God with the inner sentiments of the heart. Rousseau used this concept of sentiment to overcome the limitations of knowledge and seek guidance in an inner reality. Rejecting the imaginations of various philosophers and sages he sought to “consult the interior light (*lumière intérieure*)”⁷⁶

⁷² Rousseau, *Émile*, 404.

⁷³ Maurizio Viroli, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the "Well-Ordered Society"*, 17; Ronald Grimsley, *Rousseau and the Religious Quest*, 36.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 404.

⁷⁵ Helena Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva*, 1.

⁷⁶ Rousseau. *Émile*, 405.

After rejecting the prevailing opinions of theology and philosophy Rousseau turned to Samuel Clarke to establish truth, saying, "...the illustrious Clarke enlightens the world..."⁷⁷ Rousseau praised Clarke without reservation going so far as to say that his ideas explained all.⁷⁸ Using Clarke, Rousseau described a philosophy based on a sensationalist epistemology.⁷⁹ Through the use of the senses Rousseau deduced the laws of matter, motion and a first cause.⁸⁰ Rousseau's concept of a first cause further relied on a formulation of an ultimate will. "Here is my first principle. I believe that a will moves the universe and animates nature. It is my first dogma, or my first article of faith."⁸¹ The central place that "will" held in Rousseau's natural religion does much to explain his concept of the general will elucidated in *The Social Contract*.⁸² Will was Rousseau's affirmation of a kind of single cosmic thread weaved throughout existence, which united all creation in harmony. Its profound simplicity contrasted with what Rousseau described as the "absurd" philosophical ideas of the era regarding the operation of the universe.⁸³

This will was evidence of a supreme intelligence, which was Rousseau's second principle. "If matter in motion demonstrates to me a will, then matter moves according to certain laws which demonstrate to me an intelligence: this is my second article of faith."⁸⁴ It becomes clear that the general will was more than a simple democratic principle, but achieved a sacrality as it represented a fragment of the divine will and when exercised placed the individual in accordance with nature. "The principle of all action is in the will of a free being..."⁸⁵ Will was the generative principle of the cosmos and of good government. Rousseau's unnerving

⁷⁷ Ibid, 406.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 406.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 406-409.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 410-412.

⁸¹ Ibid, 412.

⁸² Rousseau. *Du contrat social*, 65.

⁸³ Rousseau. *Émile*, 413.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 414.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 422.

statements about the infallibility of the general will become clearer when the historian understands that for Rousseau obedience to the general will was a sacred duty, akin to obeying God. One cannot but obey this will. To be disobedient to it was nothing short of a revolt against God and nature.

While the foundation of Rousseau's philosophy was a sensationalist epistemology the final arbiter of truth was the "interior sentiment."⁸⁶ This is where the originality of Rousseau's vision of natural religion comes forth. The truths uncovered by this sentiment were not to be found in *haute philosophie*, but within the heart, "...written by nature in ineffaceable characters."⁸⁷ In other words this inner reality was indestructible and infallible. He labeled it, conscience. "The conscience is the voice of the soul, the passions are the voice of the body."⁸⁸ And again, "...it [conscience] is to the soul what instinct is to the body; in that it follows and obeys nature and never fears going astray."⁸⁹ According to Rousseau we feel this "natural sentiment" before knowledge, acquired ideas and intelligence. It was even independent of reason.⁹⁰ "Conscience, conscience! Divine instinct, immortal and celestial voice, sure guide to an ignorant and limited being, but intelligent and free; infallible judge of good and bad, which renders man like God..."⁹¹ What Jaucourt described in the *Encyclopédie* as "interior worship," Rousseau called the conscience. They were remarkably similar in formulation; both were an indestructible part of the soul and gave rise to varying external public forms.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 430; A similar notion appeared in Rousseau's work "discourse on the origins and inequality of mankind." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract ; And, the First and Second Discourses*, trans. Susan Dunn, ed. Gita May (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 107.

⁸⁷ *Émile*, 430.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 430.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 431.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 435, 436.

⁹¹ Ibid, 436, 437.

Later in the “Profession” Rousseau described this inner element as “culte exclusive” and maintain that “le culte essentiel est celui du coeur” (the essential worship is that of the heart). He made clear the connection between the internal voice of the heart and the word *culte*.⁹² Whether there was a direct connection between *Émile* and the *Encyclopédie* is secondary to a larger point about the Enlightenment perspective on religion, at least in France.⁹³ The universal essence of religion was both a philosophical proposition derived from reason and nature and an irresistible impulse from within. This “natural” worship was an explicitly interior reality. The duality of the essential/contingent dichotomy in defining “true” worship as interior entailed the erection of a wholly personal realm in which to “place” the essence of religion even as its “outer” forms were being reimaged as human creations.

Revelation vs. Natural Religion

The “Profession” attacked both religion and philosophy, but Rousseau saved the most fervent criticism for last. The Vicar concluded his speech to *Émile* with a scathing attack against traditional religion, beginning with a simple affirmation. “You see in my exposition only natural religion, very strange that one would need another.”⁹⁴ He explained that any positive aspects one may find in religion could be discovered through the use of one’s own “faculties.” “Show me what you are able to add to the glory of God, to the good of society, to your own advantage, to the duties of natural law, and which virtues you will raise up from a new worship, which is not a consequence of mine. The greatest ideas of divinity we come to by reason alone. See the spectacle of nature, listen to the inner voice.”⁹⁵ Rousseau’s natural religion was reduced to three

⁹² Ibid, 444, 463; The word exclusive in the above quotation meaning personal or within one’s own self.

⁹³ For Rousseau’s relationship to *Encyclopédie* see: Charles William Hendel, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Moraliste*, 1: 92-122; René Hubert, *Rousseau et l’Encyclopédie; essai sur la formation des idées politiques de Rousseau (1742-1956)* (Paris: J. Gamber, 1928).

⁹⁴ Ibid, 443.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 443.

principles (reason, the observation of nature and the inner voice); such was the ruthless iconoclasm of the Enlightenment perspective on religion. Rousseau, like Locke conceived of a “reasonable” Christianity, which discarded much in its efforts at redemption.

Rousseau directed the greatest criticism for revelation (—revelation meaning the major monotheisms of the world such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and presumably any notion that God had directly intervened in human affairs by way of a person or institution). “Their revelations only degrade God... they render man proud, intolerant, cruel; instead of establishing peace on the earth, they carry forth iron and fire.”⁹⁶ Aside from the violence that had been visited upon the earth; Rousseau noted that revelation had not only failed to produce a single religion, but the opposite. There were as many revelations as nations. This led Rousseau to the conclusion, that if one sought a universal understanding of religion, revelation would have to be discarded.

They tell me that one needs a revelation for man to understand the manner by which God wants to be served and assign as evidence the diversity of bizarre worship which they have insisted upon, and they do not see that this same diversity comes from the fantasy of revelations. Once the people decided to make God speak, each made him speak in their own fashion and made him say what they wanted. If one would only listen to that which God said in the heart of man, there would have been only one religion on the earth.⁹⁷

Rousseau shared the position of Jaucourt, that people imagine God in their own likeness. By doing so they inverted the Biblical principle that God created man in his own image.⁹⁸ Rousseau resolved the breach of unity between the existence of a monotheistic God and a world filled with copious religious diversity by sacrificing revelation. For Rousseau this was a necessary and even a pious sacrifice for it allowed him to maintain the oneness, transcendence and goodness of God.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 443.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 444.

⁹⁸ *Encyclopédie* , 4: 550; King James Version, Gen 1:27.

The Enlightenment perspective on religion was a redemptive project as well as a scientific experiment. The program of analyzing the religions of the world and extracting a common essence was devised to explain and remove those elements of religion that had produced conflict. Integral to this was also a desire to prevent such conflict—whether theological or otherwise—from maligning the name of God. As the scholar Jeremiah Alberg explains; Rousseau believed that, “...violence results when belief in God is absent.”⁹⁹ In addition Rousseau’s natural religion was both a means to eliminate the specter of religious violence and a means to prevent this violence from spreading atheism. Rousseau like his compatriots in the larger Enlightenment was greatly concerned with a new understanding of religion to prevent further episodes of fanaticism in Europe.¹⁰⁰

For Rousseau, natural religion was religion in the state of nature. In this sense natural religion was no religion at all; it entailed no clergy, institutions or temples, not even public or communal worship. In the state of nature, religion would only exist in the internal worship of God. As humanity no longer lived or could return to the state of nature this pure religion was unattainable. Furthermore the outer forms of this inner worship were necessary for public order.¹⁰¹ However, Rousseau insisted that this social function of religion did not justify the claims of revelation. “It (revelation) required a uniform worship; I admit: but was it so important that it required all the operations of divine power to establish it? Do not confuse the ceremony of religion with religion. The worship that God asks is that of the heart; and that worship, when it is sincere, is always uniform.”¹⁰² This was the essence of Rousseau’s universal religion. Within this framework all exterior aspects of religion and worship were necessarily contingent and

⁹⁹ Jeremiah Alberg, *A Reinterpretation of Rousseau*, 57, 64- 65.

¹⁰⁰ Ourida Mostefai, *Rousseau and "L'Infame"*, 10.

¹⁰¹ Judith Shklar, *Men and Citizens*, 123.

¹⁰² Rousseau, *Émile*, 444.

historical inventions. They were manmade, not divine and thus were like any other political or civil creation. Rousseau's concept of civil society and civil religion are based on the same premise that the civil state in its totality (including religion) is artificial.¹⁰³

Exterior Worship

As Rousseau discarded revelation he also apparently rejected the necessity of a uniform system of public worship. While it seemed that the variability of outer forms of worship was left to vague pronouncements of time and place this was not the case. Rousseau treated exterior worship as he treated the state — as a synthetic creation, which necessitated a degree of denaturing. Therefore he conceived of the possibility of changing outer forms of worship for the benefit of society. “As to exterior worship, if it must be uniform for good order, this is purely a police matter; one does not need a revelation for that.”¹⁰⁴ Public forms of worship were malleable. Their modification was a matter of the common good and public order or civil religion. In *Émile* Rousseau did not devote attention to his vision of a uniform public system of worship. However, the section on civil religion in *The Social Contract* should be seen as the extension of this idea. Here is where the natural religion of *Émile* and the civil religion of *The Social Contract* become an integrated concept. This should come as no surprise considering that the two works were both published in the same year (1762). At times they appear contradictory yet they were part of a unified system of thought.¹⁰⁵

The word “police” had a variety of meanings and these changed from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁶ Rousseau's use of the word “police” meant the powers of the state to

¹⁰³ Maurizio, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the "Well-Ordered Society"*, 36.

¹⁰⁴ Rousseau, *Émile*, 444.

¹⁰⁵ Arthur M Melzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man: On the System of Rousseau's Thought*, xiii.

¹⁰⁶ Cesare Birignani, “The Police and the City: Paris, 1660-1750” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2013); Michel Foucault, *Security, territory, population: lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 313; Marco Cicchini, *La police de larépublique:*

devise laws and enact them for the good of public order. Thus Rousseau's position was that public worship was a civil matter and it was in the purview of the state to create and enforce laws over public worship. A uniform worship was a "police" matter because a conflicted and diverse public worship was bad for public order. It should be no surprise then that Revolutionaries instituted a police force in their efforts at establishing order during the later Revolution. They created a literal "police des cultes" to manage and bring under the affairs of the state all public worship for the purpose of order and the elimination of conflict.

Rousseau's natural religion did not foresee one uniform system of worship throughout the world. The universal essence of religion was expressed in contingent and historical variations, primarily based on national lines. While Rousseau asserted that, "I find in natural religion only the elements of all religion," in practice he faced a Europe divided by three revelations (Judaism, Christianity and Islam).¹⁰⁷ Consequently, Rousseau believed that these confessional lines should be respected. "I regard all these particular religions like as so many salutary institutions which prescribe in each country a uniform manner of honoring God through a public worship, and which all have their rationale in the climate, in the government, in the genius of the people or in some other local cause which renders one preferable to another, according to time and place."¹⁰⁸ If all the differences of religion and worship were contingent and were mere manifestations of a single essence then the outer forms achieved a kind of equality. As historical creations, national religions were inextricably tied to their environment (climate and genius).¹⁰⁹ Rousseau even went so far as to suggest that to convert from one religion to another was a betrayal of one's

l'ordre public à Genève au XVIIIe siècle (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012); Alan Williams, *The Police of Paris, 1718-1789* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 1979), 8-9.

¹⁰⁷ Rousseau. *Émile*, 445, 455.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 463.

¹⁰⁹ Unmistakable echoes of Montesquieu and Voltaire on climate.

family and community. “It is an inexcusable presumption to profess a religion other than the one where you were born.”¹¹⁰ Religion was a product of nature and culture and as such each nation would have its own religion, uniform and best suited to its history. Religion in Europe would then exist in a kind of static detente based on existing traditions in a theological counterpart to the Peace of Westphalia.¹¹¹

Rousseau was firmly within the European tradition of natural religion, using a common set of themes and assumptions in keeping with the larger Enlightenment. He did not challenge the basic parameters of the Enlightenment perspective on religion, but attempted to modify it so that it responded to both the intellect and the heart. His innovation was to add the concept of sentiment, which acted as a new proof of religion’s essential truth. This sentiment introduced an element of emotion and feeling into an otherwise detached and “scientific” analysis of religion. Both defined religion naturalistically, as a set of universal principles and as a natural impulse.

The German Enlightenment

The Enlightenment perspective on religion was a Europe-wide wide phenomenon. It differed depending on geographic and linguistic contexts, but its essential themes remained consistent. Thinkers in different areas of Europe used different vocabulary and conceptual frameworks, but nevertheless the same sets of values prevailed. In Germany, Kant developed similar notions regarding religion yet in crafting his own vocabulary created a distinct set of ideas apart from the British and French contributions in the Enlightenment. Kant defined “religion” as a universal impulse based on reason within each person in *Religion within the*

¹¹⁰ Rousseau, *Émile*, 467.

¹¹¹ Robert Wokler, *Rousseau, the Age of Enlightenment, and Their Legacies*, 29.

Boundaries of Mere Reason.¹¹² He referred to the “universal religion of reason” and by this he meant a pure religion of reason; an intrinsic element, universal yet individual.¹¹³ Historical religions were the variants and modifications of this pure religion. Faith was rational belief in God and religion, but was variable as well. Faith was the individual expression of religion so there were many faiths but only one religion. “There is only *one* (true) *religion*; but there can be several kinds of *faith*. — We can say, further, that in the various churches divided from one another because of the differences in their kinds of faith, one and the same true religion can nevertheless be met with.”¹¹⁴ True religion remained singular yet expressed through a multitude of permutations and forms.

The institutions, which Kant referred to as churches were the manifestation of a community of individuals who shared the same faith or confession. They were contingent and “historical” not essential. “[I]n pure religious faith it all comes down to what constitutes the matter of the veneration of God namely the observation in moral disposition of all duties as his commands. On the other hand, a church which is the union in a moral community of many human beings of equally many dispositions, needs a *public* form of obligation, some ecclesiastical form that depends on experiential conditions and is intrinsically contingent and manifold...”¹¹⁵ For Kant the pure religion of reason had no visible church or ecclesiastical institutions. He stated that even though it was a universal religion it was without a universal union or a visible universal church. Kant further noted that it was not necessary to create a

¹¹² Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, trans., ed. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 98.

¹¹³ Herder would also express a Rousseauian position on the inner conscious, see: Johann Gottfried Herder, *Against Pure Reason: Writings on Religion, Language, and History*, trans. Marcia J. Bunge (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 93.

¹¹⁴ Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 116.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 114.

universal church, because those laws which would sustain it were already instituted around Europe and everything else was discovered through reason.¹¹⁶

It may seem that Kant was proposing that a pure religion of reason would be entirely without any institutions, but he did make room for historical churches in his framework. He defined the establishment of a church, its forms and observances as accidental and arbitrary yet this did not preclude such a religion from being a pure natural religion.¹¹⁷ Kant's pure religion of reason was without clergy or institutions yet he conceived that it was possible that an extant religion and church could be reasonable. Like Locke, Kant sought to make a case for Christianity being a rational religion. So while his initial theoretical forays into the issue of religion seemed to deny the validity of a "true" Christian Church, he stepped back from the full implications of this idea and sought a compromise between "pure" and historical religion.

Kant divided "religion" between contingent and essential elements and validated the concept of a true religion while explaining its manifold expressions. The differences among religions were for him merely "vehicles" of a single truth. Religion was expressed in a multitude of ways yet the universal religion of reasons was valid for everybody.¹¹⁸

Religious differences—an odd expression! As if we were to speak of different *moralities*. There may certainly be different historical *confessions*, although these have nothing to do with religion itself but only with changes in the means used to further religion, and are thus the province of historical research. And there may be just as many different religious *books* (the Zend-Avesta, the Vedas, the Koran, etc.). But there can only be *one religion* which is valid for all men and at all times. Thus the different confessions can scarcely be more than the vehicles of religion; these are fortuitous, and may vary with differences in time or place.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 150-156.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 157.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 154.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 38; Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 114n.

While Kant used different vocabulary his ideas developed along a similar pattern as others in the European Enlightenment. Among the great diversity of religions and religious experiences he nevertheless located a single universal religion with contingent and historical manifestations.

The Enlightenment Interpretation

The Enlightenment created an *Interpretatio Europa*. In the various religions of the world thinkers like Locke, Rousseau and Kant saw the work of the same God. They created a universal understanding religion out of the apparent contradiction of a single God and the teeming multitude of differences in the human world. Religion was simultaneously a singular essence, universal and common to all human societies, yet manifested in plural forms. Its innumerable diversity established its constructed nature and its universal equality. All the various religions of the world were equal in that they were the natural byproduct of a universal human experience. It was a plural universal based on three principles: the interpretation of God in abstract and transcendent terms, the division of religion into essential and contingent elements (often defined as interior and exterior) and finally the belief in an intrinsic impulse to worship within the individual.

The Enlightenment interpretation established religion as one and universal. The various religions of the world were decedents of an ancient primordial religion which had been clothed in various guises. Its essence was the same, but its outer forms differed and were called various names such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Theorists of natural religion believed they had discovered this ancient religion. As Rousseau's Savoyard vicar declares, "You see in my exposition only natural religion, very strange that one would need another."¹²⁰ Christianity in its pure state was a version of this primordial religion as were all other religions. If one could

¹²⁰ Rousseau. *Émile*, 443.

elaborate the features of this natural religion it would be “Christian,” but also transcend historical Christianity. Again returning to Rousseau, “I find in natural religion only the elements of all religion.”¹²¹ In *Émile*, Rousseau further lamented, “If one would only listen to that which God said in the heart of man, there would have been only one religion on the earth.”¹²² Chemin-Dupontès conceived of Theophilanthropy as this ancient universal religion.

The *Interpretatio Europa* sought to elevate divinity, but did so at the expense of religion. This was a redemptive program which viewed God in transcendent terms, above a world filled with conflict carried out in the name of religion. The thinkers of the *Interpretatio Europa* saw religion as a source of instability, conflict and tension. Fanaticism emanating from religion blackened the name of God and fostered atheism. Enlightenment thinkers attempted to remedy this situation by reimagining the systems of worship, churches, dogmas and rituals associated with religion as human creations. This detached God from religion, simultaneously sanctifying God and “secularizing” religion. Secularize here does not refer to a particular theory of secularization, but to the literal meaning to make worldly; to transform sacred history into history in human time. Where once prophets channeled the will of God, now kings and lawgivers founded new political regimes. Religion was a component of these regimes, but not their only focus.

Religion was stripped of its divine character and this had the consequence of desacralizing and delegitimizing established forms of worship and sacred history. Religion as it remained was legitimate only in its contingent and historical associations. Its scope was reduced to that of an adjunct to the state; stability and public order were understood as its primary function. Like Plato’s censure of Hesiod and Homer, like Cicero’s criticisms of Roman religion,

¹²¹ Ibid, 445.

¹²² Ibid, 444.

the *Interpretatio Europa* sought to rescue divinity from abuse, ignorance and superstition, but this program of reform was potentially devastating.¹²³ Reformers like Plato, Luther and Rousseau were creators and destroyers.¹²⁴ In the wake of their efforts at redeeming divinity, lays the wreckage of traditional religion.

The second element of the *Interpretatio Europa* was the “scientific” study of religion. The purpose of this study was to classify and redefine religion as an object of scientific inquiry. The twin pillars of this transformation were the methodologies of human reason, used to discern truth from falsehood and the use of “nature” as a conceptual realm of experimentation, the laws of which were conceived as inviolable. By this method the “laws,” principles and essential truths of religion could be uncovered and a single truth deciphered. Once isolated this essence, based on reason and nature, operated like an ideal type. It was a universal category of analysis used to interpret all religion. Theorists of religion in the Enlightenment began with an a priori universal concept of reason and nature and thus created a universal product. Enlightenment thinkers did not develop a hypothesis as a starting point of experimentation. They established a set of end state positions and crafted the necessary principles that would produce them. Under the guise of “science” was a philosophical and political program the purpose of which was to transform religion from a source of conflict into one of unity.

The third aspect of the *Interpretatio Europa* was the elaboration of an intrinsic natural impulse. The interpretation of worship naturalistically was one of the most enduring aspects of the Enlightenment perspective on religion. This innovation understood the true essence of religion as internal and indestructible. More than this it was an instinct of nature and religion

¹²³ Plato, *The republic*, 62-70; Marcus Tullius Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods*, trans. P. G. Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xxvi, 18-19; Harrison, *'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*, 15

¹²⁴ For the connection between Rousseau and Plato see: Hendel, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Moralist; Masters, The Political Philosophy of Rousseau*, 14; David Lay Williams, *Rousseau's Platonic Enlightenment*, 61.

itself a product of nature. This defined the essential/contingent dichotomy in its most radical variant. There were essential truths common to all religions deciphered through reason, yet the true universal religion of nature was within. All else was artifice, a mere apparatus of worship and human created institutions.

The conception of religion as malleable played a critical role in the Revolution. It was central to the reformation of Catholicism in the Civil Constitution. It also makes the subsequent establishment of the Worship of Reason and Supreme Being more understandable.

Revolutionaries sought to harness worship for the good of the Revolution while discarding the institutions of religion. What remained was the interpretation of *culte* as the worship of the Revolution itself. This experiment, along with its principle supporter Robespierre, ultimately failed. The aftermath of these experiments, however, has been little studied. What followed among some revolutionaries was the belief that one could not rely solely on a vague worship to buttress the Republic one actually needed a “religion” with dogma, clergy and other institutions. Theophilanthropy, crafted to be a republican civil religion, therefore arose at a pivotal phase in the course of the Revolution, between the fall of Robespierre and the Concordat.

CHAPTER 4

CIVIL RELIGION

The modern concept of civil religion emerged from the *Interpretatio Europa*. By establishing nature as essence, all else was redefined as artifice. Nature was universal, infallible and immutable, but all outside it was artificial and malleable. Rousseau erected his civil religion upon this conceptual edifice and in this way his works *Émile* and *The Social Contract*, both published in 1762, represent his unified vision for religion. *Émile* was profoundly important before the Revolution while *The Social Contract* only achieved preeminence after 1789. In terms of civil religion Rousseau was a companion of revolutionaries not a forbearer. This chapter begins with Rousseau and sets the stage for later chapters by addressing the role of the Civil Constitution and the radical *Cultes* in creating the conditions for the emergence of Theophilanthropy.

Historians may argue about the influence of Rousseau's writings before the Revolution, but one fact remains. Revolutionaries consciously chose to use Rousseau as a guide for their revolutionary experiments. What remains understudied is the important role of Theophilanthropy in this respect. Inspired by Rousseau, Theophilanthropy was crucial to the transitional period between the fall of Robespierre and the Concordat. It represented a decisive phase in the experimental process of the Revolution. While many scholars have applied the phrase civil religion to a myriad of contexts and theoretical schemes, Theophilanthropy remains the only actual attempt to establish a civil religion based on Rousseau's writings.

Rousseau based much of his understanding of the civil aspects of religion on the classical republican tradition which he associated with ancient Rome. This "classical republicanism" was intertwined with his concepts of civil religion and natural religion. His work attempted to

incorporate all three elements into a whole. The marriage of classical republicanism and appeals to nature appear paradoxical as the scholar Helen Rosenblatt states.¹ But both natural religion and republicanism shared an eschatological narrative creating a conjunction point for the mixing of the two discourses.² One of the best examples of scholarship on this melding is *The Terror of Natural Right* by Dan Edelstein. Edelstein describes the crucial ways natural rights and republicanism joined into “natural republicanism.”³ Much of the scholarship on Rousseau defines him based on preconceived frames such as political theory, religion or philosophy. Doing so misses important aspects of his thought which can only be explored within a holistic framework uniting his interest in the ancients and moderns. This chapter seeks to offer a more inclusive understanding of Rousseau’s concept of civil religion.

The Ancient System and The “Great Separation”

In the chapter titled *religion civile* in *The Social Contract*, Rousseau outlined his ideas. He began with the ancient civil religion. Rousseau’s first principle was that ancient societies were theocracies, which united religion and politics. “Men initially had no Kings but the Gods, and no Government other than Theocracy. They reasoned like Caligula and reasoned rightly.”⁴ This was a reference to an earlier portion of *The Social Contract* (Book One, Chapter Two) where Rousseau stated that because Caligula reasoned that shepherds were naturally superior to their herds and leaders were naturally superior to their people; kings were gods or the people were beasts.⁵ If you were a subject, the two outcomes were roughly equivalent. This relationship also exposed something about the foundation of new societies. In the same section

¹ Helena Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva*, 241, 252.

² Judith Shklar, *Men and Citizens*, 12-32.

³ Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Right*, 1-25.

⁴ Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 169.

⁵ *Ibid*, 47.

Rousseau discusses “King Adam” and “Emperor Noah,” indicating that at the foundation religion and politics were united in the personage of the founder.⁶ And that this founder was not “divine” by a mandate from heaven, but by the reasoned arguments of governmental power.

Rousseau secularized the founder (made him worldly). In Roman tradition the *nomothetes* or lawgiver was an amalgam of human and divine, whereas Rousseau’s founders were temporal monarchs. Secularizing the sacred history of the Bible, Rousseau transformed prophets into kings and emperors. They also founded religions, but this was incidental to the foundation of a new political order. Stripped of their divine attributes these theocracies were not the product of revelation, but human in origin. Like Varro who wrote of things divine second because they were instituted by men, Rousseau conceived of the union of religion and politics as a human creation. He defined theocracy in political terms. “From the mere fact of placing God at the head of each political society, it followed that there were as many gods as peoples... so then national divisions resulted in polytheism and in theological and civil intolerance which naturally is the same...”⁷ In Rousseau’s analysis the governments of antiquity did not distinguish between the gods and the laws. Thus political war was also theological. Therefore all wars were religious wars.⁸ The example Rousseau used to illustrate this point was the Babylonian conquest of Judea. When Jews refused to recognize the Babylonian gods the conquerors saw this as open rebellion (Rousseau would later use a similar analogy with reference to Rome and Christianity).

Rousseau depicted the ancient civil religion as a universal system because through the process of Romanization this pagan religion “was known throughout the world as one and the

⁶ Ibid, 48.

⁷ Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 169.

⁸ Ibid, 169.

same Religion.”⁹ The ancient system Rousseau described was the *Interpretatio Romana*. For Rousseau the logic of monotheism made this ancient system clearly false and yet he failed to see his own assumptions about the universal understanding of religion based on nature.¹⁰ This natural religion interpreted the vast diversity of religions throughout the world as outer forms of a single essence rooted in an intrinsic worship of a single God. Thus all the religions of the world were representative of “one and the same religion,” a modern *Interpretatio*.

Within this ancient universal religion created through empire and Romanization Christianity implanted its own universal faith. For Rousseau, this development destroyed the unity of the previous system. Religion and politics had been united, but Christianity tore them apart. “It was in these circumstances that Jesus came to establish on the earth a Spiritual kingdom; which separated the theological system from the political system, divided the State, and caused the intestine divisions which have never ceased to agitate the christian peoples.”¹¹ At the foundation lies the secret to good government and bad as well. Like Adam and Noah, Rousseau interpreted Jesus as a king. However as a temporal monarch Jesus founded a flawed system. As his kingdom was an otherworldly kingdom, it created a divided political order. Thus a fatal flaw developed in the moment of foundation.

Remedying this failure meant once again returning to the foundation, to establish a new “social contract” wherein the state and religion existed in unity. Rousseau was acutely aware

⁹ Ibid, 171.

¹⁰ Referring the *Interpretatio Graeca* and *Romana*, Rousseau stated, “The fantasy of the Greeks was to find in their gods those among the barbarian peoples...but this is in our days a very ridiculous erudition.... as if one could hold something in common among imaginary beings with different names.” And on the Romans *Interpretatio*, “Finally the Romans having extended with their empire their worship and their Gods, and having themselves frequently adopted those of the vanquished granted to one and all the rights of the City (Rome), the peoples of this vast empire found themselves imperceptibly to have a multitude of gods and modes of worship nearly everywhere, and that is how paganism was finally known throughout the world as one and the same Religion.” Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 169, 171.

¹¹ Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 169.

that Christianity overturned the ancient system, reversing its human/divine distinction and made the restoration of this “rupture” the purpose of his work. In doing so he positioned himself against Augustine’s dichotomy of the “heavenly” and “earthly” cities. Acting as a “modern” Varro, Rousseau abandoned the ancient city as an organizing frame, choosing instead universal nature. In this he consciously engaged in his own act of overturning and returned to the assumptions of the Roman system. And it is this theoretical reversal which forms the basis for the modern concept of civil religion.

According to Rousseau this cleavage of spiritual and temporal power in Christianity left the civil state to the dominion of princes instituting a “perpetual conflict of jurisdiction which has rendered all good policy impossible in Christian states...”¹² Rousseau stated that in European history some had tried to restore the ancient system, but without success. He looked to Muhammad as having “a very sound view” uniting the two powers together in the Caliphate.¹³ In Europe only Hobbes sought to resolve the problem through “the reunion of the two heads of the eagle, and to bring everything back to political unity without which no State or Government will ever be well constituted.”¹⁴ However, Hobbes neglected to see that, “the dominating spirit of Christianity was incompatible with his system, and that the interests of the priest will always be stronger than that of the State” so this too ultimately failed to restore unity.¹⁵

Rousseau’s position here might be interpreted as the subordination of religion to politics. This is incorrect because based on the premise of the *Interpretatio Europa* religion and politics represented two manifestations of a single impulse rooted in nature. In this sense the state and the civil aspects of religion were the same, human institutions. And therefore in an ideal state

¹² Ibid, 171-2.

¹³ Ibid, 172.

¹⁴ Ibid, 173.

¹⁵ Ibid, 173.

the two would be united. For Rousseau civil religion was not as Beiner claims, the instrumentalization and subordination of religion to politics.¹⁶ Rousseau ends this section on the deficiencies of Christianity by making a twofold assertion “No State was founded that Religion did not serve as its base, and ... that Christian law is a foundation more harmful than useful to a strong constitution of the State.”¹⁷ Having established that religion is necessary for the foundation of a state and that Christianity is an unacceptable foundation, he began his theoretical experimentation to construct an ideal republican civil religion. This same project animated Theophilanthropy, which would move beyond a thought experiment and create a practiced civil religion for the French Republic.

Rousseau’s Typology of Religion

Defining civil religion as the study of religion considered through its connection to society (considérée par rapport à la société) and considered “politically” Rousseau developed his own typology of civil religion.¹⁸ All religion can be civil, but in this capacity there are differences in their effectiveness and benefits. Rousseau began by dividing religion into two types, of man and citizen. “The first, without Temples, without alters, without rites, born of a strictly interior worship of the Supreme God and of the eternal obligations of morality, it is the pure and simple Religion of the Evangel, the true Theism, and what may be called the divine and natural right.”¹⁹ The religion of the citizen, by contrast, was the ancient civil religion described earlier. It existed in one county had its own gods, dogmas, rites and its “exterior worship prescribed by the laws.... Such was all religion of the first peoples, which one is able to give the

¹⁶ Ronald Beiner, *Civil Religion*, 2, 149.

¹⁷ Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 173.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 173.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 173.

name of divine right, civil or positive (droit divin civil ou positif).”²⁰ The division of “interior and exterior worship” formed a critical part of the Enlightenment understanding of religion. It was central to *Émile* and Rousseau maintains the division here, but associates each type of worship with an “ideal type” of civil religion. Rousseau’s natural religion and civil religion were inextricably linked. They were in fact part of a unified and systemic philosophy. Additionally Rousseau’s ideal civil religion would combine classical civil religion and natural religion and in this fusion was both ancient and modern.

There was a third type of religion, which Rousseau called “most bizarre,” the religion of the priest. In Europe its exemplar was Catholicism and it had given men “two legislators, two leaders, two fatherlands, men submit to contradictory duties, and it is impossible for them to be both devotees and citizens.... It results in a sort of mixed and unsociable right (droit) which has no name.”²¹ For Rousseau all three types of religions were defective in some way when “considered politically.” He described the third one as evidently bad, “All that destroys social unity is worthless, all the institutions which place man in contradiction with himself are worthless.”²² Rousseau had a great deal of praise for the first two, but had their failings as well.

The second is good in that it reunites divine worship and the love of the laws, and that it makes the fatherland the object of adoration of the Citizens, they understand that to serve the State, is to service the tutelary god. It is a species of theocracy, in which one has no duty to another pontiff than the prince, no other priests than the magistrates. Thus to die for your country, is to go to martyrdom, to violate the laws, is to be impious; and to submit a guilty party to public execration, is to sacrifice him to the wrath of the gods. *Sacer esto* (to be accursed).²³

²⁰ Ibid, 173-4.

²¹ Ibid, 174.

²² Ibid, 174.

²³ “Sacer esto” is someone who is outside of law and can be killed with impunity. In Rome sacred was something which existed outside the mundane world, it could be either holy or evil. For more information on the concept of Sacer Esto see: Leon ter Beek, “Divine Law and the Penalty of Sacer Esto in Early Rome,” in O. E. Tellegen-Couperus, *Law and Religion in the Roman Republic* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

Rousseau stated that the ancient civil religion was “founded on error” and “drowns the true worship of the Divinity in vain ceremony.”²⁴ Furthermore it makes people “bloodthirsty and intolerant” so that it is “a holy act to kill someone who does not acknowledge their gods.”²⁵ It is in a “natural state of war with all others” as Rousseau detailed in the first parts of this section on civil religion this ancient religion knows no war except holy war.²⁶Rousseau’s classical republicanism glorified the ancient civil religion, yet he had to admit one could not return to its precepts.

Many of his motives for the Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar in *Émile* were to understand religion in such a way as to banish the specter of the Wars of Religion. Returning to the ancient civil religion would return to an era of religious wars. Upon further comparison between *The Social Contract* and the Profession, Rousseau implied such a return had already happened. In *Émile*, Rousseau connected the Wars of Religion with revelation. For him revelation was an affront to a monotheistic God because instead of expounding on God’s nature it turned nations into enemies. “Their revelations only degrade God... they render man proud, intolerant, cruel; instead of establishing peace on the earth, they carry forth iron and fire.”²⁷ Therefore revelation, although based in monotheism, harkened back to the ancient civil religion with its many gods. With “As many revelations as nations” God was again at the head of every nation and holy war was the norm.²⁸ Thus the proliferation of revelations had reverted humanity to the worst aspects of the ancient system without any of its benefits and resulted in fratricidal warfare across Europe.

²⁴ Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 174.

²⁵ Ibid, 174.

²⁶ Ibid, 169.

²⁷ *Émile*, 443.

²⁸ Ibid, 444.

Likewise the religion of man is described in glowing terms. “There remains the religion of man or Christianity, not that of today, but that of the Evangel.... Through this holy sublime, and truthful religion, men, children of the same God, recognize all as friends and the society which they unite does not dissolve even in death.”²⁹ This perspective of Christianity was rooted in a traditional eschatology shared by both reformers of religion and classical republicans. This “true” Christianity was a return to a primitive state, free from corruption and exterior trappings.³⁰ In this case, Christianity is bound up with natural religion; the closer a religion was to its original state, the closer it was to its natural state. And in this natural state was a closer reflection of the original religion of nature, the essence of all religion.³¹

This pure Christianity was politically deficient, however. “But this religion, has no particular relation with the body politic... ..it is detached from all the things of the earth. I know of nothing more contrary to the social spirit.”³² And again “Christianity is a religion totally spiritual, occupied solely of things from Heaven, the fatherland of the Christian is not of this world.” He goes on to say that a society of true Christians would quickly become the victim of a Catiline or a Cromwell.³³ Catiline attempted a coup against the Late Roman Republic while Cromwell was head of the Puritan Republic in the midst of the English Civil War. Cromwell is perhaps the more relevant example as he was the leader of a Christian Republic and in Rousseau’s opinion, a despot.³⁴ Rousseau continued by setting Sparta and Rome against this

²⁹ Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 175.

³⁰ Protestants of course already defined their movement as a return to a pure and true Christianity.

³¹ The founders of Theophilanthropy would also partake in this perspective, for a time considering the name “primitive Christians.” Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 270.

³² Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 175.

³³ *Ibid*, 176.

³⁴ Earlier in his chapter on civil religion Rousseau stated that once Christians took power in Rome, the religion became a “visible despotism.” His treatment of Cromwell as a despot reiterates this point.

hypothetical Christian republic and concluded the latter would be destroyed.³⁵ So a problem as old as Plato's Republic comes into focus (why Athens lost to Sparta). Your state may be perfect, in this case the perfect Christian state, but if it cannot survive it will eventually fall into ruin.

The Impossibility of a Christian Republic

In the comparison between a hypothetical Christian state and the ancient republics Rousseau made a critical transition, "But I am mistaken in saying a Christian Republic; each of these two words excludes the other." And to emphasize the point, he added "Christianity preaches only servitude and dependence.... True Christians are made to be slaves...."³⁶ For Rousseau this was an evolution in thinking. His Geneva manuscript outlined how Protestantism would be the ideal religion for republicanism.³⁷ Rousseau ultimately rejected this because, like other theorists of the Enlightenment, he sought to transcend the confessional conflicts between Protestants and Catholics, not participate in another salvo. Rousseau based the ideal republican civil religion on natural religion and by returning to the primordial essence of all religion his religion would encompass and transcend all religion.

Using similar criticisms deployed by Machiavelli, Rousseau would signal a shift away from a Christian based civil religion.³⁸ The statement on the impossibility of a Christian republic represents Rousseau's final break with the preceding tradition of classical republicanism and a critical innovation in the modern concept of civil religion. The Christian republican vision of Machiavelli receded and the classical republican discourse in France, influenced by Rousseau, irrevocably mutated. Unlike his predecessors who wanted to reform Christianity, Rousseau

³⁵ Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 176.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 177.

³⁷ Beiner, *Civil Religion*, 75.

³⁸ Revolutionaries chose Rousseau over Machiavelli and according to Viroli this was an unfortunate choice. Viroli, *Machiavelli's God*, 9, 258.

sought to create a new religion. This transition is critical for understanding subsequent interest in creating new religions in the modern period. Theophilanthropy is singularly important as one of the first forays into this new experimental frontier.

Although Rousseau seemed to advocate the creation of a non-Christian society, he recognized that Christians would make up at least a portion of the hypothetical society envisioned in *The Social Contract*. Thus having expounded on religion, “socially and politically,” he situated the individual in his scheme and made allowances for those who held opinions that differed from those of an ideal society. “It is very important to the State that each Citizen have a Religion that makes them love their duties...”³⁹ According to Rousseau citizens had to account to the sovereign for their opinions, dogmas and morality only as they related to the social pact. So that outside the power of the state, citizens could hold any opinions they wished. As to the work of the sovereign, Rousseau broached this subject as well in *Émile*. “As to exterior worship, if it must be uniform for good order, this is purely a police matter....”⁴⁰ In other words a matter of policy and the agent of that policy is clearly defined in *The Social Contract* as the sovereign.⁴¹ In the Revolution, the various national assemblies would “possess” sovereignty, and thus in accordance with Rousseau’s teachings would be empowered to mold religion.

For Rousseau there is a clear distinction between the individual and the whole as embodied in the social pact, but does this also imply a distinction between public and private? Can personal opinions that contradict the social pact be held in private, or must they be rooted

³⁹ Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 178.

⁴⁰ Rousseau, *Émile*, 444.

⁴¹ The sovereign does not have to be a king. It is simply the institution which holds sovereignty. Since revolutionaries claimed sovereignty for the National Assembly and its subsequent incarnations, they viewed these matters of worship within their purview.

out as well? Classical republicans recognized a division between private and public, but saw the two spheres as part of an integrated whole.⁴² My sense is that this is true for Rousseau who was not one for establishing dichotomies. This is evident in his critique of Christianity and the desire to unite the interior and exterior sentiment.⁴³ In *Theophilanthropy* there is also a sense of public and private/domestic separation, but the private realm was not the sphere of personal opinion, but a place for the cultivation of republican virtue, which would then be projected into the political realm.

The Theoretical “Construction” of Religion

Finally having discredited his two exemplars of the religion of man and citizen, Rousseau endeavored to construct his own. He outlined his ideal formula for civil religion as well as means for its protection. “There is a profession of faith purely civil which belongs to the Sovereign to fix the articles, it is not precisely like the dogmas of Religion, but like sentiments of sociability, without which it is impossible to be a good Citizen or a faithful subject.”⁴⁴ The Sovereign would expel anyone from the state who does not believe in them “not as impious but unsociable” and punish hypocritical obedience with death.⁴⁵ Earlier Rousseau, using the same phrase, condemned the hypocritical obedience of Christians in the Roman Empire; further adding that once Christians shed the pretense of obedience and achieved power they instituted a “visible despotism.” Here such a transgression is punishable by death.⁴⁶ One is again reminded that Rousseau’s ideal civil religion aimed to remedy the fatal flaw of Christian civilization. His call

⁴² One finds this especially with reference to the Polis. Nelson, *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought*, 1-18

⁴³ For an exploration which makes the claim that Rousseau indeed outlines a clear separation between public and private see: Mark Cladis, *Public Vision, Private Lives: Rousseau, Religion, and 21st-Century Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁴⁴ Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 178.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 178.

⁴⁶ Is Rousseau justifying Roman persecution of Christians perhaps even suggesting it did not go far enough in rooting out disobedience? I do not think Rousseau wants to return to the ancient system, but he does want to move beyond a Christian one.

for exile and execution was meant to ensure that Christianity or another like religion would not rupture the new order envisioned in *The Social Contract*.⁴⁷ Furthermore, how does one expose hypocritical obedience except to invade the realm of personal opinion? There is no distinction between public and private here; Rousseau understood the general will as an unbreakable bond which united the individual to society.

Rousseau used the same phrase, “profession of faith” in both *Émile* and *The Social Contract*, because the principles of his civil religion are the same as the natural religion elucidated in the Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar.⁴⁸ Rousseau’s civil religion was based upon a profession of faith that united the interior sentiment and the sentiment of sociability, being two manifestations of a single essence. The sentiments of sociability are the social manifestations of the impulse Rousseau described in *Émile* as the “interior sentiment,” “the conscience,” “the inner voice,” and the “instinct of nature.”⁴⁹ In *Émile*, Rousseau contented himself with explicating its interior reality, whereas in the section on *religion civile* in *The Social Contract*, he explained its ideal representation as it related to society, politics and the state. Chemin-Dupontès would also base Theophilanthropy on sociability in an effort to unite domestic and public virtues.⁵⁰

Rousseau founded his civil religion on sentiment as he did his natural religion, but there were also dogmas, which combined elements from his two ideal types of civil religion; ancient and modern.

The dogmas of civil religion ought to be simple and small in number, declared with precision without explication or commentary. The existence of the Divinity, powerful,

⁴⁷ Just as Augustine framed his apology against Varro; Rousseau developed his ideas in opposition to Christianity (as he imaged it). Rousseau’s portrayal of Christianity as divided and unsociable was the foil for his own ideal defined by unity and sociability.

⁴⁸ Bruno Bernardi, Introduction to *Du contrat social*, 7-33; Bruno Bernardi, *Rousseau and "L'Infame"*, 160, 169.

⁴⁹ Rousseau, *Émile*, 430.

⁵⁰ Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilantropes*, 12.

intelligent, beneficent, prescient and provident, the life to come, the happiness of the just, the chastisement of the wicked, the sanctity of the Social Contract and of the Laws, these are the positive dogmas. As for the negative dogmas, I limit them to one, intolerance....⁵¹

In these dogmas he again combined the two types of religions, the religion of man based on divine and natural right and the religion of the citizen based on divine and civil right.⁵² The religion of man represented the interior reality of sentiment and the religion of citizen, represented the exterior. Thus the division between interior essence and exterior artifice explored in *Émile* reappears in *The Social Contract* when both works are viewed as a complete system.⁵³ Rousseau's new vision of religion was squarely within the Enlightenment tradition. His ideal religion would combine the national unity of the ancient system and the universalism of the modern. It was both national and cosmopolitan, in effect a perfect illustration of the Enlightenment.

What began as an exposition on religion and politics evolved into an outline for a new religion. This religion was not the "pure religion of the Gospel," but of the ultimate source of the Gospel and indeed all religion, that of the primordial religion of nature. From *Émile* "I find in natural religion only the elements of all religion."⁵⁴ The interior sentiment was not otherworldly, but rooted in nature itself.⁵⁵ This religion would therefore be a "true theism" and fulfill Rousseau's central purpose of *The Social Contract*, to remedy the fatal flaw in Christian civilization by conceiving a new order to replace it. Empowered by the assumptions of the *Interpretatio Europa*, Rousseau imagined himself the founder of this new social order. The

⁵¹ Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 178-179.

⁵² Shklar states that Rousseau is asking the reader to choose between the religion of man and citizen so on this point I think she has it wrong. Judith Shklar, *Men and Citizens*, 1-32.

⁵³ Silk makes a similar point in reference to "cultus interior and cultus exterior." Silk, "Numa Pompilius," 884.

⁵⁴ Rousseau. *Émile*, 445.

⁵⁵ Rousseau likens it to an instinct in *Émile*.

religion of this new order was only theoretical, but the Revolution would create the opportunity for its emergence in practice in the form of Theophilanthropy.

Rousseau incorporated another element of the religion of the citizen into his proposal. He ejected the superstition of the ancient system, but retained the sanctity of the laws. In the ancient system the union of religion and politics in a temporal theocracy created theological intolerance that was also civil.⁵⁶ In Rousseau's ideal civil religion intolerance took on a different form. "Those who distinguish civil and theological intolerance deceive themselves, in my opinion. These two are inseparable."⁵⁷ Reversing the ancient system, the civil profession of faith created theological intolerance. However, because of Monotheism there could no longer be any "exclusive national religions" in Europe. Therefore tolerance had to be extended to all those who tolerated others with the exception of those whose, "dogmas are contrary to the duties of citizenship."⁵⁸ Rousseau's previous statements clearly marked Christianity as such a religion.

Rousseau's regime of toleration, meant to counter the failures of Christianity at its foundation and during the Religious Wars, sought to establish toleration through a rejection of Christian civilization. For Rousseau the elimination of Christianity was necessary for toleration to prevail. It was not merely that Christianity was a bad civil religion, but that Christians were bad citizens and represented a threat to the social pact. This represents one of the embryonic elements of secularization, that religion—in this case a particular religion is a threat to social cohesion. This mutated in the course of the Revolution to a position which held that the solution to conflict was not the transformation of religion, but its abolition. Policies against one religion soon encompassed all religion. Made possible by the intellectual precedents of the

⁵⁶ Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 169.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 179.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 179.

Enlightenment and empowered by the crisis of the Revolution, de-Christianization gave way to secularization.

The Civil Constitution

With the proclamation of the National Assembly in 1789 revolutionaries claimed the sovereignty of the nation as their sole prerogative. As the sovereign ruler of France the Assembly considered the Catholic Church of France to be under the dominion of the revolutionary state. Consequently reorganization of the Catholic Church was one of the first projects of the Revolution. Called the Civil Constitution of the Clergy this project reorganized the structure of the Church to mirror the newly created Departments. The legislation also sought to foster a more democratic culture within the Church. Clergy were made public officials, salaried by the state and a permanent council debated the affairs of the Church. Additionally higher clergy were expected to serve in local parishes.⁵⁹ Although, there was a great deal of tension and disagreement during the debate, the legislation passed the Assembly.⁶⁰ All this was done without the consultation and approval of the Pope and thus laid a foundation for conflict.

Some scholars have tied the content of the Civil Constitution to Rousseau's ideas.⁶¹ There is good reason for this, yet these ideas were not the responsibility of one man; they permeated the intellectual atmosphere of Enlightenment Europe. In respect to "Les Doctrines Religieuses de la Révolution" Pierre-Maurice Masson mentioned Montesquieu, Voltaire, Mably and Raynal.⁶² Rousseau cannot be dismissed, but the truth is that crediting one individual for the Civil Constitution much less the entire Revolution is unnecessary. The Civil Constitution was

⁵⁹ Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France, 1780-1804* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 141.

⁶⁰ Timothy Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789-1790)* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 288-95.

⁶¹ Masson, *La religion de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 3:226-7.

⁶² *Ibid*, 3:231.

not the result of a spontaneous revolutionary fever or the “fault of Rousseau,” but a general Enlightenment attitude regarding religion. The notion that religion comprised an interior essence and exterior artifice under the dominion of the state provided revolutionaries with a well-established set of assumptions from which to draw upon.

There were also other long standing influences on the Civil Constitution such as Richerism, Gallicanism and Jansenism.⁶³ These traditions did not oppose an Enlightenment view of religion. Instead Enlightenment values easily fit into these existing narratives of reform. Enlightenment thinkers advocating a return to a “true” Christianity appropriated existing narratives of reform and rearranged them in accordance with a new set of assumptions about the malleability of religion. Some scholars have noted the Protestant characteristics of reform in the Revolution. Revolutionaries no doubt used elements of past reforms in their own efforts. However, the Enlightenment and Revolution ought to be viewed as a religious reform in its own right and not the resolution of unresolved issues originating in the Protestant Reformation.⁶⁴

In the course of the eighteenth century, the perspective that defined religion as a human creation became imbedded within preexisting reformist discourses. Within these traditions, the Enlightenment assumptions remained hidden yet harbored a radical premise that empowered reformers to transform religion. This is not to say that the Enlightenment values promoted the onset of the Revolution. This is not an “origins” argument. The Enlightenment assumptions about religion fostered an intellectual arena of experimentation where a proliferation of different options emerged. The Revolution created the opportunity for the expression of these experiments in practice.

⁶³ Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France*, 142.

⁶⁴ Dale Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560-1791* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 1-13.

The crisis of the Revolution transformed a desire for reform into a mandate for the unilateral reorganization of the Church. As the Church historian Nigel Aston states, “The nation via its elected representatives was determined to have the last word on what had once been the specifically sacerdotal. Such logic ominously anticipated the rationale behind the civil constitution of the clergy.”⁶⁵ The swiftness with which authorities acted indicates that this reform was the result of a preformed set of positions. The course of the Revolution provided the opportunity, but the assumptions underlying this reform were already in place.⁶⁶

The advent of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy proceeded in popular societies and in the National Assembly. Work on reforming religion outside of the government was spear headed in the Social Circle where major leaders eventually became Constitutional Bishops such as Adrien Lamourette and Claude Fauchet. The Social Circle was an important thread of continuity throughout the Revolution especially on the matter of religion. It held an important position in the early Revolution and though its influence waned during the radical period, it reemerged later with many of the same participants and was instrumental in the emergence of Theophilanthropy. In the Assembly the Ecclesiastical Committee directed the legislation on the Civil Constitution and the central voice here was Jean-Baptiste Treilhard.

The first practical experiments on religion in the Revolution arose with the idea of “national religion.” The writings of Rousseau and the revolutionary Claude Fauchet were critical to the development of a revolutionary national religion in respect to the Civil Constitution.⁶⁷ The historian Gary Kates states that the club of the Social Circle, The Confederation of the Friends of

⁶⁵ Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France*, 129.

⁶⁶ Much credit must be given to Alexis de Tocqueville for his prescient observation that the Revolution occurred in the mind before 1789. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, 13.

⁶⁷ Gary Kates, *The Cercle Social, the Girondins, and the French Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 100.

Truth, “advocated two kinds of transformations in French religious practice. These were a radical remodeling of ecclesiastical life and the development of a new civil religion.”⁶⁸ These two perspectives represented factions within the Social Circle and the Revolution at large. One viewed the ideal patriotic religion as Christianity and combined elements from Montesquieu and Rousseau to realize this fusion. In this work, spear headed by Adrien Lamourette and Fauchet, “...Rousseau’s civil religion was made explicitly Christian...”⁶⁹ This modification of Rousseau developed into a “Christian school” (Kates’ term). Consequently, Lamourette and Fauchet among others were central to the establishment of the Constitutional Church as a Christian civil religion for the Revolution.⁷⁰

A counter point to the “Christian school” was Nicolas Bonneville another prominent member of the Social Circle. At this early stage in the Revolution Bonneville, “proposed that Christianity be superseded by a religion better suited to the new epoch, one which would project the values of the Enlightenment...”⁷¹ Fauchet and Bonneville were both members of the Social Circle and their intellectual conflict illustrates the experimental drive of revolutionaries.⁷² Fauchet, in his commentaries on Rousseau, said that religion was love and if the Gospels excluded even a single person then they would have to be modified. Bonneville in the Circle’s journal, *Bouche de Fer* (Mouth of Iron), deliberately misquoted Fauchet, stating that if anything in the Gospels did not correspond to reason they must be changed.⁷³ Fauchet and Bonneville quarreled over this misappropriation, but while these factions may have disagreed on certain matters they all accepted that human beings were empowered to transform religion based on

⁶⁸ Ibid, 101.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 103.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 103.

⁷¹ Kates, *The Cercle Social*, 103.

⁷² For a good description of this quarrel see: Jonathan I. Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas: An Intellectual History of the French Revolution from the Rights of Man to Robespierre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 160-2.

⁷³ Kates, *The Cercle Social*, 131.

“enlightened” principles. As Kates remarks, “In several respects the Civil Constitution matched the kind of civil religion advocated by Fauchet and his Christian followers.”⁷⁴ Fauchet, Lamourette and another future Constitutional Bishop Henri Grégoire worked closely with the Ecclesiastical Committee, framing their efforts as a return to an “authentic” Christianity.⁷⁵

In the National Assembly the intellectual values of the Enlightenment were put into practice. The Civil Constitution was a critical salvo in a war of ideas and brought this war into the realm of government policy. The architects of the Civil Constitution wanted to eliminate abuses and restore Christianity.⁷⁶ Here Treilhard described the revolutionary achievement.

The moment for reform has arrived, as it must or institutions cease to be useful. We must return to true principles. The spiritual jurisdiction only encompasses faith and dogma. All that is of order (*discipline*) and policy belongs to the temporal authority. Your decrees are without prejudice to our holy religion. We must return her to primitive purity and priests will again become the first Christians of the Gospel. Those who fear seeing this purification in the administration of public worship by these holy reforms are the truest enemies of religion.⁷⁷

All the hallmarks of the Enlightenment interpretation of religion were present; the division of religion into an internal spiritual essence and an exterior “public worship” administered by the state. Imbedded within the Civil Constitution was also an eschatology which defined reform as a return to purity and opposition as immoral. Treilhard was confident in the righteousness of the Civil Constitution. However, there was significant disagreement in the National Assembly and to aid in the passage of the law the Ecclesiastical Committee was enlarged with non-ecclesiastical members.⁷⁸ When confronted with resistance to the reorganization of the Church without its consent, Treilhard stated, “The Church is part of the State. The State is not part of the

⁷⁴ Ibid, 134.

⁷⁵ Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas*, 189.

⁷⁶ Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France*, 141.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Jacques Guyot d'Amfreville, *Vie de Jean-Baptiste Treilhard (1742-1810)* (Limoges: Ve H. Ducourtieux, 1879), 18.

⁷⁸ Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas*, 189.

Church, and the state could even change the religion of the French nation if that corresponded to the wishes of the majority”⁷⁹ Aston describes Treilhard as a Jansenist sympathizer and his hostility towards Catholic institutions a residue of Jansenist sentiments.

There are some problems with the Jansenist label. Does this kind of extreme “erastianism” come from the Jansenist perspective or one associated with Rousseau?⁸⁰ The belief that the state rules over religion seems to be a combination of Westphalian sovereignty, Gallicanism and Rousseau’s notion of civil religion. Furthermore why would a so-called Jansenist, who would be keenly aware of what the state could do in terms of persecution now claim that the state ought to hold total dominion over religion? Was not the union of Pope and Absolute monarch one of the driving factors in the story of Jansenism’s fall? The French King requested and received a Papal Bull condemning Jansenism. The importance of Jansenism seems to be greatly exaggerated a corrective is needed.

Opponents to the Civil Constitution recognized the radical implications of the legislation. The Catholic Bishop Bonal put it this way, “You have declared that all power comes from the nation; from that, you have concluded that the title of the public functionaries of the Church comes from the same source. If it was thus, we would be left only with a human religion, a religion of circumstances, a religion for *politiques*.”⁸¹ Bonal, in opposing the Civil Constitution, aptly identified one of the central positions of the *Interpretatio Europa*; that the outer representations of religion were contingent, the result of human ingenuity and under the domain of the state.

⁷⁹ Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France*, 144.

⁸⁰ Erastianism is the subordination of religion to secular authority elucidated by Thomas Erastus a Protestant theologian.

⁸¹ Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France*, 157.

Recent reforms undertaken by Joseph II of Austria seemed to indicate that reforms of the type seen in the Civil Constitution were not so radical. This suggests that the Civil Constitution was not inspired by *philosophes*, but Gallicanism and reasonable reform. This is the position of John McManners.⁸² I agree and disagree. The fact that the reforms of the Civil Constitution were “moderate” by cotemporary standards shows the extent to which Enlightenment values permeated European political society. However, it is only possible to view the Civil Constitution as moderate if one ignores what took place after its failure. Had the reforms of Joseph II during the 1780’s not met with Papal approval in the Concordat of 1784; would Joseph have undertaken to destroy the power of the Catholic Church in Austria or attempted to invent a new religion to replace Catholicism?⁸³ Clearly not. Since no artificial historiographical barriers ought to be erected between the Enlightenment and the Revolution, much less different phases of the Revolution, one must take the reforms advocated by the Civil Constitution as integral to the entire revolutionary project.

The radical nature of the Civil Constitution was not in content, but in conception. The very notion that the constituted authorities of a nation could unilaterally transform religion was radical. Would it have been possible for revolutionaries to achieve a piece of legislation like the Civil Constitution with Papal approval? The reforms of Joseph II seem to suggest that was a possibility. Why then did revolutionaries respond to the Papal rejection with a fanatical war against Christianity? In previous episodes of Church-State conflict, a papal rejection or even a threat of excommunication against the offending sovereign was an inducement to renegotiation

⁸² John McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 42.

⁸³ The reforms of Joseph II were contentious and engendered a great deal of hostility, but nevertheless existed within established precedents.

and eventually a return to normal relations under a jointly developed concordat.⁸⁴ The effectiveness of this jousting had limits as the Protestant Reformation shows. In terms of eighteenth-century Europe, negotiation was the established precedent. Revolutionaries radically deviated from this norm. They responded to the Pope's rejection of the Civil Constitution not by endeavoring to accomplish their goals in conjunction with the authority of the Church, but by labeling the Church an enemy of the Revolution and embarking on an open war against Catholicism. When viewed from this perspective, the Civil Constitution was radical indeed. Initially the scope of reform was limited; however when several compounding crises destroyed the legitimacy of existing institutions an opening appeared. This provided the opportunity for more radical experimentation to follow.

The Enlightenment interpretation of religion as expressed by revolutionaries like Treilhard saw exterior elements of religion as human creations under the dominion of the state. This was diametrically opposed to the view that the Catholic Church was a divinely ordained institution. From this vantage point the conflict between the Revolution and the Church appears inevitable. However, it was only inevitable if one denies that these opposing worldviews had not been in violent intellectual struggle for a good portion of the eighteenth century.⁸⁵ The conflicts in the Revolution were not inevitable because they were already a reality. The Revolution represented a new phase of this struggle. A degree of stability and the localization of the debate among the prosperous classes muted this conflict before the Revolution. The war of ideas remained within the confines of "polite" society and its weapons were ink and paper.

Additionally these debates had little influence on policy in the autocratic old regime thus

⁸⁴ In fact Napoleon was threatened with excommunication when relations between Imperial France and the Catholic Church frayed soon after the Concordat. AFIV 1047 dos. 1, 53.

⁸⁵ Darrin McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 18-53, 73-88.

vehement differences could be masked over. When the events of the Revolution (economic collapse, the threat of war and the expansion of political power) destroyed the veneer of stability and the power of the elites; the war of ideas spilled into the streets and revolutionary committees.⁸⁶

De-Christianization

With the Pope's rejection the failure of the Civil Constitution was a foregone conclusion and this "fatal divorce" in the words of Mathiez laid the foundations for a radical split between Catholicism and the Revolution. This failure saw Rousseau transformed from a companion to the Revolution into a prophet. His pronouncements in *The Social Contract* on the weakness of Christianity as a civil religion and in particular its incompatibility with a republic appeared prophetic. The rupture between the Revolution and Christianity resulted in twin developments; de-Christianization and the emergence of the revolutionary "Cults."

The central issue in the historiography of de-Christianization is how historians use the French Revolution to prove or challenge the assertion that Christianity and by extension religion is dying.⁸⁷ This perspective has been remarkably consistent in the historiography of the Revolution. In the early nineteenth century, chroniclers of the Revolution like Michelet interpreted the Revolution as a process of de-Christianization.⁸⁸ In the late nineteenth century the scion of the liberal interpretation Alphonse Aulard insisted that the conflict between the

⁸⁶ The Social Circle is an excellent illustration of this; it possessed a great deal of diversity from the revolutionary Christianity of Fauchet to the Deism of Bonneville. The factions represented by these two individuals remained united for a time in the early Revolution, but increasingly radicalization separated them. For a description of this process see: Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas*, 162.

⁸⁷ Bernard Plongeron, *Conscience religieuse en révolution. Regards sur l'historiographie religieuse de la Révolution française* (Paris: Picard, 1969); Jean-Marie Mayeur, Bernard Plongeron and Astérios Argyriou, *Histoire du christianisme: des origines à nos jours Tome X, Les Défis de la modernité (1750-1840)* (Paris: Desclée, 1997).

⁸⁸ Jules Michelet, *History of the French Revolution*, 22.

Revolution and the Church was avoidable.⁸⁹ His student Mathiez agreed, blaming foreigners.⁹⁰ Mathiez also pioneered social theory which gained prominence in the French academy into the twentieth century. This culminated in the work of Michelle Vovelle who interpreted de-Christianization as a manifestation of long term “secularizing” trends.⁹¹ Other historians like John McManners, Bernard Plongeron and Dale Van Kley have asserted that de-Christianization was an aberration and so challenged the assumptions linking de-Christianization and secularization. The historiography continues to focus on Year II and remains stuck in an alternating debate between de-Christianization as evidence of the death or endurance of religion.⁹²

In this dissertation de-Christianization is treated as both a contingent aberration located in Year II and a prelude to the secular policies of the Thermidorian Convention, which separated church and state and prohibited public worship. De-Christianization emerged due to the circumstances of the Revolution and was part of an experimental process of trial and error. The failure of the Civil Constitution gave way to an open war against Catholicism and the prospect of a non-Christian religious experience. Major elements of the campaign to root out Catholicism were the invocation of a new calendar and the suppression of Christian practice in particular by representatives on mission and the revolutionary army. New revolutionary “religions” invented to accommodate the non-Christian character of the era were the “Cults” (Worship) of Reason and the Supreme Being. The experimental and volatile nature of de-Christianization was fragile and

⁸⁹ Aulard, *The French Revolution*, 3: 160-162.

⁹⁰ Mathiez, *The French Revolution*, 413.

⁹¹ Michel Vovelle, *The Revolution against the Church: From Reason to the Supreme Being*, trans. Alan José (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991), 173-175; Michel Vovelle, *Piété baroque et déchristianisation en Provence au XVIIIe siècle; les attitudes devant la mort d'après les clauses des testaments* (Paris: Plon, 1973), 322.

⁹² John McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998); Nigel Aston, *Christianity and Revolutionary Europe, 1750-1830*. Cambridge (U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution*, 367.

eventually collapsed. Its legacy provided two crucial intellectual and legal precedents. First its failure spurred further experimentation eventually resulting in Theophilanthropy. Second, de-Christianization fostered the creation of a legal apparatus that provided the groundwork for future efforts at outlawing all forms of worship in the Thermidorian Convention and the Directory.

In terms of de-Christianization and the Worship of Reason, Joseph Fouché was an essential voice along with Pierre Gaspard Chaumette. Fouché survived the Terror and eventually found a home as an ally of Napoleon whereas Robespierre executed Chaumette during the Terror. In terms of the connection between de-Christianization in Year II and the secular policies of the Thermidorian Convention the connections are primarily with language. The same general intellectual framework was employed and the same words used in both cases.

The recognized starting point for de-Christianization was when Fouché, a representative on mission, proclaimed an edict against Christianity at Nièvre in west-central France. On 19 Vendémiaire Year II (10 Oct 1793), Fouché declared the “substitution of superstitious and hypocritical systems of worship” and their replacement by “universal morality.” Echoing Rousseau’s charge against Christianity of “hypocritical obedience,” Fouché called for the suppression of Catholicism. He went on to outline the legal parameters of de-Christianization that would eventually evolve into the secular legal regime instituted in the Thermidorian Convention and Directory.

Considering that, if at the movement the Republic declared solemnly that in accordance with an equal protection to exercise the worship of all religions it is permitted for all sects to establish in their public places, roads and streets, the signs of their particular sect, to celebrate their religious ceremonies. The result would be confusion and disorder in the city. The following is decreed. All systems of worship of the diverse religions will be exercised only in their respective temples.⁹³

⁹³ Quoted in Aulard, *Culte de la raison et le culte de l'être supreme*, 27-8.

Fouché used public tranquility as a rationale for the prohibition of public worship. The edict further declared that the Republic recognized no single system of worship as dominant or privileged and that all “religious signs” in public spaces would be wiped out. Finally Fouché forbid all clerics from donning their dress in public.⁹⁴ Fouché associated religious observance with a threat to public order. He defined the legitimate space for religion to be non-public. He also framed his edict against all religions to maintain the appearance of neutrality when in reality it was directed against Catholicism.

The notion of banishing worship from the public arena was not unique to Fouché; it was also taken up by Chaumette. In the same month as Fouché’s edict, Chaumette mirrored the call for proscribing exterior worship. After a report by Chaumette which railed against the charlatanism of priests, the Commune general council stated that, “all exterior acts of any worship are interdicted by the law.”⁹⁵ The basic parameters of de-Christianization were the appeal to public order and neutrality and the banishment of religion from the public were present in the future legislation restricting public worship during the Thermidorian Convention. The language of de-Christianization was adopted verbatim into the secular regime instituted during the latter Republic.

Revolutionary Worship

De-Christianization did not proceed as an outright rejection of religion, but the replacement of Christianity with an alternative.⁹⁶ Before the Revolution the prospect of creating a non-Christian religion was conceptually possible. The circumstances of the Revolution created

⁹⁴ Ibid, 28.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Pierre-Gaspard Chaumette, *Papiers de Chaumette*, eds. Fritz Braesch (Paris: Au siège de la Société, 1908), 198; Aulard, *Culte de la raison et le culte de l'être supreme*, 39.

⁹⁶ Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France*, 262.

the conditions for this possibility to emerge in practice. Rousseau is central in terms of both the theoretical “construction” of a new religion and its praxis in the Revolution.

The idea that one could create a religion was as much a radical innovation as it was mundane (of this world). If religion was a human creation, then modifying it was simply a normative activity. Furthermore if one employed reason in this endeavor then a more perfect religion would result. After all the ancient lawgivers, mere human beings, heroic though they may have been, created the great religions of the past. By learning from their examples and employing the perfections of reason and nature, one could recreate their great deeds and indeed surpass them. Rousseau viewed himself as a legislator-founder as did revolutionaries.

Revolutionaries identified the two “Cults” of Reason and the Supreme Being as systems of worship and not *religions* for a very important reason. The use of the words, *religion* and *culte* in the Enlightenment explain the abandonment of a revolutionary “religion” and the institution of a “*culte*” during the radical period of the French Revolution. Religion signified a system of belief and institutions; *culte* on the other hand was an inner reality within the soul and an outer reality, created by human beings. One meaning of natural religion was literally no religion, only the interior worship of God prior or outside of the institutions or society.⁹⁷ With the failure of the Civil Constitution revolutionaries abandoned “religion,” a separate institutional apparatus, in favor of a worship tied to the Revolution itself.⁹⁸ In doing so revolutionaries accepted two basic premises of the Enlightenment perceptives on religion; the inner worship of God was indestructible and its outer manifestation could be harnessed by the state.

⁹⁷ In legislation on the legitimization of children born out of marriage the term revolutionaries employed was “enfant naturelle” a child born outside of the institution of marriage. France and Krakovitch. *Archives nationales. Inventaire Général De La Série AD, Sous-Série ADxviii c (Impressions des assemblées)* (Paris: impr. nationale, 1997), 392.

⁹⁸ Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France*, 262.

Revolutionaries interpreted the institutions of religion and exterior worship to be human inventions (as was the state itself). Thus the union of religion and politics was an attempt to sacralize the Revolution.⁹⁹ The separation of religion from the revolutionary state was not yet a political possibility so the project of the radical period was, in the words of Alphonse Aulard, to replace Christianity and establish a national worship based on natural religion.¹⁰⁰ The first attempt was the Worship of Reason based on natural religion and Enlightenment precedents. As the *Encyclopédie* proclaimed, “La religion naturelle est le culte que la raison” (natural religion is the worship of reason).¹⁰¹ It must be said that the term *culte* did not necessarily indicate the worship of a thing, but worship through a thing. For example, in the Revolution there was a “*culte des arbres*” (trees). It is clear that revolutionaries were not calling for the literal worship of trees, but worship through a ritualization of a thing.

Those who sought to harness *culte* expected to see a new worship spontaneously emerge.¹⁰² The premise of natural religion was that the instinct to worship, the sentiment of sociability would manifest itself once the clouds of superstition had been dispersed. Revolutionary de-Christianizers were so convinced of this truth that when this “natural religion” did not engender sufficient enthusiasm or resistance emerged more coercive methods had to be employed.¹⁰³ The Worship of Reason culminated on 20 *Brumaire* Year II (10 November 1793) with the Festival of Reason. The Festival was celebrated in Notre Dame Cathedral and established the goddess of reason upon the altar of the Church now styled the Temple of Reason. Chaumette was the prime organizer of the affair. The Worship of Reason quickly gained a

⁹⁹ Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 262-82.

¹⁰⁰ Alphonse Aulard, *Culte de la raison et le culte de l'être supreme (1793-1794); essai historique* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1892), 40.

¹⁰¹ *Encyclopédie*, 14:78.

¹⁰² Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France*, 263.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 268-9.

reputation for advocating atheism, in part because of Chaumette and his famous dictum that death is the eternal sleep.¹⁰⁴

In response to the atheism and violence fostered by de-Christianization and the Worship of Reason, other revolutionaries attempted to offer a more conciliatory tone towards Christianity. Henri Godineau at Boudreaux, ten days after the Festival of Reason stated it as such.

All forms of religious worship were invented by men, and legislators established them to give weight and sanction to their laws. Numa, Moses, Mahomet, called themselves inspired, and by that means obtained great authority over the minds of the weak and ignorant men, whom they wished to civilize.... Numa founded a religious worship on his civil laws; Moses built his civil upon his religious code; Mahomet did the same. Jesus alone established a worship adapted to every form of government; for Jesus founded all religion upon the love of God and our neighbor.¹⁰⁵

There are echoes of Machiavelli with the reference to Numa, the appeal to divinity by the legislator and the civilizing influence of religion. And of course Rousseau and his focus on religious founders. Godineau's description is an excellent illustration of how the discourse of civil religion and the Enlightenment understanding of religion combined in the Revolution.

Godineau accepted Rousseau's view on religion, but altered his interpretation of Christianity. For Godineau, it was Christianity's supposed non-political character which suited it to the Revolution. Unlike the other religions, Christianity could be completely separated from any civil apparatus and thus freely attached to any system of government, in this case the Revolution and its institutions. Christianity could be split into religion and worship; the first discarded as unnecessary the latter usable for the Revolution. The Republic, its institutions and laws would be the foundation for the worship of the Supreme Being.

¹⁰⁴ Aulard, *Culte de la raison et le culte de l'être supreme*, 29.

¹⁰⁵ Henri Godineau, *An Oration, Upon Religious Worship* (Philadelphia: B. F. Bache, 1794), 1.

The rejection of de-Christianization and rapprochement with Christianity continued with the law on the liberty of worship and what Aulard called Robespierre's "neo-Christianity."¹⁰⁶ On 15 *Frimaire* Year II, one month after the Festival of Reason, Robespierre stated that, "The French people and their representatives respect the liberty of worship for all systems of worship and do not proscribe any."¹⁰⁷ Three days later on 18 *Frimaire*, the National Convention decreed legislation on the liberty of worship. The decree itself made explicit reference to refractory priests and warned those who would "under the pretext of religion compromise the cause of liberty."¹⁰⁸ The decree repudiated de-Christianization and there was no hint of prohibiting public worship. It would not be until the transition from Thermidor to the Directory when the language of the de-Christianizes was incorporated into the discussion of liberty of worship.

Some five months after 18 *Frimaire*—and after Robespierre had the leaders of the Worship of Reason executed—the Convention decreed the celebration of the Worship of the Supreme Being on 18 *Floreal* Year II. The Festival was held on 20 *Prairial* Year II (8 June 1794).¹⁰⁹ For Robespierre, much like Godineau's interpretation, the Republic itself was the civil and institutional aspect of a revolutionary worship. Robespierre's attempt to sacralize the Revolution failed, but associating the worship of God with the evils of the Terror scandalized religion in general and set the stage for the emergence of the secular policies in 1795.

One of the central aims of the civil religion section in *The Social Contract* was to banish the dichotomy which had afflicted Christian civilization and restore the bond between religion and the state. Robespierre simply interpreted this precept from the vantage point that the

¹⁰⁶ Aulard, *Culte de la raison et le culte de l'être supreme*, 210.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 230.

¹⁰⁸ France and Lepec, *Recueil général des lois, décrets, ordonnances, etc depuis le mois de juin 1789 jusqu'au mois d'août 1830* (Paris: P. Dupont, 1839), 32.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 291.

Republic was the ideal union of religion and politics. Some might suggest that Robespierre's Worship of the Supreme Being was in effect a practical expression of Rousseau's civil religion in *The Social Contract*.¹¹⁰ This is so, but it is also true that the Civil Constitution and subsequently Theophilanthropy were as well. Rousseau's ideas were a malleable revolutionary instrument.

The end of the radical phase and the failure of the revolutionary "Cults" produced a new stage in the thinking on religion in the Revolution. One side believed that the Revolution could not simply have a vague worship tied to the Republic, but needed a proper "religion." This was what motivated Theophilanthropy and later the Concordat. The other side saw the failure of the Revolution's religious policy as a signal to abandon any need for either religion or worship. After Thermidor, the Convention separated church and state and forbid public worship. The Thermidorian Convention took issue with the radical period not on content, but on method.¹¹¹ Thermidor did not represent a retreat from revolutionary values but a return to de-Christianization. Thermidor and the Directory also marked a new legalistic phase in the Revolution. Law and order became the focus and served to mask the violence of the revolutionary project.

¹¹⁰ Michaël Culoma, *La religion civile de Rousseau à Robespierre* (Paris: Harmattan, 2010); Philip knee, "Religion civile and the culte of the supreme being," in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la Révolution: actes du Colloque de Montréal, 25-28 mai 1989*, ed. Jean Roy (Ottawa: Association nord-américaine des études Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1991).

¹¹¹ Social historians treat Thermidor and the Directory as a retreat and a period of bourgeois consolidation. In terms of social policy that may be true, but in regards to the religious question there was no retreat. In fact there was a further radicalization.

CHAPTER 5

THEOPHILANTHROPY I

Jean-Baptiste Chemin-Dupontès developed Theophilanthropy through a gradual process which mirrored the course of the Revolution. His initial works in the early Revolution were occupied with the education of children and youth in revolutionary values. During the radical period Chemin-Dupontès authored a tract aimed at uniting Christianity and the Republic. Finally was Theophilanthropy, a fully formed religion independent from the revolutionary state with institutions, dogma and rituals. The importance of Chemin-Dupontès revolves around two points. First the study of his career highlights the transition in the Revolution from the desire to establish a Christian republican civil religion to a non-Christian one. Second, his *Manuel* became a template for all subsequent activities involving Theophilanthropy from the Revolution to the late nineteenth century. After the Revolution he was a chronicler of Masonry.

In the early Revolution Chemin-Dupontès's works centered on childhood education. His pamphlet, *The Republican Alphabet* was designed for teaching children the alphabet using republican symbols and values.¹ Published in Year II, it followed this basic instruction with in depth lessons on the principles of natural religion geared towards children. It began by appealing to the spectacle of nature with the maxim that the beauty of nature proved the existence of God. It followed with a page from Rousseau, stating that the laws of God were within the heart and finally that "religion consists in following the laws of God."² The remainder of the document

¹ Jean-Baptiste Chemin-Dupontès, *Alphabet républicain, orné de gravures : & suivi de conversations à la portée des enfans, propres à leur inspirer l'amour de la liberté, de l'égalité, & de toutes les vertus républicaines* (Paris: n.p., 1790).

² Ibid, 7-9.

summarized domestic, political, martial and economic virtues. This early effort was the origins of Theophilanthropy.

In the *Republican Catechism* also published in Year II, Chemin-Dupontès focused on older children. He combined educational concerns with lessons about revolutionary virtue.³ This work was part of a larger effort in France at establishing a new “catechism” for the Revolution.⁴ The first essay in the *Republican Catechism* covered the youthful paragon of revolutionary sacrifice, the child martyr Joseph Barra. It then covered republican institutions, the Constitution of 1793, the revolutionary calendar and explored concepts like liberty and equality before ending with songs in honor of the Republic. Chemin-Dupontès’s catechism was a jumping-off point for a new educational program. He wrote a “gospel” designed to unite not just French citizens in fraternity, but the whole earth!

Initially published as *Morality of the Sans-Culottes or Republican Gospel* this work attempted to extract a code of morality from the Hebrew Bible and the Gospel that agreed with revolutionary republicanism.⁵ A later version dropped reference to the Sans-Culottes and it became simply *Republican Gospel*. It was also translated and published in America by a congressional representative from Philadelphia and a Presbyterian minister, Blair McClenachan in 1794.⁶ The first two sections of the *Republican Gospel* were extracts from the Hebrew Bible and the Gospel focusing on personal and social morality. The third section expounded on the morality of republicanism. Chemin-Dupontès focused on the newly proclaimed Worship of the

³ Jean-Baptiste Chemin-Dupontès, *L'ami des jeunes patriotes ou catéchisme républicain dédié aux jeunes martyrs de la liberté* (Paris: n.p. 1793).

⁴ Adrian Velicu, *Civic Catechisms and Reason in the French Revolution* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2010), 101.

⁵ Jean-Baptiste Chemin-Dupontès, *Morale des Sans-Culottes ou Evangile républicain* (Paris: n.p., 1794).

⁶ Jean-Baptiste Chemin-Dupontès, *Morality of the Sans-Culottes or The Republican Gospel*, trans. Blair McClenachan (Philadelphia: T. Dobson, 1794).

Supreme Being and its stance against atheism.⁷ He listed various virtues and used examples from the Revolution to illustrate them.

The aim of the *Republican Gospel* was apparent from its frontispiece, which depicted four representative figures; on the left stood Moses holding the Ten Commandments with the words, *Morality of the Bible*, inscribed on them. On the right Jesus held a scroll with the words, *Morality of the Gospel*. In the middle was Marianne, symbol of the Republic. She held an ouroboros (a snake eating itself) representing the eternal quality of the religious truths contained in the Old Testament and the Gospel. Within the ouroboros was the phrase, “rights and duties of citizens.” Above the three figures was the goddess of liberty holding a torch in one hand and three halos in the other. The halos, implying a union of religion and republicanism were not associated with the figures. In this presentation, inspired by the Enlightenment, Moses and Jesus were not divine intermediaries, but moral teachers.

Published during the period of the Worship of the Supreme Being the *Republican Gospel* attempted to establish a Christian republicanism apart from the revolutionary Catholicism of the Civil Constitution. “In all times and among all peoples, the morality of nature has been and will always be the same. One finds in the bible and the gospel the touching and sublime morality of nature that is as good as the republican constitution. Moses and Jesus were Sans-culottes as good as our montagnard deputies.”⁸ Chemin-Dupontès incorporation of Moses signified a more universal appeal to both Jews and Christians in France. Unlike Robespierre’s Worship, which was entirely based on nature or even Godineau’s attempt to detach Jesus from Christianity, Chemin-Dupontès hoped to keep the texts of Judaism and Christianity within a larger

⁷ Ibid, 34.

⁸ Chemin-Dupontès, *Morale des Sans-Culottes*, 3.

understanding of revolutionary religion. This was still at the stage where a revolutionary Christian civil religion was a possibility.

For Chemin-Dupontès this entailed an effort to “rationalize” the Bible through the purging of “errors.” Similar to other Enlightenment “Christian” reformers such as Locke, Rousseau and Kant, Chemin-Dupontès sought to attain a “reasonable” Christianity by cleansing the Bible and Gospel of error and superstition.

I know that there are in the bible and the gospel some maxims contrary to nature. This is because in all ages, there has existed men who have sought to induce the people to error for their profit. These are men who have made from the most beautiful lessons of wisdom and virtue, exhortations to superstition and crime. But in purging the bible and the gospel, as I have done, from the errors that ambitious sectarians have added, these two books will be more than they were in their origin. They will be, that is to say, codes of morality, able to bring happiness to the earth and to carry men to virtue and republican fraternity.⁹

Chemin-Dupontès saw the Republic, personified as a savior, as the source of a new gospel. The stories of its heroes and martyrs were a new basis for universal virtue. Chemin-Dupontès incorporated Moses and Jesus into the “sacred” history of the Republic composing a new gospel and a universal religion expressed through the Revolution. These holy texts would, in the words of Chemin-Dupontès, reach their perfection in association with the Republic. The Republic as redeemer would fulfil the promise of religion and banish its errors.

The hopes for a revolutionary Christianity peaked with the Civil Constitution, but reemerged during a brief period during the Worship of the Supreme Being. Soon after revolutionaries abandoned Christian republicanism, except for stalwarts like Grégoire. In the story of religion in the Revolution, Chemin-Dupontès’s work appeared at a crucial stage when revolutionaries hoped to achieve a symbiosis between Revolution and Christianity while rejecting Catholic republicanism. This too failed and here Chemin-Dupontès is again useful for

⁹ Ibid, 60.

understanding the transition from Christian republicanism to natural republicanism in the later Revolution. Theophilanthropy incorporated Christianity into its universal religion of nature, but after 18 *Fructidor* and in an era of increasing anti-Catholic tension Chemin-Dupontès jettisoned his interest in Christianity altogether. In later works, which were large compilations of religious texts from around the world, Jesus appeared only in a brief section titled the “hebrew sage.”

Theophilanthropy

The creation of a new religion was a process of trial and error. Its potential may have existed in theory, but required a period of intense crisis to emerge in practice. As a process its features are evident in the works of Chemin-Dupontès. First was the association of religion, Christian and then natural, with the Millenarianism of the Revolution. The Republic became a symbol for a new age and revolutionary religion took on the same dimensions. This “future” religion was first an adjunct to the state and then an independent movement. Once detached from the state this new religious expression became an independent and practiced religion. The Revolution thus acted as a catalyst and incubator for the invention of a new religion. The precedent established by this new religion would go on to inspire further experimentation into the twentieth century.

The milieu from which Theophilanthropy emerged was a later incarnation of the Social Circle. Instrumental to the Civil Constitution, the Circle faded into obscurity during the radical era. After the fall of Robespierre the Circle reemerged. This new Social Circle combined members of the previous group and also reformers called *Ideologues* who focused on education.¹⁰ The word ideologue meant the science of man; the study of thought and ideas in the

¹⁰ Mathiez, *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, 84, 120, 213.

pursuit of knowledge and education.¹¹ Religion was a central concern for the Social Circle which revolved around concepts of universal religion and morality.

One of the first salvos of this debate was the 1791 work *On the Spirit of Religions* by Nicolas Bonneville who called for a universal “confederation” of religions.¹² The radical era tabled the Social Circle’s interest in a universal religion of nature, but this interest returned with the work of Antoine François Daubermesnil who wrote a treatise on natural religion in 1795. His “worship of the adorers” was an “immediate precursor” to Theophilanthropy.¹³ Soon after in 1796, Jean-Baptiste Chemin-Dupontès published *Manuel des Theophilanthropes*, outlining dogmas and institutions of Theophilanthropy.

While Chemin-Dupontès was the main source behind Theophilanthropy, the administration of the new religion was charged to a central committee. According to Mathiez the committee was composed of around fifty individuals with the most important being Chemin-Dupontès, Jacques Antoine Creuzé-Latouche, Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemours, Valentin Haüy, Jean-François Dubroca and Etienne-Marie Siauve.¹⁴

Universal Religion and Morality

There was significant debate in the Enlightenment over the connection between religion and morality. The crux of the debate centered on whether religion and morality were separate phenomenon. The notion that morality was separate and autonomous from religion was present

¹¹ Antoine Louis Claude Destutt de Tracy, *Éléments d'idéologie* (Paris: Courcier, 1804).

¹² Nicolas de Bonneville, *De l'Esprit des Religions* (Paris: Cercle social, 1791), 83.

¹³ François Antoine Daubermesnil, *Extraits d'un manuscrit intitulé Le culte des adorateurs* (Paris: Cercle social, 1795); François-Alphonse Aulard, *The French Revolution: a political history, 1789-1804*, trans. Bernard Miall (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 4: 66.

¹⁴ Mathiez, *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, 106, 698-704.

in the work of Holbach in *La morale universelle* and in Jaucourt's work in the *Encyclopédie*.¹⁵ In the Revolution this idea appeared among those critical of religion such as Fouché who emphasized a universal morality in the edict at Nièvre. The *ideologue* Constantin François de Chassebœuf, Comte de Volney also proposed an autonomous moral system.¹⁶ For Volney in particular universal morality was attainable through the observation of nature and religion was both unnecessary and potentially harmful.

Chemin-Dupontès intervened in the debate over universal religion/morality to refute the perspective that religion was harmful. He conceived of Theophilanthropy as a means to redeem divinity from association with religious conflict, “mysterious” religion and works of “irreligion.” Consequently he developed a theology which postulated a single religion and morality, but many systems of worship. “[T]here are many different systems of worship, but there is only one religion, as there is only one morality...”¹⁷ And in the work *Elementary Instruction*, designed for the instruction of children, he declared. “Do all people profess the same worship? No, but despite the difference of their worship, they are all in agreement on the essential principles of religion and morality, all believe in the existence of a good and just God...”¹⁸ Worship was divided between interior and exterior. The interior was invariable based on an inner impulse or sentiment to worship God whereas the exterior varied. But as exterior worship was directed towards the same end, the worship of the Supreme Being, it was universal as well.¹⁹

¹⁵ Paul Henri Dietrich Holbach, *La morale universelle* (Amsterdam: M. M. Rey, 1776), x; Robert Wokler, “Projecting the Enlightenment,” in *The Enlightenment: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies*, ed. Ryan Patrick Hanley and Darrin M. McMahon (London: Routledge 2010), I: 274.

¹⁶ Aulard, *Culte de la raison et le culte de l'être supreme*, 27; Constantin François de Chassebœuf comte de Volney, *La loi naturelle, ou Catéchisme du citoyen français* (Paris: de Sallior, 1793), 30

¹⁷ Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilantropes*, 55.

¹⁸ Jean Baptiste Chemin-Dupontès, *Instruction élémentaire sur la morale religieuse: par demandes et par réponses* (Paris: Bureau du courier del la librairie, 1798), 22.

¹⁹ Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilantropes*, 18; *Instruction élémentaire*, 22.

The concept of a universal religion and morality, combined with a plural concept of worship, identified Theophilanthropy as an inheritor of Enlightenment interpretation of religion. Like the thinkers of the Enlightenment, Chemin-Dupontès desired to remove religion as source of conflict and establish it as a source of unity. The Enlightenment concern over the Wars of Religion provided an excellent frame of reference for a time when the Revolution was emerging from the Terror and de-Christianization. The religious conflict of the radical era animated revolutionaries to search for a means to transform religion into a force for unity in the latter Republic. The Enlightenment was not the only source of inspiration for Chemin-Dupontès. Theophilanthropy was more than the praxis of the Enlightenment *Interpretatio Europa*; it was an amalgam of classical republicanism and civil religion built upon the base of natural religion.

The principle documents of Theophilanthropy were the *Manuel de la Théophilanthropie*, *Instruction Élémetaire* and *Année Religieuse*. The *Manuel* published in *Vendémiaire* Year V (September 1796), *Elementary Instruction* (also in Year V), *Ritual of the Theophilanthropists* in Year VI and *Religious Yearly* and *Morality of the Sages* in subsequent years. The *Manuel* was the standard for Theophilanthropy. Other writings by Chemin-Dupontès and the works of other authors associated with Theophilanthropy used the *Manuel* as a model.

The motivation behind Theophilanthropy as described by Chemin-Dupontès was the education of children in the principles of religion and morality. “Several leading fathers, persuaded that religious principles are the most solid base for a good education... joined together to search for a means to protect their children from the dangers of irreligion.”²⁰ While not directly critical of a particular religion or philosophy, Chemin-Dupontès defined his perspective against irreligion and “mysterious” doctrines, stating that children raised with “mysteries” forget

²⁰ Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilantropes*, 5.

true religion and morality.²¹ To guard against these two poles Theophilanthropes would “...inculcate their children in the principles of natural religion,” which Chemin-Dupontès conceived as the basis for all the systems of worship on earth.²²

The religion envisioned by Chemin-Dupontès was an outgrowth of his earlier forays into republican education. In the work *Rituel des Theophilanthropes* published in Year VI he stated. “Theophilanthropy is not a sect, but an instruction of universal morality, the theophilanthropic schools are truly primary schools.”²³ Theophilanthropy was principally a means of inculcating republican values, but more than this Chemin-Dupontès saw it as a means to educate all of humanity in a universal system.

We are not proposing to the people a new religion, or a new type of worship. Our religion is a universal religion, our worship dates back to the first ages of the world and we will see through the exposition of our doctrine that we are friends of all the different systems of worship on the earth. We respect their dogmas, we practice their morality.... Theophilanthropy, far from being a new sect, seeks to unite those that exist, in one sentiment, that of piety and charity. The pretext of religion is not to spill blood. This code will teach men, that they actually agree on the essential principles of religion and morality. And that those differences in their opinions and in their *usages* must not break the bonds of *fraternité* which the author of nature has established between all his children.²⁴

The assertion that there was a kernel of truth within all the systems of worship throughout the world made incorporating them in a unified system possible. Looking back, the comments made by Hunt et al., on Bernard and Picart’s universal understanding of religion are illuminating. “Incorporating all religions into one system with a single origin might be imaginable, but including all of them in one single regime of religious toleration was beyond anyone’s

²¹ Ibid, 6.

²² Ibid, 6.

²³ Jean Baptiste Chemin-Dupontès, *Rituel des adorateurs de Dieu et amis des hommes: contenant l'ordre des exercices de la théophilantropie* (À Paris: Chez l'éditeur, 1798), 6.

²⁴ Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilanthropes*, 8-10.

imagination.”²⁵ The limitless imagination of revolutionaries would conceive of such a system, called Theophilanthropy.

Chemin-Dupontès concept of religion was twofold, an interior sentiment and its outward expressions, uniting natural and civil religion in a Rousseauian schema. Theophilanthropy was not merely a connection uniting man and God, but a system providing theological grounding and institutional coherence to the abstraction of natural religion. Theophilanthropy represented the rejection of *culte* alone and a desire to establish a *religion*; a system encompassing institutions and dogmas with an associated system of (exterior) worship. The dogmas of this sentiment were the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. Chemin-Dupontès further adds that these dogmas did not need to be demonstrated because they “are of the verities of sentiment, that each finds in their heart.”²⁶ This “*profession de croire*” as he described it in the *Elementary Instruction* was based on the concept of the interior worship as an instinct, naturally directed towards God.²⁷

Chemin-Dupontès excluded Rousseau’s third dogma, that of intolerance. Such a principle may well have inspired revolutionaries during the Terror, but after Thermidor intolerance gave way to renewed hopes of reconciliation. Even as this reconciliation faded some like Chemin-Dupontès continued to see religion as a possible remedy for the afflictions of the Republic. Chemin-Dupontès focused on unity and discarded intolerance, which Rousseau borrowed from Roman civil religion. Theophilanthropy was the practice of Enlightenment ideas, but one which had passed through the prism of revolutionary events. Theophilanthropy was still

²⁵ Lynn Hunt et al, *The Book That Changed Europe*, 132.

²⁶ Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilantropes*, 12; Lyons, Martyn. *France Under the Directory*. p 111; Mathiez, *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, 93.

²⁷ Chemin-Dupontès, *Instruction élémentaire*, 18-19.

inspired by the ancient republics, but also the “modern” Republic born of the Revolution. This new Republic surpassed all others and it provided an exemplar for the future.

Chemin-Dupontès defined religion by the link between the human soul and God, but also on the basis of virtue. “Religion is a sacred connection between men and divinity.... Religion sustains all the social virtues and all the sentiments which are gentle and lenient.”²⁸ Elsewhere he added. “Never lose sight that religion is inseparable from wisdom, moderation and universal charity, or rather that it [religion] is wisdom, moderation and universal charity itself.”²⁹ The essence of religion for Chemin-Dupontès was geared towards a practical end with a focus on practice and public actions. In this vein he stated that it was not enough to simply have this opinion (belief in the existence of God and the immortality of the soul) and be “religious,” one had to be mindful of “*religion pratique*” in the completion of one’s duties.³⁰ This was a departure from the “*cultes*” which had no institutions except those of the Republic itself. Theophilanthropy would be a more complete effort, uniting the interior sentiment with institutions.

According to Chemin-Dupontès, failing to recognize God and the positive role of religion turned men into animals.³¹ “Man without religion regards as good or bad only that which favors or that which is contrary to his interest.”³² The notion of self-interest as a positive force was a powerful current of thought among some thinkers in the Enlightenment, but it is rejected here and replaced by sentiment and sociability. This was a common if sometimes neglected

²⁸ Jean Baptiste Chemin-Dupontès, *Année religieuse des Théophilantropes: recueil de discours et extraits sur la religion et la morale universelles* (Paris: Bureau des ouvrages de la Théophilantropie, 1797), 16.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 16.

³⁰ Chemin-Dupontès, *Instruction élémentaire*, 16.

³¹ Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilantropes*, 12.

³² Chemin-Dupontès, *Instruction élémentaire*, 16.

Enlightenment position: Rousseau, for example made a similar rejection of Bernard Mandeville.³³

After highlighting the positive role of religion and the negative effects of religion's absence Chemin-Dupontès finished this section with a utilitarian argument. "A system which renders men good, companionate, scrupulous in probity and their duties, can this be a system of error? Those who persuade themselves that they can be deceitful with impunity, ungrateful, cruel and that the only crime is not having escaped human justice, can a system so monstrous be true? Such is the system which denies the existence of God and the immortality of the soul."³⁴

Much like Varro and Machiavelli, the practical benefits of religion were presented as self-evident and on some level independent of questions of ultimate truth. If indeed the belief in God was in error yet religion provided innumerable benefits to society why not maintain it on that point alone?³⁵ The utilitarian argument seemed to be a sufficient basis for supporting a civil religion. However, there is no indication that Chemin-Dupontès was a non-believing supporter of civil religion. For him the existence of God was simply assumed.³⁶

Having defined religion and its relationship to divinity, Chemin-Dupontès sought to incorporate morality into his scheme. His purpose was to join together notions of religion and morality with divinity. In the eighteenth century, religion and morality were distinct objects of inquiry. This dichotomy is best represented by Holbach in his *La morale universelle*.³⁷ This

³³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract ; And, the First and Second Discourses*, 106-107.

³⁴ Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilantropes*, 13.

³⁵ This utilitarian perspective was reminiscent of Voltaire's famous statement about "inventing" God. Voltaire, *Épître à l'auteur du livre des trois imposteurs* (Paris: n.p., 1769).

³⁶ Ibid, 14; Chemin-Dupontès, *Instruction élémentaire*, 22-23.

³⁷ Holbach envisioned a universal morality separable and independent of religion. "We do not speak here of religious morality.... We claim only to propose in this work the principles of a human and social morality, suitable for the world we live in, of which reason and experience are sufficient guides towards happiness." Holbach further stated that morality was founded in the nature of man and "one is man before having a religion." Paul Henri Dietrich Holbach, *La morale universelle* (Amsterdam: M. M. Rey, 1776), x.

idea also showed up in the *Encyclopédie*. In the section on “Morality” Jaucourt made clear that it is a, “...matter of general rules independent of religious faith...”³⁸ Finally, Volney who was the most relevant source for Theophilanthropy, sought to develop a universal morality apart from religion.³⁹ Even though Chemin-Dupontès was speaking against the idea that morality was separable from religion he treated them as distinct. Religion signified a connection, “which carries us to belief in the existence of God who recompenses the good and who punishes the wicked. It attaches us more strongly to our duties... Whereas morality instructs us in our duties, religion carries us to their completion. Thus religion is the most solid base for morality...”⁴⁰ In this elaboration, religion and morality worked in conjunction and in this union both were more exalted and produced better results.

Chemin-Dupontès defined morality simply, “If their (Theophilanthropists’s) dogmas are simple their morality is no less so. Adore God, cherish your fellows, render yourself useful to the *patrie*.... All morality which agrees with this grand principle is good to the eyes of the theophilanthropists.”⁴¹ This highlights two of Chemin-Dupontès main points, religion and morality must be united and morality must have an individual as well as social function. The social function of religion is emphasized and is discussed in depth later in this chapter. The dictum to cherish your fellows is expressed in both a familial and national context. And the command to be useful to the *patrie* is social as well as military.

³⁸ Robert Wokler, “Projecting the Enlightenment,” in *The Enlightenment: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies*, ed. Ryan Patrick Hanley and Darrin M. McMahon (London: Routledge 2010), I: 274.

³⁹ Volney, *La loi naturelle*, 30.

⁴⁰ Chemin-Dupontès, *Instruction élémentaire*, 15 16.

⁴¹ Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilantropes*, 16-17.

Chemin-Dupontès also connected morality to Rousseau's concept of the "interior sentiment." Connecting morality to sentiment was necessary because, although infallible it could be misdirected and therefore required morality to ensure its positive effects.

To adore God, this is above all obedience to his law, which he has clearly explicated to us by this interior sentiment which carries us to good, and which turns us away from bad, and which is called conscience. How is one able to know his own voice? As conscience, always infallible when it is judging the morality of our actions, is able sometimes to be lost on the nature of good or bad in itself, Theophilanthropists have one sure regulation for not becoming mistaken in this regard. This regulation is the following maxim. Good is all that tends to conserve man or to perfect him. Bad is all that tends to destroy or deteriorate him (*Le bien est tout ce qui tend à conserver l'homme ou à le perfectionner. Le mal est tout ce qui tend à le détruire ou à le détériorer.*)⁴²

The final sentence of the citation comes from one of Volney's works *Loi naturelle, ou Catéchisme du citoyen français* published in 1793.⁴³ In another work Chemin-Dupontès defined morality as the "science of our duties" based on Volney's dictum, observing that this maxim alone encompasses all morality.⁴⁴ Volney's conception of a universal moral principle existed independent of religion which Volney associated religion with priestcraft in *The Ruins*. Chemin-Dupontès appropriated this autonomous conception of morality to argue against Volney. "We shall see that the religious morality of the Theophilanthropists is appropriate for all countries and all systems of worship, because in effect there is only one religion and one morality."⁴⁵ Chemin-Dupontès promoted a union of religion and morality which would unite individual and social duties directed towards God in a universal scheme applicable throughout the world.

⁴² Ibid, 18-19.

⁴³ Constantin François de Chassebœuf comte de Volney, *La loi naturelle, ou Catéchisme du citoyen français* (Paris: de Sallior, 1793), 30.

⁴⁴ Chemin-Dupontès, *Instruction élémentaire*, 11-12, 14.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 7, 19.

Social and Domestic

True to its name Theophilanthropy was the composition of a theology and philanthropy. Its philanthropy focused on the use of religion for social betterment, one of the major themes of the civil religion tradition. It was a particular interpretation of society which inspired Theophilanthropy's concept of philanthropy. "Society" in this dissertation is in reference to the source material not to social-scientific categories developed in the nineteenth century. "Society" and "sociability" were neologisms of the Enlightenment and undergoing a process of definition as Keith Michael Baker and others describes.⁴⁶

At times the word "society" was a general term for an association of people, but it also had another more complex meaning. An evolution of contract theory, this concept of society proposed that the origins of human associations lay in a natural impulse to be social. Humans as social beings were naturally inclined to create society, thus society was primarily based on sentiment (as a kind of instinct). Rousseau was not the only eighteenth-century thinkers to elucidate this concept, but for the purposes of the topic of Theophilanthropy he is preeminent. Here sociability was the outward manifestation in the public, political and social realm of the interior sentiment. In the work of Chemin-Dupontès the interest in society focused on three "sentiments of sociability" the nation, family and society.

Chemin-Dupontès translated the axiom "cherish your fellows" (derived from natural philosophy), into a command to render service to the nation.⁴⁷ He stated that improper education

⁴⁶ Keith Michael Baker, "Enlightenment and the institution of society: notes for a conceptual history," in *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, ed. Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 84-104; Graeme Garrard, *Rousseau's Counter-Enlightenment A Republican Critique of the Philosophes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 41-53; Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Daniel Gordon, *Citizens Without Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought, 1670-1789* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 43-85.

⁴⁷ For the epistemological argument Chemin-Dupontès used see: Chemin-Dupontès, *Instruction élémentaire*, 24-36.

created a perpetual childhood and a generation of dependent men not able to defend the nation.⁴⁸ Chemin-Dupontès commanded parents to teach virtue to their children so that they may be useful and render service to the *patrie*.⁴⁹ By doing this, a child would “find his own happiness and glory” and provide an example to the rest of society through a respect for the “*mœurs*,” laws, public officials and public systems of worship. The purpose of Theophilanthropic education was to make male children good sons, husbands, fathers and citizens.⁵⁰ Chemin-Dupontès translated natural philosophy into a revolutionary context. What emerged was a focus on masculinity with war being the ultimate expression of filial piety. The domestic focus of Theophilanthropy and its educational environment was directed at male children and fathers to create good citizens and soldiers.

In Theophilanthropy the family was the basic unit of civilization. For Chemin-Dupontès, the essence of the religion was the domestic space.⁵¹ The central pillar of this concept of the family was the male head of household.⁵² “The exercise of Theophilanthropic worship does not need ministers, but only lecturers and orators, which are momentary functions fulfilled by the *chefs de famille*.”⁵³ The *chef de famille* was the minister of worship in Theophilanthropy and so the institution of clergy (though not a clerical class) provided a focal point for Theophilanthropic worship. The *chef de famille* combined a paternal and hierarchical family dynamic which united religion and state through the lens of the domestic space. The command to cherish your fellows had a familial, social and patriotic component. Domestic virtues were focused on the family

⁴⁸ Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilantropes*, 24.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 25-26.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 27.

⁵¹ François Furet and Mona Ozouf, *A critical dictionary of the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 567; Martyn Lyons, *France Under the Directory*, 111; Mathiez, *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, 38.

⁵² Andrew Jainchill, *Reimagining Politics After the Terror*, 85; Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1988), 270.

⁵³ Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilantropes*, 8-10; *Année religieuse*, 7.

which Chemin-Dupontès listed as thrift, paternal love (raising children), conjugal love, filial love, fraternal love and the fulfillment of the duties between master and servant.⁵⁴ Wives had a “reciprocal,” yet subordinate role. In Theophilanthropy women were expected to accept husbands as the head of the household and as ministers of the religion.⁵⁵ The family unit and its domestic virtues were directed primarily at raising children.⁵⁶

There was a clear emulation of Roman practice with the *pater familias* as household priest.⁵⁷ Roman religion was an attractive option for Chemin-Dupontès because it provided clear patriarchal relationships within the family and established a union of state and religion. The role of *pater familias* was the *sacra familiae*, one who ministered the household gods and the worship of ancestors within the family. As the political and public face of the family the *pater familias* represented a union of religion and politics from its foundation to the rest of Roman society. In emulating this dynamic, Theophilanthropy firstly sought to define the family as the essential unit of the new order in France. Secondly this view of the family attempted to unite religion and politics not solely in the realm of high politics, but vertically, throughout French society. Just as it was in Rome, the family dynamic in Theophilanthropy was a means to link, through the family, religion and state in the pursuit of an ideal of citizenship.⁵⁸

Women and the Revolution

Chemin-Dupontès’s conception of domesticity was a combination of classical republicanism, part of a continued evolution of contract theory with sociability as its focus and the circumstances of post-Terror France. His aim was to bring stability in the first pillar of

⁵⁴ Chemin-Dupontès, *Instruction élémentaire*, 37.

⁵⁵ Mathiez, Albert. *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, 35, 37; Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilanthropes*, 29.

⁵⁶ Chemin-Dupontès, *Instruction élémentaire*, 39.

⁵⁷ Beth Severy, *Augustus and the Family at the Birth of the Roman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁵⁸ The *pater familias* was common trop in the Revolution, see Jennifer Ngairé Heuer, *The Family and the Nation: Gender and Citizenship in Revolutionary France, 1789-1830* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 98.

society (the family) and thereby extend stability throughout France. The centerpiece of this new order was the male citizen-soldier. But what did this new familial regime mean for women?⁵⁹

The historiography on women in the Revolution has tended to center around the question of whether the Revolution was an era of increasing freedom for women or inaugurated a new era of repression. Joan Landes argues that the Revolution diminished the role and status of women. They were now confined to the private domestic arena and notes that the very idea of there being a public and private sphere is a masculine construct.⁶⁰ Other historians have challenged this assertion such as Olwen Hufton, Suzanne Desan and Dominique Godineau.⁶¹

In terms of the transition to the Directory the work of Lynn Hunt is illuminating. Hunt's exploration of symbolic imagery suggests that images of Hercules as a symbol of the Republic increased during the Terror as revolutionaries sought to emphasize masculine attributes. During the Directory Marianne returned, but without the depictions of violence.⁶² Considering that the previous notions of sociability in the radical period were male dominated spaces such as the Convention, the Clubs and military, one might suggest that a domestic setting which valorized

⁵⁹ Women's history emerged in the seventies focusing on women and their hidden or obscured role in history. In the eighties and nineties this work evolved with the use of "gender" theory. "Gender" theory proposes that the values, attitudes and ideas that people associate with men and women are perceptions not necessarily connected to biological realities. These perceptions are often associated with agendas of control and exploitation. In practice "gender" theorists often write about the origins of these values and specific periods in time when notions held about men and women were in flux. Focusing on these periods purports to expose the fictive nature of such notions. See: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Joan Wallach, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 1-50.

⁶⁰ Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

⁶¹ Olwen Hufton states that the Old Régime was not more amenable to women and any exceptions were just that. She also argues against the idea that women were a source of Counter-Revolution, insisting that such attitudes were a product of the nineteenth century. Suzanne Desan emphasizes the Revolution as a period of liberation using divorce proceedings. Dominique Godineau states that even though the historiography focused on the male story, women were always there and integral to the Revolution. Olwen Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Dominique Godineau, *The women of Paris and their French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 97.

⁶² Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 87-119.

female contributions to the republic was a part of this transition. There were prominent female members of the intellectual elite such as De Staël. During the Directory there was also a return to the Salon culture of the pre-revolution which was facilitated by women.⁶³ An interesting corollary to this was the 1799 piece, *Intervention of the Sabine Women* by Jacques-Louis David. The painting depicts women standing between Roman husbands and Sabine fathers. Women representing families are restoring the domestic fabric of France and preventing civil war.

In reference to this historiography, Theophilanthropy was part of a larger trend in France to informally restrict and codify relationships between men and women in marriage and family life. Theophilanthropy did not view religion as a private matter and solely a women's concern. Religion in the home was both a pursuit of men and women though in different roles and in an unequal relationship. Theophilanthropy did view women's place as in the home but did not make specific references to a particularly female notion of religiosity. Nor do the sources related to Theophilanthropy indicate a sense that women were more susceptible to Counter-Revolution.

Where does Theophilanthropy's notion of domesticity originate? Certainly, traditional French assumptions about the role of women were one source. Additionally the military situation in France (France being at war with the rest of Europe) imbued the intellectual and cultural environment with a military focus that favored masculinity and martial virtues traditionally associated with men. This new assertion of domesticity was in contrast to the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary periods. Lynn Hunt describes the pre-revolutionary period as a time when art displayed an undercurrent of hostility to paternal authority.⁶⁴

There was also an opposing vision established by Jacques-Louis David who used fathers to symbolize not a corrupt monarchy, but the fatherland. This is seen in the *Oath of the Horatii*.

⁶³ Goodman, *The Republic of Letters*, 90-135.

⁶⁴ Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 37.

Describing David's motivations Joan Landes suggests that the painting "[C]onflates the representation of family or paternal authority with that of the state." David represented the domestic and political space as one.⁶⁵ However, if the Revolution was a patricide then the focus on fathers and domesticity in the Directory was the restoration of the paternal bond. The conflicts between the *patrie* and the paternal authority of the king were resolved in the Terror and fathers once again could be a symbol of the Republic. Jennifer Heuer, in *The Family and the Nation* states that the Terror emphasized the nation above all else while the later Revolution returned to pre-revolutionary norms and focused on the centrality of the family.⁶⁶ She writes that the latter Revolution with its focus on the *pater familais* indicated a reversal where the family takes primacy away from the nation. In reality this use of Roman tradition emphasized the equality of family and nation as indicated by Chemin-Dupontès *chef de famille*. Like David, Chemin-Dupontès saw the family and the nation as one.

The intellectual source material for Chemin-Dupontès was also critically important. The inspiration for his concept of domesticity came from patriarchal civilizations spanning the world from Rome, India and China. These civilizations provided support for an existing understanding of a male dominated domestic setting. These ancient civilizations viewed women as part of a domestic regime dominated by the male head of household. In particular "classical republicanism" provided a model from ancient Greece and Rome with a deeply imbedded patriarchal structure. Any emulation of this society would influence revolutionaries to conceive

⁶⁵ Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 154.

⁶⁶ Jennifer Heuer, *The Family and the Nation*, 13, 192.

of a proper republican system as being primarily masculine. Rousseau was a key factor in this as well as his ideas reinforced a male centered universe.⁶⁷

Another important aspect of Theophilanthropy's domestic focus was the relationship between "nature" and the domestic space as the locus of virtue in the Republic. Theophilanthropy participated in a new understanding of the relationship between natural religion and domesticity. In this sense the domestic setting was not artificial, but the first representation of society (created by the natural impulse of sociability) and thus "natural." "This worship (Theophilanthropy) returns to the birth of the world, as it was (first) professed by sages in the silence of domestic foyers."⁶⁸ Chemin-Dupontès here returned to the concept that Theophilanthropy was the first religion of the earth, a true universal religion, but included the family as the foundation of this universal religion. "It is he (God) who have engraved in the heart of the first humans, in ours, in those of all the habitants of the earth, this religion which consists in adoring God and in cherishing your fellows, that we express by one word alone, that of Theophilanthropy. Thus our religion is that of the first *parents* (emphasis mine), it is yours, it is ours, it is a universal religion."⁶⁹ In this new formulation, the universal religion of nature was not encountered by wondering in the forest (*Émile*), but in the home. In this interpretation the domestic space was a conjunction point in the Revolution's "natural republicanism."⁷⁰

Public Theophilanthropy

The focus on domesticity in Theophilanthropy had a public purpose and represented a transitional view of virtue in the Revolution that departed from previous attitudes of the radical

⁶⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rousseau on Women, Love, and Family*, ed. Christopher Kelly and Eve Grace (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Press, 2009), xiv.

⁶⁸ Chemin-Dupontès, *Année religieuse*, 6.

⁶⁹ Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilantropes*, 57.

⁷⁰ Edelstein's word.

period. During the radical era there were many proposals for the creation of republican culture, but most accepted that virtue was something generated in public acts of citizenship whether in the popular societies, festivals, sectional politics or duties related to the Convention. In Theophilanthropy there is an inversion of this principle. Virtue was created in the domestic space and then was made manifested in the public. The emphasis on the necessity of proper education for an individual to be a fully capable citizen implied that virtue must be carefully cultivated in a controlled environment before it emerged onto the public stage. There was no dichotomy between private and public. Virtue in its domestic formation and in its final consummation in public duties shared the same principles. In Theophilanthropy the domestic and public spaces were inextricably linked in the generation of virtue.

The historian James Livesey states that Theophilanthropy was “social and domestic, rather than political and public.”⁷¹ In truth it was both though domesticity defined Theophilanthropy to such an extent that Chemin-Dupontès envisioned the founding of the religion within family units. “Hardly had the Manual been published than respectable persons by their *mœurs* and enlightenment, saw in the publicity of the worship an easy means to spread its instruction and morality at the same time. These powerful considerations determined the families of the Theophilanthropists to unite to publically exercise their worship.”⁷² For Chemin-Dupontès the domestic and the public worked in concert, but the domestic arena was the starting point of public expressions of worship. “Each *chef de famille* being minister of their worship, it is easy for them to exercise it in their own families. If however, to give to society a useful example to support religion and morality, they celebrate their festivals in public edifices, they

⁷¹ James Livesey, *Making Democracy in the French Revolution*, 206-7.

⁷² Chemin-Dupontès, *Année religieuse*, 6.

must observe these practices with the same character of simplicity.”⁷³ The nature of public worship was rooted in the domestic setting, but this is not to say that it conceived as wholly private matter. Public worship in Theophilanthropy was utilitarian and defined as necessary for society.

The utility of public worship was an integral component of Theophilanthropy. What follows is a selection from the question and answer format of the book, *Elementary Instruction*.

Must we render to God an exterior worship? Yes, for our utility and for others. Why is the profession of a worship useful to us? Because worship, in uniting us from time to time with our brothers either in public or in our own families to adore God and encourage good, we recall the sentiments of respect for the divinity, beneficence for our fellows, the practice of our duties, and strengthen in our soul the love of virtue and horror of vice.... Why is worship useful to others? Because in professing a worship, we give to our neighbors, to our friends, to our fellow citizens, a useful example, which allows religion and morality (without which there is no happiness for individuals or society) to take hold among them.⁷⁴

The focus on the family was geared towards a public purpose. Theophilanthropy directed its institutions of religion, worship services and the education of children toward a social end and ultimately domestic virtues led to social, public and patriotic virtues. In respect to a domestic/public relationship Theophilanthropy did not represent a separation of private and public associated with an advancing bourgeoisie in a Marxian conception. Rather, it represented classical republican assumptions about the role of the domestic space in creating public virtue.

Theophilanthropy owes more to Rome than to an advancing bourgeoisie.

The concept of social virtues was critically important for Chemin-Dupontès. He based his concept of social virtue primarily on justice which he defined by the French colloquial phrase, a version of the Golden Rule, “Do not do to others what we would not want done to us (*A*

⁷³ Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilantropes*, 37, 47.

⁷⁴ Chemin-Dupontès, *Instruction élémentaire*, 21.

ne pas faire à autrui, ce que nous ne voudrions pas qu'on nous fit).⁷⁵ His concept of justice was inextricably linked to social betterment (philanthropy). His interest in what today might be called “social justice” was confined to relief of the poor, simplicity of *mœurs* (being frugal and moderate) and patriotism.⁷⁶ Essential to these values was a duty to provide a public example, to be a “...virtuous example, making happy individuals, families and societies”.⁷⁷ For Chemin-Dupontès the transition from domestic to social virtue was a logical progression. This was not a “domestication” which sought to confine religion and separate it from politics, but an effort to harness religion for a social purpose, projecting it from the home out into the world.

And this purpose, defined by the themes of public utility, social betterment and a union of religion and politics, marks Theophilanthropy as a crucial participant in the civil religion tradition. More than this, Theophilanthropy was the first modern civil religion because it was the first attempt to realize the full implications of the reversal in the divine/human relationship wrought by the Enlightenment, which held that religion was a human creation.

Theophilanthropy was the willful creation of a religion for social betterment. As such it was a precursor to more widespread developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The social virtues with an emphasis on family and society would become the focus for the continued elaboration of Theophilanthropy. This constituted a practical application of the principles of the *Interpretatio Europa*. The Enlightenment perspective on religion conceived of a universal religion based on nature in theory. Theophilanthropy sought to establish a world system of religious worship in practice. “We are called Theophilanthropists for those who follow our worship and the followers of all the systems of worship (around the world) which

⁷⁵ Ibid, 41, 42.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 42-45.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 45.

carry men to the adoration of divinity and to the love of their neighbors. Such is the way of this denomination, which by no means characterizes a sect and is appropriate for all religious men regardless of their system of worship.”⁷⁸ This practical universalism was possible because the ancient religion of humanity, as Chemin-Dupontès described Theophilanthropy, was based on the two pillars of primordial monotheism and natural religion.⁷⁹ Because all religions of the world recognized “a good and just God” this made them singular in purpose.⁸⁰ Likewise Chemin-Dupontès viewed all the religions of the world as “natural.” “Open the most ancient books known, seek therein the religion which was the worship of the first humans.... You will see that their religion was called natural Religion, because it had the same author as nature (God).”⁸¹ These two pillars allowed the incorporation of different religious and ethical traditions from around the world into a single and universal Theophilanthropic system of worship.

“Prophetic” Warnings

In another link between classical republicanism and natural religion, Theophilanthropy (like Rousseau’s civil religion) also developed an eschatology based on a narrative of purity, followed by corruption and ending in redemption (Theophilanthropy itself being part of the redemptive project). Chemin-Dupontès believed that Theophilanthropy was a return to the original religion of the earth. This once pure religion had fallen into corruption and become rife with superstition and superfluous ceremony. Having recovered this ancient religion Chemin-Dupontès warned against its ornamentation with ceremonies.⁸² He stated that if one were to introduce such ornamentation, Theophilanthropy would be “denatured” and the people would

⁷⁸ Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilantropes*, 48; *Année religieuse*, 8.

⁷⁹ Primordial monotheism is the assumption that all religions were originally monotheistic and over time acquired degrees of “improper” worship such as idolatry and polytheism. Retuning religion to its roots would them equal and bring them all back to the worship of a single omnipotent God.

⁸⁰ Chemin-Dupontès, *Instruction élémentaire*, 22.

⁸¹ Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilantropes*, 56, 57.

⁸² *Ibid*, 50-51.

become more attached to ceremonies than to principles. Consequently the people would fall into superstition.⁸³ This reformist impulse contained a powerful iconoclastic element aimed at honoring divinity.

Admit no sculpture, painting, engraving which is intended to represent either the Divinity, his attributes, human virtues or any other purely intellectual objects, which is able to be understood by allegories.... Admit no representations of any personage, because even the most virtuous men have their weaknesses and the image of any mortal is not dignified to be placed in the temple of the Divinity.⁸⁴

This call to reject images is a recurring theme in the annals of religious reform. It bears a strikingly familiar tone to Jewish and Christian episodes of iconoclasm and to Islamic principles forbidding idolatry and the creation of any likenesses of God or “holy” persons. It also draws inspiration from Enlightenment efforts at reform which hoped to elevate and free the divine from “improper” worship.

Finally Chemin-Dupontès warns against innovations in the basic principles of Theophilanthropy or in the manner of its public expressions (public festivals, lectures, discourses, and the like).⁸⁵ Imbedded in this admonition is perhaps a fatalistic sense that the original religion of humanity had been corrupted once and could fall into superstition again. This was not necessarily eschatological, where a cycle of renewal and corruption repeated (as in the thought of Machiavelli). Chemin-Dupontès’s clear warnings about superstition and idolatry gave voice to the specter of repetition. The assumption here was that using reason one could escape the cycles of history and establish a final regeneration. It was Chemin-Dupontès’s hope that the religion of the new age would not fall into corruption, but remain pure and thus aid in humanity’s enlightened future.

⁸³ Ibid, 52.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 53.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 53-55.

“World Religions”

The principle documents in Chemin-Dupontès practical development of a universal worship was his work *Année religieuse*, a three volume set and *Morale des Sages*.⁸⁶ These documents were a collection of discourses and extracts to be read during the course of the year, either in public temples or in homes. The importance of these documents is indicated in the *Manuel*, where Chemin-Dupontès attests that when the *Année religieuse* was completed adherents would have a complete system that even “the simplest villager” could administer.⁸⁷ These two documents were critical in the innovation and legacy of Theophilanthropy. They established patterns which would become the basis for a “modern” understanding of “world religion.” According to Chemin-Dupontès, the history of religion was defined by a series of paragons forming a lineage of founder figures each elucidating a set of universal ideas. These universal truths were the varied manifestation of a universal human experience and at the core of each religion was a single truth common to all.

This concept of world religion was based on a twofold premise, that Theophilanthropy was suitable for all systems of worship for the incorporation of other religions into its broad system of belief. “Theophilanthropists are not disciples of one man, but profit from the precepts of wisdom from writers of all nations and times.”⁸⁸ In *Morale des Sages*, the most comprehensive document, Chemin-Dupontès associated the various regional and national manifestations of this universal religion with great personages or “sages.” From antiquity he mentioned Pythagoras, Socrates, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca and Plutarch. From the Abrahamic

⁸⁶ Jean Baptiste Chemin-Dupontès, *Morale des sages de tous les pays et de tous le siècles; ou, Collection épurée des moralistes anciens et modernes* (Paris: Chez l'éditeur, 1798).

⁸⁷ Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilantropes*, 56.

⁸⁸ Chemin-Dupontès, *Année religieuse*, 9; *Manuel des Théophilantropes*, 55.

religions he mentioned Hebrew sages, the sage of Judea (Jesus)⁸⁹ and selections from the Koran.⁹⁰ This was followed by Eastern traditions; Zoroastrianism, a sage from India and Confucius. Finally were the moderns and here Chemin-Dupontès mentions primarily Enlightenment figures from Europe and America; Fenelon, William Penn, Franklin, Rousseau and Voltaire. Like other efforts within the civil religion tradition, Theophilanthropy relied heavily on the concept of the founder. Chemin-Dupontès conceived the theoretical universal/world religion through the conceptual tools of reason and nature, but its practical expression was centered on the founder as an exemplar of a national or confessional system.

Some of the more interesting sections in Chemin-Dupontès's work concern Eastern traditions from China and India. These sections highlight an important contributor to work on what historians call "Orientalism." In addition, taken as a whole these documents comprise an early venture into constructing a global conception of civilization using religion. The sections on Confucius were taken verbatim from the work *De la philosophie des chinois et pensées morales de Confucius* published by Pierre-Charles Lévesque in 1782.⁹¹ It was part of a larger series titled *Collection des Moralistes Ancients* that Lévesque helped compile with Jacques André Naigeon.⁹² Both writers were active in the *Encyclopédie* movement and were confidants of Diderot.⁹³ The material on India comes directly from the work *The Oeconomy of human life: translated from an*

⁸⁹ The reader only knows that he means Jesus by a single footnote, which seems to indicate a high level of cautiousness regarding mentioning Jesus and by extension Christianity.

⁹⁰For other important references to Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the *Année religieuse* see: Chemin-Dupontès, *Année religieuse*, 24, 34, 41-43.

⁹¹ Pierre Charles Levesque, *De la philosophie des chinois & pensées morales de Confucius* (Didot L'ainé, 1782). It was a Latin translation originating with Jesuit missionaries. As such it reinforced the concept of primordial monotheism. Lionel Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions & Universal Civilization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 119.

⁹² An earlier effort by Naigeon prefigured this work: Jacques André Naigeon, *Encyclopédie méthodique* (A Paris: Panckoucke, 1791); Jacques André Naigeon and Pierre-Charles Lévesque, *Collection Des Moralistes Anciens: Dédiée Au Roi* (Didot L'ainé, 1782).

⁹³Vladimir Somov, "Pierre-Charles Levesque, protégé de Diderot et historien de la Russie," *Cahiers du monde russe* 42 n. 2-3 (2002): 275-294; Anthony Pagden, *The Enlightenment and Why It Still Matters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 194.

Indian manuscript, written by an ancient Bramin by Robert Dodsley published in 1751.⁹⁴ The French edition *L'Elixir De La Morale Indienne, Ou Oeconomie De La Vie Humaine; Compose par un ancien Bramine* was published in 1760.⁹⁵ As John Bray notes there is evidence that *The Oeconomy* was in fact written by Dodsley himself.⁹⁶

The Orient and “Orientalism”

Chemin-Dupontès use of “Eastern” texts reproduced the concerns of Theophilanthropy on personal, family, social and economic morality.⁹⁷ The *Année religieuse* and *Morale des Sages* were extensive and therefore one can gather a clearer picture of the relationship between Theophilanthropy and women. On personal morality Chemin-Dupontès selected portions from these documents centered on restricting one’s passions and mastery over self.⁹⁸ Confucian principles, transposed into Theophilanthropy defined this self-control as a masculine attribute. “The wise man, always mindful to conquer himself, readies and adapts himself to the *mœurs* and genius of others, but always a master of himself, he does not leave himself to softness or depravity by the habits and the examples of dependent and effeminate men.”⁹⁹ The “Sage of India” warns against seduction by “*femmes sans mœurs*” and counsels that intense desire and

⁹⁴ Robert Dodsley, *The Oeconomy of human life: translated from an Indian manuscript, written by an ancient Bramin* (London: M. Cooper, 1751).

⁹⁵ Robert Dodsley, *L'Elixir De La Morale Indienne, Ou Oeconomie De La Vie Humaine; Compose par un ancien Bramine*, trans. Sieur Dhaulon (Paris: Ganeau, 1760).

⁹⁶ John Bray, “The Oeconomy of Human Life: An Ancient Bramin In Eighteenth-Century Tibet,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 19 (2009): 439.

⁹⁷ The appropriation of Eastern texts proceeded under the assumption that these religions were monotheistic (premised by the concept of primordial monotheism which was integral to Deism and theistic natural religion). Some examples of this in the eighteenth-century were: Voltaire, *Fragmens sur l'Inde, sur le général Lalli, sur le procès du comte de Morangiés, et sur plusieurs autres sujets* (A Londres: François Grasset et Comp, 1774); Mariyadas Pillai, *Bagavadam; ou, Doctrine divine; ouvrage indien, canonique, sur l'Etre Suprême, les dieux, les géans, les hommes, les diverses parties de l'univers*, ed. Foucher d'Obsonville, trans. Méridas Poullé (Paris: La veuve Tilliard & fills, 1788).

⁹⁸ Chemin-Dupontès, *Année religieuse*, 49, 75.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 54.

blind passion lead to destruction.¹⁰⁰ Self-control was primarily a male pursuit and existed in opposition to unrestrained desire which Chemin-Dupontès, through the lens of the East, associated with women. The translation of these Eastern virtues into Theophilanthropy was made easier in that both relied on a male centered conception of virtue and family.

The statements on personal morality were translated into domestic virtues through the male head of household using references to Chinese and Roman civilization.¹⁰¹ Quoting from the section entitled “various Chinese authors,” Chemin-Dupontès emphasized that “The duty of the father is to correct the faults of his children; the penchant of the mother is to excuse them. The father must correct, but without too much rigor, the mother must sympathize with their failings, but not out of too much complacency.”¹⁰² The depiction of women as naturally more empathetic aided in the representation of the family as a division of labor with the father taking a leadership role. There was guidance to respect women as long as they maintained this status quo. In the same section on Chinese philosophy, Chemin-Dupontès offers the dictum that to neglect the education of your daughters is to bring shame on your family.¹⁰³ Beyond respect for women and the education of daughters, “submission and obedience” were the ideal for women as the “sage of India” stated, “Consider the delicateness of her sex, the fragility of her body, and do not be too severe with her failings, but remember your own imperfections.”¹⁰⁴ The language directed at children is reproduced here in reference to wives indicating a basic concept of inequality within the family and an infantilization of women.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 110.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 50.

¹⁰² Ibid, 96.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 97.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 115.

The next theme of critical importance was economic virtues. Chemin-Dupontès highlighted the dangers of economic inequality to both individuals and society. His hopes to ameliorate this injustice were central to Theophilanthropy. As with the domestic virtues these economic virtues were first established within the individual and then manifested outwardly. The dictates of personal morality taken from Chinese philosophy proposed that those in the pursuit of virtue would seek knowledge instead of riches and renounce the pursuit of pleasure.¹⁰⁵ “Do not ask if these honors are grand, if the profit is considerable, but if the thing is just.”¹⁰⁶ And in another quote from India, individuals are counseled to be moderate in business gains and to “listen to the voice of your conscience.”¹⁰⁷ The onus of this economic virtue was on the individual and expressed through “universal love.”¹⁰⁸ This notion of philanthropy and charity was tied to individual morality and not to state intervention.¹⁰⁹

The consequence of this love in the economic realm was as follows, “Love bares a distributive justice which renders to each that which he is due....”¹¹⁰ For Chemin-Dupontès when love had exerted its influence upon the economic relations of humanity then economic justice will have succeeded. “When this piety has permanently established its empire in all hearts, the entire universe will be one family.”¹¹¹ This concept of social justice, inspired by universal love, spoke to the same concerns over increasing inequality during the Directory as the Conspiracy of Equals. Marxists historiography classifies individual based-philanthropy as bourgeois.¹¹² If one interprets the Conspiracy of Equals as proto-socialist then the scholarship is

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 91, 94.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 95.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 75.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 51.

¹⁰⁹ Such as the Maximum enacted by Robespierre during the radical period of the Revolution.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 52.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 52, 53.

¹¹² Samuel Ronsin, “*Recherche sur la théophilanthropie*,” 102.

left debating the same old classical interpretation. However, both groups saw inequality as a central concern although they offered vastly different solutions. This indicates a clear dissatisfaction across the political spectrum with the era of the Directory and with the promise of the Revolution. This dissatisfaction called into question the legitimacy of the existing institutions and paved the way for dictatorship.

Chemin-Dupontès's use of Eastern religion and philosophy was based on an assumption that the East and West were equal. The moral codes of China and India were not curiosities, but a curriculum designed to educate French youth. This brings to mind Edward Said's concept of "Orientalism." Said describes the ways in which Westerners define the West against an imagined concept of the East.¹¹³ This attitude served to critique the West and rationalize imperial control over the East. Some of the oft cited examples are portrayals of the East as a place of mystical, hidden knowledge in opposition to a rational West (cold and sterile if being used pejoratively). Other common portrayals represent the East as a place of indulgence where one was lost to temptation, the harem being the principal example. Finally is the idea of a static East which is eternal and unchanging. How does this analysis relate to Theophilanthropy?

There is a connection in regard to women being a source of corruption, but there is more nuance than simple binaries. In the work of Chemin-Dupontès the East is not a place of excess as in traditional orientalist imagery, but representative of a philosophy of self-control. This vision of the East was not replete with harems and riches, but abstinence, domesticity and economic probity. It is true that in Theophilanthropy the East was representative of an eternal unchanging essence, but this understanding was also associated with the West because this essence was universal. The treatment of the East as an equal participant in a concept world

¹¹³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York : Vintage Books, 2003), 1-28.

religion competed with other discourses in the nineteenth century which either associated the East with a superior knowledge (Theosophy) or as a backward civilization (colonialism). The European attitudes towards the East were more nuanced than orientalism supposes.

This point is supported by Dan Edelstein's comments in *The Enlightenment: A genealogy*. Edelstein notes how traditions of universal history began to view history as the progression of knowledge from East to West with the East as a foundation point. This gave the East equality with other moments of foundation such as Athens and Rome. "But substituting India for Egypt as the 'cradle of pagan superstition, the Science, and the Arts' opened up a dizzying new historical possibility: what if these Indian Ancients had in fact been more modern than we are today?"¹¹⁴ There were two competing visions of the East in the Enlightenment; one which held that the East was inferior and another which believed that all these great civilizations were equal. Theophilanthropy is an example of latter where the sages of China and India have equality with the ancient and modern sages of Europe. There was a great deal more equality between East and West in philosophy and technology in the eighteenth century than is supposed. Kenneth Pomeranz argues that the "Great Divergence," which produced the age of colonization was a recent development.¹¹⁵

The interest of Chemin-Dupontès in India, China and other civilizations was a critical evolution in the concept of universal/world religion inherited from the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment interpretation of religion made differences of worship understandable, the utilitarian argument in civil religion made them beneficial, but only within their regional contexts. This contrasted with previously held viewpoints that the multiplicity in religion was an

¹¹⁴ Dan Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2010), 75.

¹¹⁵ Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

unfortunate circumstance. The existence of so many religions and associated systems of worship was an insurmountable problem and necessitated tolerance. Rousseau's own position gives voice to a yearning to return to the single primordial religion of the past. "If one would only listen to that which God said in the heart of man, there would have been only one religion on the earth."¹¹⁶ The eschatology of natural religion viewed multiplicity as a form of degeneration. The original religion of the world had been unified, but over time it became divided. A return to this religion would therefore be ideal and tolerance is advocated only because such a return is impossible.

The degeneration of religion was a natural outgrowth of human diversity, but also could be the work of manipulative priests. While Rousseau lamented the corruption of religion he also characterized them as "salutary institutions" suited to a particular time and place.¹¹⁷ Chemin-Dupontès partook of the eschatology of natural religion as well, referring to Theophilanthropy as original religion of the world. But there was also a shift in thinking about the multiplicity of different religions. Chemin-Dupontès was far more optimistic about the diversity of religions in the world perhaps because he believed Theophilanthropy was a return to the primordial religion of humanity. Thus Theophilanthropy, being the product of reason could transcend the religions of the world and escape the perpetual cycles of corruption.

In Theophilanthropy the manifestations of this single religion in different historical and regional contexts became something to honor, draw inspiration from and not an unfortunate circumstance of corruption. Based in part on the various encyclopedic efforts of the Enlightenment era, Theophilanthropy converted the study of comparative religions into an understanding of world religion. In this way the various traditions and different systems of

¹¹⁶ Rousseau, *Émile*, 444.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 463.

worship from around the world became building blocks in a conception of world religion/civilization and fostered the idea that the diversity of religion and diversity in general ought to be celebrated. This concept of world religion, not as a single religion spanning the earth (though this remains embedded in the concept), but a single human expression with varied manifestations is critical in the development of emerging notions of “pluralism” and “globalization.” Thus one of the visible legacies of the *Interpretatio Europa* comes into focus.

CHAPTER 6

SECULARIZATION

In 1907 Albert Mathiez wrote an article titled “L’Exercice du culte sous la première séparation 1795-1802” detailing the background for the recently passed *Laïcité* (1905).¹ Mathiez’s assumption was that *Laïcité* was merely the “second separation” and the first effort at separation church and state, restricting public worship and bringing religion more closely under the surveillance of the state was during the Directory in 1795. If one accepts the assumptions that *Laïcité* was a repetition of efforts in the first French Revolution and that *Laïcité* instituted secularization then what is the first separation, but a proto or early form of secularization?

The *Interpretatio Europa* defined all that was outside nature as artificial and thus under the dominion of human endeavor. The perceived malleability of religion spurred a plethora of revolutionary experiments. Each experiment attempted to remove religion as a source of conflict. Some wanted to establish a civil religion as a means to bind French citizens together, while others sought to remove religion from public and political life to remedy the threat of persistent conflict. While theoretically possible in the Enlightenment’s interpretation of religion, the separation of religion and politics and the removal of religion from public life were only realized through the experimental process of the French Revolution.²

The various experiments on religion in the Revolution and their subsequent failures made secularization a viable option. The removal of religion from political affairs and the prohibition of public worship did not proceed through some grand historical process, but as the direct result

¹ Albert Mathiez, “L’Exercice du culte sous la première séparation 1795-1802,” *Extrait de la Revue Politique and Parlementaire* 51 (1907): 79-106.

² The separation of Church and state in the US Constitution, the “wall of separation” comes from a letter of Jefferson which was deemed “constitutional” after the fact (1878, Reynolds v. United States). France represents the first case of a true separation of Church and state, instituted in 1795.

of willful experimentation. In practice this experiment was ultimately a legislative initiative, executed by the state. The state used a variety of tools at its disposal to enact secularization including violence, coercion, “legal” murder and state terror. Secularization was in its origins in the French Revolution and today an intellectual and political experiment in a new way of living based on the intellectual assumptions of the Enlightenment interpretation of religion and enacted into law using state power.

The Elements of Secularization

Several key elements contributed to the emergence of secularization during the Directory. First was the intellectual background of the Enlightenment interpretation of religion embodied in Rousseau which proposed that religion was under the dominion of the state. Second was the search for a solution to persistent religious conflict. Conflict continued to afflict the Republic even after the Terror and resulted in a loss of hope for reform. The solution, for some, was the literal removal of religion. Third was the debate surrounding “liberty of worship” or *La Liberté des Cultes*. This debate was a concern throughout the Revolution and was exemplified by Article 10 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, specifying that no one be disturbed for their religious opinion unless they threaten public order. In the Directory revolutionaries imbedded the proscription of public worship within the discourse of liberty of worship. Fourth was the mutation of de-Christianization from an attack against one religion into a rejection of all religion. Legislators incorporated fundamental aspects of de-Christianization, as enunciated by Fouché, into the secular laws instituted during Thermidor and the Directory. And finally was the creation of the *Police des cultes* as a mechanism of enforcement for the new secular laws. The *Police des cultes* were agents empowered by the state for surveillance and enforcement of the provisions regarding religion.

The Enlightenment's division of religion into interior essence and exterior artifice provided the basis for a secular worldview to emerge. Rousseau, channeling the civil religion tradition, insisted on the usefulness of religion, but the secular perspective while accepting the assumption of religion as artifice ejected the utilitarian argument. The intellectual evidence for this was in the works of Volney, who viewed the outer forms of religion as priestcraft and imposture.³ In *The Ruins* he offered a negative appraisal of all religion as the illusory invention of priests and advocated for the separation of the religion and state.⁴

This work continued with Thomas Paine who, while residing in Paris, authored *Age of Reason* in 1794.⁵ Its scathing attack against Christianity echoed the work of Volney. A further salvo in the spirit of Volney was *Origine de tous les cultes, ou Religion universelle* by Charles-François Dupuis published in 1794.⁶ Dupuis held that all religion was rooted in ignorance. The universal religion of nature was nothing more than superstitious speculations on the zodiac.⁷ In the *Encyclopédie* Jaucourt described the dichotomy between "true" religion and the empty ceremonies instituted by priests. Volney and Dupuis abandoned this perspective in favor of a view which interpreted all religion as priestcraft.⁸ Instead of seeking to harness the edifice of religion for some social or political good secularists saw its removal as the ideal solution. This view deprived religion of any special claim over society or politics. Along with the assertion

³ Joscelyn Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, 27-48.

⁴ François de Chassebœuf comte de Volney, *Les Ruines: ou, méditation sur les révolutions des empires* (Paris: Desenne, Volland, Plassan, 1791), 320-330.

⁵ Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason: Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* (1795; reprint, New York: Willey Book Co, 1940); Thomas Paine, *A Discourse Delivered by Thomas Paine, at the Society of the Theophilanthropists, at Paris, 1798* (London: Thomas Clio Rickman, 1798).

⁶ Charles-François Dupuis, *Origine de tous les cultes, ou, Religion universelle* (Paris: Chez H. Agasse, 1794); Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 32-37.

⁷ Dupuis' work was later taken up and supported by Tracy. Charles Hunter Van Duzer, *Contribution of the Ideologues to French Revolutionary Thought* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1935), 70.

⁸ *Encyclopédie*, 4: 550.

that morality was separate from religion, secular policy saw the social or public function of religion as no longer necessary.

The desire to prevent religion from being a source of conflict inspired various efforts at reforming religion in France such as the Constitutional Church and the revolutionary “Cults.” The repeated failures of these policies resulted in a new solution enacted by the Thermidorian Convention, the literal removal of religion. Instead of viewing religion as a solution to conflict this new view began to associate religion itself with conflict. Secularization in part emerged as a solution to the religious discord which had afflicted the Revolution. Revolutionaries defined laws restricting religion as a proper response to fanaticism. The policy of secularization was instituted as a security issue.

The debate over liberty of worship was present throughout the Revolution, but in the Directory it became associated with a series of laws regulating and restricting worship. Revolutionaries justified the proscription and surveillance of public worship because such activities could be used by the enemies of the Revolution to incite conflict. Mathiez’s article on the “first separation” details these new laws.⁹ The focus of these laws was refractory priests, separating the Constitutional Church from the government and finally the restriction of public worship. Mathiez stated that the first separation was defined by events unlike *Laïcité* which was conducted in an era of domestic peace.¹⁰ The secularization of 1795 was a long chain beginning with the Civil Constitution, but two laws established in 1795 are central; 3 *Ventôse* Year III and 7 *Vendémiaire* Year IV.

There were precedents to revolutionary secularization during the episodes of de-Christianization. There is a direct link between the edict of Fouché and the language of the laws

⁹ Mathiez, “L’Exercice du culte sous la première séparation,” 85.

¹⁰ The émigré landing at Quiberon in *Thermidor* Year III (July 1795) was particularly important.

of 3 *Ventôse* and 7 *Vendémiaire*. In this way the de-Christianization of Year II was a prelude to the secular policies of the later Revolution. The connections between de-Christianization and secularization in the historiography argues over the significance of the de-Christianization in Year II, but this obscures the fact that the fullest expression of secularization did not happen during the radical period, but during the Directory. The failure of the Civil Constitution, de-Christianization and Robespierre's grotesque worship had the effect of maligning religion generally. Catholicism and revolutionary religion had both been discredited in the eyes of *conventionnelles* who attempted to replace the anarchic, sporadic and spontaneous de-Christianization of the radical era with a systematic de-Christianization enshrined in law.

The creation of the Police of Worship on 3 *Ventôse* Year III (21 February 1795) was essential for the advent of secularization in the Revolution. This law was presented to the National Convention by the combined committees of public safety, general security and legislation. It began by invoking the Rights of Man and Citizen and the Constitution of Year III. It stated that the right to the exercise worship will not be disturbed, but then proceeded to forbid all public worship.

The ceremonies of all systems of worship are prohibited outside of the enclosure chosen for its exercise. The law does not recognize any minister of worship, none can appear in public with the clothes, ornaments or costumes involved in their religious ceremonies. All assemblies of citizens for the exercise of any worship are subject to the surveillance of the constituted authorities. This surveillance is contained in the measures of police and of public security. No particular sign of worship can be placed in a public space, or in any exterior manner whatsoever. No inscription can be designated in the place which it (worship) is associated. No proclamation or public convocation can be made to invite citizens.¹¹

This is the origin of *Laïcité*. One hundred and ten years separate 1795 and 1905, yet the policies stand together as the foundation of the modern relationship between religion and politics in

¹¹ France, "no. 665, Loi sur l'exercice des cultes du 3 Ventôse," *Bulletin des lois, An III Nivôse-Ventôse 1794-1795 Dec.-Mars* (Paris: impr. nationale, 1794-1931).

France. Secularization is a policy enacted and enforced by the state. This was not just the “forcible redefinition of religion as belief” as Asad states, but the actual forced removal of religion from public life in conjunction with the intellectual reimagining of religion.¹²

The language of the law bears a striking resemblance to the edict of Fouché. It calls for the confinement of worship to an edifice, the proscription of religious dress outside of these spaces and the elimination of any sign associated with worship. To these aspects of de-Christianization were added the appeal to constituted authority and the mechanism of enforcement, the *Police des Cultes*. 3 *Ventôse* was not an edict made on the frontier in the fluid space between the central government's authority and the chaos of civil war. It was not a sporadic and frenzied response to immediate circumstances. It was a law deliberated in security of Paris, enacted by the National Convention encompassing all of France.

Justifications for Secularization

An instructive document on the new laws restricting religion was a directive written on behalf of the *Directoire du Département de l'Isère*.¹³ These departmental governments (directorate) worked on behalf of the central government in Paris and enacted revolutionary legislation. The document was signed Puis, vice president and Gautier secretary general. In an extract from the minutes for 13 *Messidor* Year III, the Directorate defined the laws restricting worship as a “return to justice and the freedom of religious opinions,” against the forces of atheism, tyranny and fanaticism.¹⁴ On the new mechanisms of control, the department heads cautioned citizens that “This surveillance should not alarm you. Before the revolution all

¹² Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 205.

¹³ Puis and Gauthier, *Instruction du directoire du département de l'Isère sur l'exécution des lois des 3 ventôse, 11 prairial an III, sur l'exercice des cultes, leur célébration dans les édifices qui y étaient originellement destinés*, Grenoble: J. M. Cuchet, 1795); Further information on de-Christianization in l'Isère see: Aimée-Marie de Franclieu, *La persécution religieuse dans le département de l'Isère: de 1790 à 1802* (tournai, Notre-dame press, 1905), 345.

¹⁴ Puis, *Instruction du directoire du département de l'Isère*, 1.

assemblies were under the surveillance of the municipal bodies and submitted to the laws of the police and public security. The law of 3 *Ventôse* makes no change in this regard.”¹⁵

Revolutionaries appealed to legal precedents even those from the *Ancien Régime* to rationalize these new laws, making radical innovation appear normative. In this continuity between the old and new, the power of the state was consistent.

The legal justification aside, the theoretical justification for the Directorate of l'Isère was derived from the Enlightenment division of worship (*culte*) between interior and exterior. “Do not confuse that which is the exterior of worship with that which is its essence. It is only by this distinction that your good faith will be safeguarded from the trappings of which they are surrounded.”¹⁶ There is a clear connection between the Directorate’s exposition on the Law of 3 *Ventôse* and the Enlightenment values highlighted earlier in this dissertation.¹⁷ The passage from L’Isère shares similarities with passages from the *Encyclopédie* and Rousseau. From Jaucourt “Priests once instituted, extend the visible apparatus of exterior worship... which the people confuse with religion.”¹⁸ And from *Émile* “Do not confuse the ceremony of religion with religion.”¹⁹ Each source used the same verb *confondre* to describe how exterior representations were not to be confused with the essence of religion. The division of worship between interior and exterior elements provided the basis for rationalizing the domination of the state over exterior worship and defining interior worship as private.

Enlightenment assumptions provided revolutionaries with the means to interpret exterior aspects of worship as malleable and ultimately under the dominion of the state. “That which is

¹⁵ Ibid, 2.

¹⁶ Ibid, 3.

¹⁷ One distinguishes two sorts of worship, interior and exterior. *Encyclopédie*, 4: 550.

¹⁸ *Encyclopédie* . 4: 550.

¹⁹ Rousseau, *Émile*, 444.

of the exterior are all the signs that the law forbids (*loi défend*).²⁰ It belongs to the government alone to determine them or to proscribe them. No power is able to contest this right.”²¹ And to prove that even divine power does not contest the power of the modern state, the authors appealed to Christians for obedience using the Gospel. “Does not the gospel order obedience to the powers of the earth? Was not the author of this precept himself the model of submission to whom it was due?”²² This interpretation redefined religious submission to secular authority as “Christian” and the command to render unto Caesar what he is due was transposed from antiquity and applied to the modern secular state.²³

The Enlightenment and Rousseau in particular laid the foundation for the modern state’s claims over religion. In *The Social Contract* Rousseau outlined how the sentiments of sociability (the exterior manifestations of the interior sentiment) were under the domain of the Sovereign.²⁴ In *Émile* Rousseau stated that if exterior worship “must be uniform for good order” it was a matter of policy.²⁵ Secular policy in the Revolution was a mutation of Rousseau’s assumptions about religion being under the dominion of the state. Rousseau thought this dominion was in the service of unifying religion and politics, but here it represents the opposite. Thus when the Enlightenment interpretation of religion passed through the trials of the Revolution it resulted in a secular conception of religion as removable from public life. Rousseau remains at the nexus of the modern concept of religion as it manifested itself within the Enlightenment view of religion, civil religion and secularization.

²⁰ Though it seems that this would be translated into what the law defends through some investigations this phrasing is translated as forbids.

²¹ Puis, *Instruction du directoire du département de l’Isère*, 3.

²² Ibid, 3.

²³ Mark 12:17.

²⁴ Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 178.

²⁵ Rousseau, *Émile*, 444.

Enlightenment thinkers never envisioned that exterior worship could be removed from society; it was only in the course of the Revolution that the innovation of secularization emerged. From Jaucourt, “It is certain that the abolition of exterior worship would be harmful to the good of human society in general and to that of civil society in particular...”²⁶ However, the suppression of certain aspects of exterior worship existed in potential within the Enlightenment program of reform. Again returning to Jaucourt, “Finally, one is able to dispense with exterior acts of worship only in certain times and rare cases. For example when exposed in the exercise of some great evil...”²⁷ If some acts of exterior worship could be legitimately suppressed then all were potentially susceptible for removal. This provided a rationalization that under extreme circumstances exterior worship could be removed from the public. The Revolution would provide such a crisis and thus the intellectual foundation of the Enlightenment combined with a particular set of circumstances and created secularization.²⁸

The experiment of secularization was a twofold program; the proscription of public worship and the confinement of religion (defined as an interior element) to the private sphere. In this process revolutionaries again drew upon assumptions from the Enlightenment which empowered human beings to remold religion. The Directorate of l'Isère further elaborated the division of exterior and interior for the purpose of redefining “true” worship as interior and private.

That which is the essence of worship is the object of worship, belief (*croyance*), elevation of the soul towards this object, the affection of the heart for it, and the principles which form and direct this elevation and these affections. It is therefore true that exterior worship and the interior worship are two very distinct things and absolutely independent

²⁶ *Encyclopédie*, 4: 551.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 4: 551.

²⁸ This begs the question, was the Enlightenment interpretation of religion simply one manifestation of a secular shift. As was explored in chapter one the Enlightenment view of religion as a human creation was not unique or new, but a repetition. If indeed secularization is a process and a reality, it is one which is temporary and neither exceptional or inevitable.

from one another. The first is subordinated to the power of government, it gives to it (worship) the regulations and forms which it (the government) pleases. The second is a property (characteristic) of which man alone has the freedom and entire disposition over. It cannot be subordinated to the laws of the government; no human power can submit it (this essence) to their domination. You conceive now that the cross, the ornaments, all types of costumes, even those of suppressed fraternities and the ringing of bells are not the essence of worship. This [essence] is undamaged and indifferent to the suppression of all these signs.²⁹

Privatization of religion like other forms of secularization is the product of a set of intellectual assumptions about the world and the application of these ideas in government policy.

Privatization is not a stage in the process of secularization or a better representation of “true” faith, but an intellectual justification for a governmental policy that forcibly moves worship into the private realm. Privatization serves larger aims of domesticating religion to secular authority and the persecution of resisters.

Privatization required a new conceptual realm, to make room for the dominion of the state. The “conscience” was an intellectual construct, a place to “put” religion so the state could increase its domination over human affairs. Secularists during the Revolution employed the division of religion (interior/exterior), but de-legitimized the exterior. This left only the interior realm as the legitimate place for religion. Thus secular policy draws upon and is a mutation of the Enlightenment interpretation of religion as a duality and the right of the sovereign ruler (now state authority) to control public worship. The erection of a public/private dichotomy was a recent innovation which at the moment is slowly dying. It remains unclear just how the state will confine religion to a private realm which is disappearing in the modern age. As technology and cultural attitudes further eject the content of the private sphere into the public, the issues which secularization is attempting to quiet, through suppression and confinement will spring forth.

²⁹ Puis, *Instruction du directoire du département de l'Isère*, 3.

Instrumental to the continual institutionalization of secularization was the law of 7 *Vendémiaire* Year IV (29 September 1795). Legislated by the National Convention in the first month of the New Year this law consolidated all laws regarding worship into one statute and introduced penalties for failing to adhere to these new provisions. This law continued to use the rhetoric of the liberty of worship. The Constitution of Year III established that, “[N]o one can prevent the exercise, in its conformity to the laws, the worship which anyone has chosen.”³⁰ Conformity however defined this “free” exercise of worship as an interior reality. “[T]he laws of which it is necessary to conform oneself to, in the exercise of worship, do not determine that which is only in the domain of thought or over the relationship of man with the objects of his worship. They (the laws) have not and cannot have a purpose in enhanced surveillance (of the interior) in the measures of policy and of public security.”³¹ In this formula the state held the policing of the exterior sentiment was within its purview. The interior reality was within the “domain of thought” and did not concern the state. Thus an element of *Laïcité* comes into focus; subjects could believe whatever they wished as long as they maintained silence in public. Violation of this legal barrier between exterior and interior worship would be met with persecution.

The state folded its new claimed powers over religion under the discourse of liberty of worship. The state offered a “purely civil guarantee against abuse” and would punish anyone who disturbed the religious ceremonies of others. The state claimed to guarantee the so-called free exercise of worship by envisioning itself as a neutral referee preventing any religion from

³⁰ France, “no. 1134, Loi sur l’exercice et la police extérieure des cultes du 7 Vendémiaire,” *Bulletin of lois, An IV Vendémiaire-Brumaire 1795 Sept.-Oct.* (Paris: impr. nationale, 1794-1931).

³¹ Puis, *Instruction du directoire du département de l’Isère*, 3.

becoming “exclusive, dominant or persecuting”.³² This attempt at neutrality was reminiscent of Fouché in his rejection of a privileged religion. The law of 7 *Vendémiaire* rhetorically joined all religions together. In practice secularization targets only certain religions. During the Revolution it was Catholicism, today in France it is Islam. Beyond its specific target in the Revolution these policies were inherently coercive. Violations of this law resulted in a fine of 500 *livres* and not less than 50 and an imprisonment not exceeding two years and not less than one month.³³

A month after the law of 7 *Vendémiaire*, the Constitution of Year III (passed in Year III, enacted in Year IV) came into effect and established the Directory on 10 *Brumaire* Year IV (1 November 1795). Almost immediately the proscription of worship became an issue of debate. About four months later on 22 *Ventôse* the Directory executed an addendum to the law of 7 *Vendémiaire*. Focused on *réfractaires*, the Directory claimed that the laws of 11 *Prairial* Year II and 7 *Vendémiaire* Year IV did not accomplish their purpose in preventing errors associated with, “...the exercise of worship of ministers who by their previous acts declared themselves enemies of liberty ...”³⁴ The Directory commented that these protections did not apply to men who had been forever banished from the Republic and been subject to civil death.

Because the laws restricting worship employed the rhetoric of liberty of worship anyone could push for their rights to be accepted by the revolutionary state. Clearly “enemies” of the Republic asked for their “rights” to be respected and the Directory saw this as unacceptable. The Directors stated that the law of 11 *Prairial* (against refractory priests) has been subverted by elements of the constitutional regime namely the “Code of crimes and penalties” implemented on

³² Ibid, 3.

³³ Ibid, 3.

³⁴ France and Antonin Debidour, *Recueil des actes du Directoire exécutif: procès-verbaux, arrêtés, instructions, lettres et actes divers* (Paris: impr. nationale, 1910-1917), 1: 786.

3 *Brumaire* Year IV by the National Convention one week before the institution of the Directory. Article 6 of the Code stated that the object of this civil action was the reparation for damages which the violation had caused.³⁵ In other words the laws regarding worship had not sufficiently punished the enemies of the Republic and the laws regarding liberty of worship were not to be extended to certain proscribed groups. The doors of reconciliation were inadvertently opened and then slammed shut.

About a month after these discussions a new law on worship was promulgated. On 22 *Germinal* Year IV (11 April 1796) in the Council of 500 (one of the legislative bodies of the Directorial republic) certain provisions of the law of 3 *Ventôse* were clarified. The new law of 22 *Germinal* Year IV sought to root out and set penalties for “seditious” activities “under the pretext of exercising a worship.”³⁶ The law reiterating that no public worship may take place in France. For the first offense an individual would be imprisoned for a minimum of one month and a maximum of six months. For the second offense the individual would be imprisoned for one year. If a minister violated this policy the penalty for the first offense was imprisonment for one year and for the second offense, deportation. Thus the law of 7 *Vendémiaire* which forbade the exercise of public worship was deemed too lenient and further strengthened with what became known as the “Dry Guillotine,” a sentence of almost certain death on the island of Guyana. The increasing harshness of the laws regarding religion was accompanied by renewed tension associated with the annexation of Belgium. Revolutionaries began imposing French laws

³⁵ *L'action civile a pour objet la réparation du dommage que le délit a causé. Elle appartient à ceux qui ont souffert ce dommage.*

³⁶ France, “no. 318, Loi qui interdit l’usage des cloches et toute autre espèce de convocation publique pour l’exercice d’un culte du 22 Germinal,” *Bulletin of lois, An IV Germinal 1796 Mars-Sept.* (Paris impr. nationale, 1794-1931).

regarding the confiscation of property and the proscription of public worship in “reunited departments.”

Secularization was an experimental process. This process saw a conception of religion transform from a necessary component of social good and rooted in the nature of man, to a vision associated with Dupuis, Paine and Volney. This new view held that religion was not necessary for the erection of a moral society and finally that religion itself was a source of harm to society. This final conclusion roots the origins of secularization in France to a set of intellectual positions stemming from the Enlightenment, transformed in the crucible of the Revolution and manifested in a policy initiative. Saying such developments represent the consummation of historical forces is to deny true authorship. Social theoretical abstractions are not historical actors, the National Convention passed this law, and hundreds of individuals debated and approved it. It represented their values and what they believed was an acceptable response to the challenges of the Revolution. Secularization is a policy based on a set of assumptions freely acquired as personal values and implemented by elites using police powers. Its theoretical variant, so-called theories of secularization are enunciated after the fact, used to justify the force required.

Secularization failed to solve the problem of religious conflict and was swept away (as was Theophilanthropy) by the Concordat. The debate over the proper role of religion in French society was temporarily settled, but not resolved and would reappear in the Third Republic with the debate over *Laïcité*. In 1905 secularization won the day, but there is no final resolution only a temporary respite, which periodically becomes inflamed. One wonders if the update to *Laïcité* in 2004 (*Loi n 2004-228 du 15 mars 2004*), which proscribed certain public expressions of faith, in particular those of Muslims, has resolved the issues over religion in France. As recent terrorist attacks have proven, the answer is clearly no.

CHAPTER 7

THEOPHILANTHROPY II

The previous two chapters explored two different trajectories for the religious policy of the Revolution. Some wanted to establish Theophilanthropy as a civil religion for France though not one associated with the government. The other solution implemented in the National Convention and then Directory was a series of laws outlawing public worship. These two solutions would come into direct conflict after the coup of 18 Fructidor Year V (4 September 1797). After Fructidor the cause of Theophilanthropy was taken up by members of the government unsatisfied with the new secular regime.

Two elements dominate the history of Theophilanthropy after 18 *Fructidor*. First; the public features of Theophilanthropy became more prominent and the scope of its influence increased for a time. This coincided with an increased interest among some quarters in the government in establishing a civil religion for the Republic. Second Theophilanthropy acquired, through this association with politics, a more anti-Christian character which also overlapped with a general increase in religious tensions during the Directory. Three individuals illustrate general attitudes in the Directory towards establishing a civil religion: the Director Louis Marie de La Révellière-Lépeaux and two members of the Council of Ancients, Jean-Baptiste Leclerc and François Martin Poultier.

Related to its more prominent political role was the fact that Theophilanthropy also developed a larger public presence. Two journals emerged after *Fructidor* that centered on the propagation of Theophilanthropy. They largely focused on the relationship between parents and children, educational subjects and general moral advocacy. Much of the content was a repetition

of the basic elements of Chemin-Dupontès's *Manuel* repackaged for a larger audience.¹ A series of related pamphlets in support of Theophilanthropy also appeared. Each was styled a “discourse” written for presentation at Theophilanthropic worship services.²

The politicization of Theophilanthropy occurred at a time when many revolutionaries viewed their principal enemies as royalism, fanaticism and terrorism. Revolutionaries associated royalism with the *émigrés* and European monarchies currently at war with France. Terrorism and anarchy referred to the Reign of Terror under Robespierre, to Jacobins in general and later to Babeuf's Conspiracy of Equals. Fanaticism referred to Catholic priests and for some revolutionaries Catholicism at large. Priests who had refused to take the oath to the Civil Constitution were called *réfractaire* and after the repeal of the Civil Constitution those who refused to take an oath to the Revolution and the hatred of monarchy were called *insermentés*. Even after the government separated the Constitutional Church and the oath to the Constitution was no longer an issue there remained sources of conflict. The series of civic oaths and “republican sermons” against royalism and anarchy stand out.³ The failure to adhere to these oaths by any clergy member would result in severe persecution.

On 18 September 1794, in the last day of Year II and a month before the Directory assumed control, the Civil Constitution was abrogated and the Constitutional Church separated from government.⁴ Even if one supposes that the conflict between Catholicism and the Revolution waned after Thermidor events would reignite tensions. In October 1795 the National

¹ *L'Ami des théophilantropes ou Recueil de morale universelle à l'usage des hommes de toutes les religions, de tous les pays de tous les états et métiers* (Paris: Journal des Theophilanthropes, 1798); Barbet, Darcet and E. M. Siauve, *L'Écho des Cercles patriotiques* (Paris: Cercles patriotiques and Réunions de théophilanthropes, 1797).

² François-Nicolas Parent and Jean-François Dubroca, *Recueil de discours prononcés dans divers temples de théophilantropes* (Paris: Bureau des ouvrages de la Théophilanthropie, 1797); Thomas Paine, *A Discourse Delivered by Thomas Paine, at the Society of the Theophilanthropists at Paris* (London: Clio Rickman, 1798).

³ Alphonse Aulard, *Histoire politique de la révolution française; origines et développement de la démocratie et de la république* (1789-1804) (Paris: A. Colin, 1901), 622-623.

⁴ Days later on the 7th of *Vendémiaire* the Convention passed the law outlawing all public worship.

Convention annexed Belgium, called *pays* or *provinces reunites* (reunited lands/provinces). These territories subsequently came under the full force of French laws regarding the various oaths expected of citizens and the confiscation of Church property. The treatment of *réfractaire* and *insermentes* clergy was largely the same. Although the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was no longer in effect the conflict between Catholicism and the Revolution continued. This interminable conflict and the desire to resolve it defined the Directorial Republic. Theophilanthropy emerged during a time when the debate over religion revolved around those wanting to establish a civil religion as a means to overcome conflict and those seeking to remove religion from politics.

Révellière-Lépeaux

Révellière-Lépeaux, a student of Rousseau and Montesquieu, was elected to the Estates General from Angers. He was a supporter of the Civil Constitution, the execution of the King and faced persecution under the Terror. In the post-Terror Convention he was a voice of reconciliation and this along with recognition of his talents led to his election to Directory.⁵ His initial support for the Civil Constitution had been totally reversed by the end of the Terror and de-Christianization.

Révellière-Lépeaux's attitude towards Catholicism was hostile and this formed a critical basis for his approach to the idea of civil religion. On 15 *Pluviôse* Year IV (4 February 1796) Révellière-Lépeaux authored a letter on behalf of the Directory to General Napoleon Bonaparte. In the letter Révellière-Lépeaux stated that the "*culte romain*" was the enemy of liberty, the

⁵ Georgia Robison, *Revelliere-Lepeaux, Citizen Director, 1753-1824* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), 51-84.

“*Religion romaine*” was the irrevocable enemy of the republic.⁶ He instructed Bonaparte to rekindle the torch against “fanaticism” in Italy, meaning that he should act against Catholicism on its home turf.⁷ In correspondence with his brother, Napoleon stated that he and Révellière-Lépeaux were in agreement regarding this aim, and desired in particular to prevent a successor to the Pope when the current one, Pius VI then imprisoned in France, died.⁸

Révellière-Lépeaux’s principal work on civil religion was *Réflexions sur le culte, sur les cérémonies civiles et sur les fêtes nationales*. It was published on 12 *Floreal* Year V (1 May 1797) about a month after the elections of *Germinal* Year V (April 1797) which infused the assemblies of the Directory with royalist sentiment.⁹ The work focused on what he believed to be the essential institutions of the Republic, the conservation of *mœurs* and the survival of the Republic.¹⁰ Révellière-Lépeaux posited that without a dogma or “exterior worship” one would not be able to inculcate moral principles or have the people practice those principles. He addressed critics, stating that it was possible for some to live virtuous lives without religion, but that this was not true of the “people.”¹¹ “The multitude must be given positive support, a dogma or two that serves as the base of their morality and a worship that directs the application or at least reminds them of it (morality).”¹² Révellière-Lépeaux, responding to the debate in the Directory between the advocates of a civil religion and those who wanted to abolish religion

⁶ This distinction between *culte* and *religion* reinforces early claims. Worship is about practice, habit and consequently culture; religion is institutional and the difference is apparent in Révellière-Lépeaux’s comments. The Catholic system of worship is a danger to republican culture while its institutions are a danger to the Republic.

⁷ France and Debidour, *Archives nationales. Inventaire Général De La Série AF, Sous-Série AFiii (Procès-verbaux des séances du Directoire)* (Paris: impr. nationale, 1910-1917), 431 plaq. 2464, 1- 2.

⁸ Napoleon, *The Confidential Correspondence of Napoleon Bonaparte with His Brother Joseph: Selected and Translated, with Explanatory Notes, from the ‘Mémoires Du Roi Joseph’* (New York: Appleton and Co, 1856), 42-43.

⁹ Louis-Marie de La Revellière-Lépeaux, *Réflexions sur le culte, sur les cérémonies civiles et sur les fêtes nationales* (Paris: Chez H.J. Jansen, 1797).

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 4-5.

¹² *Ibid*, 5.

altogether, drew upon the utilitarian arguments within the civil religion tradition, insisting that religion was necessary for public morality and stability of the Republic.

Emphasizing the need for religion, Révellière-Lépeaux sought inspiration from Rousseau by stating that “the cold calculus of reason” cannot alone guide men to virtue. Reminiscent of Rousseau's critique of philosophy in *Émile*, this position stated that mere Enlightenment rationalism was not sufficient. However, beyond the necessity of religion for “morality” and “public liberty,” Révellière-Lépeaux believed the dogmas of this religion must be simple.¹³ This simplicity was necessary to guard against priests who represented superstition and tyranny. Priests transformed those who believed in the “true God” into “stupid and servile executors” of the will of priests.¹⁴ Similar to arguments by Jaucourt in the *Encyclopédie* and countering arguments from thinkers like Paine, Volney and Dupuis, Révellière-Lépeaux believed that religion was not priestcraft, but that many religions devolved into priestcraft if not properly protected.

After voicing the dangers of priestly influence, Révellière-Lépeaux entered into an interesting diversion which simultaneously condemned Catholicism and celebrated Calvinism as an example of virtuous religion. He stated that Catholicism among all Christian sects was the most opposed to “progress and the exercise of healthy morality and the most contrary to the establishment and maintenance of liberty.”¹⁵ He went on to compare a Catholic and Calvinist country to illustrate this point, stating that in Calvinist countries, “households (were) happier, women more chaste and more economical, husbands more tender and more laborious, children more cherished and more respectful... .in a word, a people more active, more industrious, more

¹³ Ibid, 6.

¹⁴ Ibid, 7.

¹⁵ Ibid, 9.

charitable, better and more content, had more public spirit and a veritable love for the *patrie*.”¹⁶

The assumption underlying this comparison was that the less influence from priests and the simpler the dogmas of a religion, the better were its effects. So then if one were to further reduce these elements beyond Calvinism then the positive effects would be even greater. This was not an advocacy for a Protestant civil religion.¹⁷

Révellière-Lépeaux’s purpose was not to outline his own civil religion, but to safeguard the Revolution from the emergence of a religion counter to revolutionary ideals. Echoing Rousseau, Révellière-Lépeaux opined that the only dogmas needed to establish morality were the existence of God and the immortality of the soul.¹⁸ If one tolerated more dogmas than this, “you elevate only a monstrous edifice where men go astray and withdraw from the sanctuary of reason and justice.”¹⁹ Simplicity was an organizing principle in the Revolution. It was both iconoclastic and eschatological. Simplicity represented an effort to return to an original purity.

For Révellière-Lépeaux the new secular outlook instituted by the Convention and Directory created a vacuum. The prospect that royalist forces would fill this vacuum gripped him with a “*horror vacui*” or a fear that if a counterpoint was not present then Catholicism would return. “When one has defeated an unreasonable and anti-social worship it is always replaced by others or it is reborn in its own ruins. . . . Such is precisely the position we find ourselves in France”²⁰ In the Enlightenment understanding religion, worship was the exterior manifestation of a natural impulse that would necessarily be expressed. Révellière-Lépeaux rejected the prospect of society existing without religion because even if one destroyed the established

¹⁶ Ibid, 10.

¹⁷ The use of Calvinism as an example was established in part by its association with Geneva and Rousseau, but also by a strong current of Protestant-philism in the Directory, represented by thinkers such as Germaine de Staël and Benjamin Constant.

¹⁸ Révellière-Lépeaux, *Réflexions sur le culte*, 10.

¹⁹ Ibid, 11.

²⁰ Ibid, 12.

religion, a new one would inevitably emerge. With this in mind Révellière-Lépeaux sought to prevent the return of the old one by establishing an acceptable alternative.

The assumptions of the indelible nature of religion and the fear of the return of Catholicism prompted Révellière-Lépeaux to see creating a new religion as the only solution. He believed it was only possible to modify a religion at its birth before the corruption of priests.²¹ It would seem that on the matter of its simplicity and its novelty that Theophilanthropy fit Révellière-Lépeaux's requirements. Although he made no mention of Theophilanthropy in his essay his political philosophy and future support of the new religion would seem to be in agreement. Eventually Révellière-Lépeaux would emerge as a principal supporter of Theophilanthropy and in many respects became a symbol of the religion outside France.²²

On the role of the state vis-à-vis religion, Révellière-Lépeaux had a complex perspective. He saw religion as necessary for social order, but rejected state intervention. "It is only through opinion and through non public voices from the government that such an institution comes to propagate itself and sustain itself."²³ Révellière-Lépeaux sought to establish an indirect, but integral relationship between religion and politics. In this new formula which revolutionized the concept of civil religion, a religion need not be directly attached to the state to be effective. The separation of Church and State and the law proscribing public worship were the letter of the law at the time so whether this was genuinely the opinion of Révellière-Lépeaux or simply his resignation to the law, is unclear.

But Révellière-Lépeaux's views do portend an increasing decentralization of civil religion. Before the Revolution from Rome to Rousseau, the lineage of thinkers on civil religion

²¹ Ibid, 14.

²² Robison, *Revelliere-Lepeaux, Citizen Director*, 161.

²³ Révellière-Lépeaux, *Réflexions sur le culte*, 22.

always assumed religion to be integrally connected to the state. After the Revolution, religion instituted for the social good no longer had to be tied to the state. Into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the divergence of religion from the state developed in three directions: community-based civil religions propagated among specific groups such as the Moorish Science Temple; international religions such as Theosophy; and numerically large religions that act as civil religions in an unofficial, but still integral way such as American Christianity.

Révellière-Lépeaux stated that civil ceremonies and national festivals provided a direct means for the state to intervene in the creation of republican culture. On the matter of civil ceremonies he focused a great deal on social and domestic concerns and their relation to overall public order.²⁴ As for National festivals Révellière-Lépeaux believed they ought to “kindle the imagination, elevate the soul to the most sublime ideas and the heart to greatest sentiment.”²⁵ Révellière-Lépeaux believed that worship, civic ceremonies and national festivals were equally necessary. They were parallel, similar and interlocking and directed towards the same end, the establishment of republican culture.²⁶

However, Révellière-Lépeaux did not want religious institutions connected to the state in the same way as the other civil institutions.²⁷ He believed that if priests were connected to the state then they would shortly take control and produce religious fanaticism.²⁸ This would smother both the “sentiments of religion” and reason and infect politics with a religious element. “Your legislature would be moreover converted into a school of theology,” and political dissent would be transformed into bloody religious quarrel. Révellière-Lépeaux’s did not want to

²⁴ Ibid, 24, 25, 31.

²⁵ Ibid, 33.

²⁶ Ibid, 35.

²⁷ Ibid, 36.

²⁸ Ibid, 36.

abandon religion to the caprice of potential tyrants or sectarians.²⁹ The Terror loomed large and the state was no longer held in the same high regard as in the early Revolution. The nation as constituted in the institution of government could become corrupt. This was a more mature if pessimistic realization. It was also true that in the Directory the “enemies” of the Republic were often lumped together in a bizarre cabal of religious fanatics, atheists and royalists—an unholy alliance desiring to destroy the Republic. To unite religion with politics could invite royalist “fanatics” into the halls of power, or tempt the likes of Robespierre or Babeuf to infiltrate the government.

In terms of a clear demarcation between religion and politics Révellière-Lépeaux stated that each had its place. He believed that “religious worship” ought to be expressed in devotional assemblies focused on fostering justice and goodness, “All which is exterior to this belongs to the law and to the government.”³⁰ Here Révellière-Lépeaux mirrored precisely the language of secularization as detailed by the Directorate of l'Isère. This established that both the modern notion of civil religion described by Révellière-Lépeaux and the secular polices of the revolutionary government shared the same assumptions derived from the Enlightenment interpretation of religion.

One might call Révellière-Lépeaux’s position a species of secularization in that it separates religion from the state. However, Révellière-Lépeaux envisioned a more fluid permeable separation between religion and politics. What is also important for understanding Révellière-Lépeaux’s concept of civil religion was the influence of Rousseau and how this intellectual heritage changed in the context of the Revolution. Révellière-Lépeaux clearly

²⁹ Ibid, 37.

³⁰ Ibid, 38.

wanted a civil religion for the Republic, but there were significant differences in his proposal compared to Rousseau's theories.

The notion that the "sovereign" was singularly responsible for the relationship between the religion and state was an important influence throughout the Revolution from the Civil Constitution to the law of 7 *Vendémiaire*. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy unilaterally transformed the relationship between the French state and Catholicism. It may have begun as an oath, but eventually evolved into an institutional alternative to the Catholic Church. Rousseau's idea of sovereignty had its own mutations and for some historians contributed to the radicalization of the Revolution.³¹ For Révellière-Lépeaux the concept of civil religion differed significantly from *The Social Contract*. Rousseau argued that religion and politics be connected in an integrated whole, as two exterior representations of the interior sentiment. Révellière-Lépeaux, however, saw religion and politics as connected, but ultimately in separate roles. Rousseau's influence was central, but his thought was not borrowed without modification. Indeed, very rarely were inevitable conclusions derived from Rousseau's thought. Rather, he provided revolutionaries with malleable concepts, which were continually modified through the praxis and experiences of the Revolution.

Leclerc

As much as events played a role in forming and reforming ideas, the ongoing debate over religion also contributed to evolving concepts of civil religion. Révellière-Lépeaux did not expound alone; he was speaking against those seeking to abandon the prospect of a revolutionary religion. For example, as Mona Ozouf notes, the legislator Talot, in *Messidor* Year V, two

³¹ Keith Michael Baker, "Transformations of Classical Republicanism in Eighteenth-Century France," *The Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 1 (March 2001): 32-53; François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 30-33.

months before the Coup of 18 *Fructidor*, stated that revolutionaries were no longer in the business of creating a new *culte*.³² The debate continued when just days before the coup on 9 *Fructidor* Year V (26 Aug 1797), Jean-Baptists Leclerc gave a speech *Discourse sur l'existence et l'utilité d'une religion civile en France* in the Council of Ancients. Leclerc was a longtime friend and ally of Révellière-Lépeaux. In terms of the civil religion debate in the Revolution and Theophilanthropy Leclerc was a trusted lieutenant.³³

The discourse highlighted the contentious atmosphere and the conflicting positions of those taking part in the debate regarding civil religion. It used the exact phrasing of Rousseau (*religion civile*) and invoked the name Theophilanthropy. Leclerc addressed opposition against Theophilanthropy by first refuting criticism of the religion as a new Islam, a Jacobin revival or a Jacobite movement of Catholic renegades.³⁴ Countering these spurious charges, Leclerc associated Theophilanthropy directly with Rousseau as a way to give it legitimacy and deflect criticism. If the sage of the Revolution was connected to Theophilanthropy then what true revolutionary could dismiss it?³⁵

Leclerc's central argument was that the institutions of the Republic already constituted a civil religion. Leclerc elaborated, "These sentiments [respect of forbearers, loved ones and those who sacrificed for the *patrie*] form with the dogma of the existence of God, adopted by the French people in the preamble of their declaration of rights, is a type of civil religion that connects all the systems of worship (in the world) by a common foundation."³⁶ And a few lines later he made this union of religion and politics more explicit, saying that "...we have a civil

³² François Furet, *A critical dictionary of the French Revolution*, 567.

³³ Robison, *Revelliere-Lepeaux, Citizen Director*, 26-27, 194-195.

³⁴ Jean-Baptists Leclerc, *Discourse sur l'existence et l'utilité d'une religion civile en France* (Paris: n.p., 1797), 4-5.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 6.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 11.

religion, with its dogmas, its practices and its priests.” Its dogmas were the declaration of rights of man and citizen. Its practices were those the legislators ordained and its priests were civil officers.³⁷ “The union of all these objects forms a mother religion ... from which all other religions are derived ...”³⁸ In this perspective the Republic acted not necessarily as a religion, but as a focal point unifying all different systems of worship. All confessions within the Republic (Leclerc mentioned Catholics, Protestants and Jews among others) could participate in this civil religion. In this way, each religion and its believers could participate in a grandiose project of sacralizing the Revolution.

In this sense civil religion was not a type of religion, but the way in which civil institutions were imbued with sacral qualities. Here Leclerc gestures toward the origins of modern pluralism. Pluralism is not a secular outlook within a “neutral” state. It sacralizes the nation, not as an object of worship, but as a focal point for myriad religions to imbue the state and nation with sacrality. Thus each religion when joined with patriotism and civic action is in effect a civil religion. Leclerc’s vision did not come to fruition in France, but it is very much what Robert Bellah describes in his exposé on American civil religion.³⁹ Pluralism represents one manifestation of the Enlightenment’s plural universal concept of religion.

Leclerc’s speech was illustrative of the larger connection between civil religion and secularization. The law which separated church and state had already come into effect, and in the debate after the speech a commenter pointed out that “your civil religion is proscribed by the Constitution, it does not recognize any worship.”⁴⁰ In this context Leclerc employed an interesting strategy to propose a civil religion, yet to do so within the confines of the existing

³⁷ Ibid, 13.

³⁸ Ibid, 13.

³⁹ Robert Bellah, “Civil religion in america,” *Daedalus* 134, no. 4 (2005): 40-55.

⁴⁰ Leclerc, *Discourse sur l’existence et l’utilité d’une religion civile en France*, 28.

law. He crafted an argument that stated that there already existed a civil religion imbedded within the Republic that shared the same values as Theophilanthropy. This fit into the self-presentation of Theophilanthropy not as a sect or an alternative to other systems of worship, but as a universal system. Leclerc's description also differed from Chemin-Dupontès definition of Theophilanthropy in terms of institutions. Chemin-Dupontès created a clergy the *chef de famille*, which Leclerc ignored.

Fructidor

The Coup of 18 *Fructidor* grew out of the two elections in 1797 which gave the Council of 500 and the Council of Ancients royalist majorities. The members of the Directory could either gradually cede power or reject the elections and maintain power. Révellière-Lépeaux and likeminded directors believed that the emerging royalist majority would lead to the end of the Republic and a return of the monarchy and Catholicism.⁴¹

Theophilanthropy had a more prominent role following the Coup of 18 *Fructidor* when Révellière-Lépeaux attempted to appropriate Theophilanthropy as part of a new push against the perceived enemies of the Revolution.⁴² The new public face of Theophilanthropy was accompanied by a more authoritarian direction by the Directory. Historians call this period the second or dictatorial period of the Directory.⁴³ After 18 *Fructidor*, Révellière-Lépeaux exerted a powerful influence on the central committee of Theophilanthropy and according to Mathiez it became more Jacobin in character.⁴⁴ Révellière-Lépeaux also asked for the support of prominent figures like Napoleon Bonaparte.⁴⁵ Bonaparte was the subject of praise by the Theophilanthropic

⁴¹ Robison, *Revelliere-Lepeaux, Citizen Director*, 132-133.

⁴² Mathiez, *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, 124.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 187.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 206.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 205- 206.

society, hailed as a “warrior philosopher.”⁴⁶ It appears that Révellière-Lépeaux found in Theophilanthropy the type of religion outlined in his theoretical piece, one that would be a means to cultivate virtue in the Republic.⁴⁷

Révellière-Lépeaux himself was attacked for his role in promoting Theophilanthropy. He was called the “pope” and “high-priest” of the religion.⁴⁸ He was also caricatured as a new Muhammad.⁴⁹ The perception of the time was that, like a new Islam, Theophilanthropy was being spread through coercion and violence.⁵⁰ In eighteenth-century Europe there was a strong undercurrent of thought that associated Islam with barbarism. Henri Grégoire compared the destruction wrought by revolutionary “vandals” during the Terror to the iconoclasm of Protestantism and to the violence of Islam.⁵¹

Also critical was the depiction of Muhammad as a charlatan, who had appropriated various aspects of Christianity and “invented” a religion from it. A corollary to this view was the charge that Muhammad was an imposter. This charge had appeared in the work of Voltaire (in a play produced in 1741) and before that in the infamous “treaties on the three imposters.”⁵² But the accusation that a particular religion was the invention of imposters preceded the

⁴⁶ Anonymous, *Les théophilantropes soutenus par Bonaparte, son discours sur la religion, et sa prière à l'Eternel* (Paris: impr. d'Augustin, n. d.).

⁴⁷ Mathiez, *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, 145.

⁴⁸ Several images illustrate this point: Jacques Louis Copia, “Le Directeur Reveillere pape des Theophilantropes ce burlesque pontificat étoit placé dans le Directoire,” Illustration, *Collection Michel Hennin, Relatives À L'Histoire De France Vol. 140, 12297-12375* (Paris: n.p., 1797); James Gillray, “New Morality; or The Promis'd Installment of the High-Priest of the Theophilanthropes, with the Homage of Leviathan and His Suite,” Illustration, *Anti-Jacobin Magazine & Review* (London: J. Wright 169 Piccadilly, 1798).

⁴⁹ Carl de Vinck, “Mahomet-théophilantrope,” Illustration, *Collection De Vinck. Un Siècle D'histoire De France Par L'estampe, 1770-1870. Vol. 49, 6584-6796* (Paris: n.p., 1798).

⁵⁰ Mathiez, Albert. *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, 185, 618.

⁵¹ Henri Grégoire, *Troisième rapport sur le vandalisme* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale des lois, 1794), 349; Henri Grégoire, *Rapport sur les destructions opérées par le vandalisme, et sur les moyens de le réprimer*, (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1794), 266.

⁵² Voltaire, *Le fanatisme, ou, Mahomet le prophète: tragédie* (Paris: n.p., 1741); Anonymous, *Traité Des Trois Imposteurs* (Amsterdam: M.M. Rey, n.d.).

Enlightenment.⁵³ In the revolutionary context, critics of Theophilanthropy such as Alexandre-Joseph Guyot highlighted these associations. Guyot's work *L'ami des théophilantropes*, compared Theophilanthropy to Islam and implied Theophilanthropy was also imposture.⁵⁴ Although at first the depiction of Révellière-Lépeaux as Muhammad may seem strange, it drew upon an established formula dating back centuries.

After 18 *Fructidor* adherents of Theophilanthropy became much more anti-Christian. While conceptually Theophilanthropy aimed to incorporate all systems of worship, its relationship with Christianity was paramount. Theophilanthropy shared common elements with the revolutionary "cults" that spearheaded de-Christianization. All were based on natural religion and republicanism and while this did not necessitate an anti-Christian perspective, the potential was there. The purpose of Chemin-Dupontès was in part to overcome the legacy of de-Christianization and thus he cultivated a neutral attitude towards Christianity in the major works of Theophilanthropy. His earlier work in the *Republican Gospel* hoped to see a union of Christianity and Revolution. As Mona Ozouf notes, some of the founders of Theophilanthropy talked of calling the movement's adherents "primitive Christians."⁵⁵

Did Chemin-Dupontès abandon hopes for a synthesis between Christianity and Revolution as the course of the Revolution made such a position unsustainable? Did he adopt Rousseau's natural religion based alternative only gradually? Whatever the case, Chemin-Dupontès's solution was to avoid the issue. Christianity was one manifestation of the primordial religion of nature. The universalism of natural religion made the thorny issue of Christian

⁵³ The tradition which charged a particular religion as fraud comes from the long history of Judaism and Christianity. From a Jewish perspective Christianity would be the misappropriation of Judaism for the purpose of inventing a new religion. Likewise this was true of Christianity vis-à-vis Islam. There is a fundamental difference here, whereas these critiques proposed a "true" religion against a false one. The view exemplified by such thinkers as Volney was that all religion was invention.

⁵⁴ Alexandre Joseph Guyot, *L'Ami Des Théophilantropes* (Paris: Levacher, 1797).

⁵⁵ Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 270.

republicanism irrelevant. The primordial religion of nature transcended Christianity and thus its persecution or elimination was unnecessary. Chemin-Dupontès also warned against such intolerance, “All the habitants of the earth are Theophilanthropists,” he declared, adding that “far from seeking to overthrow the altars of other systems of worship, you must moderate your zeal...”⁵⁶ Theophilanthropists must accept the believers of other faiths as thier brothers.⁵⁷

Poultier

Such conciliatory messages, however, fell on deaf ears after *Fructidor*. The case of François Martin Poultier, a legislator and former priest is instructive. He wrote *Discours décadaires à l'usage des Théophilanthropes* in Year VI. Dedicated to his daughter, its purpose was to advise her as well as to attack the enemies of the Republic. Poultier declared to his daughter, “You were born in a republic, your eyes will not be soiled by the appearance of a king, your soul not outraged by the crimes of his associates and the pride of his slaves. An imposturous priest did not consecrate the days after your birth to falsehood and superstition. Your youth will not be tormented by over-intricate practices, your reason will not be obscured by revolting mysteries. Constantly at your side, I will defend your young soul against the pernicious insinuations of fanaticism.”⁵⁸ This counsel to his daughter combined a series of concerns, common in the late Republic, the cultivation of virtue, the education of the next generation and preventing the return of “royalism” and “fanaticism.”

For Poultier the central means for the protection and education of his daughter was domestic family life. “May you my precious child, love as your father does, the sweet pleasures of domestic life! These simple and touching pleasures are, for pure souls, a charm which the

⁵⁶ Jean Baptiste Chemin-Dupontès, *Manuel des Théophilanthropes*, 48.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 49.

⁵⁸ François Martin Poultier d’elotte, *Discours Décadaires, À L'usage Des Théophilanthropes* (Paris: n.p., 1798), iii.

wicked cannot comprehend. These pleasures are the recompense and the necessity of virtuous hearts.”⁵⁹ Poultier advice to his daughter is also instructive for investigating how revolutionaries understood the role of women in the consolidation of the Republic. Poultier emphasized a traditional dichotomy in French culture between masculine and feminine virtue. For those women who rejected their domestic duties, Poultier had this to say. “May you not imitate these restless and ambitious women who discontented with the rank where nature has placed them, soar beyond their sphere, go from circle to circle, from spectacle to spectacle looking for dissipations which they bring to their odious homes and forget the sacred duties of wives and mothers.”⁶⁰ By contrast the ideal for his daughter was to be a wife and mother to a “partisan of the republic, with irreproachable *mœurs*”.⁶¹ The domestic concepts outlined in Theophilanthropy were part of a larger desire to see traditional roles recovered following the Terror.⁶²

Revolutionaries sought to recover traditional roles and to protect the Revolution from threats both inside and outside of France. They skirted a fine line between advocating increased restrictions and maintaining the Republic.⁶³ In the end revolutionaries decided to move gradually towards dictatorship, in the home and in France as a whole. Hoping to secure the Republic they in fact destroyed it. The history of domesticity was a microcosm of the larger political and cultural conditions in the late Republic as it transitioned into an Empire.

Poultier repeated Chemin-Dupontès’s dictum that Theophilanthropy was the original religion of the world yet imbued this with a far more anti-Christian tone which began to shape the post *Fructidor* Revolution. “Theophilanthropy is not a new religion, it is the most ancient of

⁵⁹ Ibid, iv.

⁶⁰ Ibid, v.

⁶¹ Ibid, v.

⁶² Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France*, 249-310.

⁶³ The restrictions placed on religion during the Directory were indicative of larger authoritarian trends.

all religions. It is that of the patriarchs in the infancy of the world, it has been and is again the religion of those who in all lands are elevated by their enlightenment and philosophy, above shameful prejudices, pagan, Jewish and Christian idolatry.”⁶⁴ Poultier mentions some of these patriarchs, but none are the founders of religions.⁶⁵ The “lawgiver” concept in the work of Rousseau had previously incorporated figures like Moses and Muhammad. Poultier now excluded them.

Poultier tapped into an existing language of Monotheistic-based reform. This reform had spurred an iconoclasm that savaged the ancient Roman religion (paganism). Now it was repurposed by the Enlightenment Reformation to attack Judaism and Christianity as nothing more than a species of idolatry. Poultier invoked Jesus as a means to criticize Judaism and Christianity and elevate Theophilanthropy.⁶⁶ Poultier stated Jesus, “did not come, in his own words, to reestablish the worship of his father that had been disfigured by the Jews, this doctrine is that of the Theophilanthropists. *Love one another.*”⁶⁷ Poultier reproduced the first part of Mathew 5:17, but instead of establishing Jesus as the fulfilment of mosaic law Poultier positions Theophilanthropy as the fulfilment of the pure religion corrupted by Jews and Christians. In Poultier’s estimation, Theophilanthropy was the true religion and had resurrected, rescued and fulfilled the teachings of Jesus.

Poultier then assimilated these theological arguments into the context of the Revolution and decried the enemies of the Revolution as purveyors of false religion. He stated that royalists had subverted the doctrines of Jesus and now practiced idolatry. This idolatry was expressed

⁶⁴ Poultier, *Discours Décadaires, À L'usage Des Théophilantropes*, vii.

⁶⁵ Confucius, Socrates, Plato, Cicero, Cato, Brutus, Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Raynal and Buffon were Theophilanthropes. Poultier, *Discours Décadaires, À L'usage Des Théophilantropes*, viii.

⁶⁶ Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. King James Version, Mathew 5:17.

⁶⁷ Poultier, *Discours Décadaires, À L'usage Des Théophilantropes*, x; King James Version, John 13:34.

through a hatred of the Republic because royalists “know that this idolatry is the pedestal of royalty.”⁶⁸ Kings usurped the sovereignty of the people and used priests to enslave them to fanaticism thus making them pliant subjects.⁶⁹ Poultier further added that those who conspired against the existence of God were the agents of tyranny. These agents were not only those identified as royalist or fanatics, but those who during the Terror “persecuted priests and despoiled churches.”⁷⁰ Terrorists subverted *mœurs* by preaching atheism. Their goal was the destruction of the Republic. “But the national glaive like waves of the ocean does not suffer any impurity. It strikes down the chiefs of this impious sect.”⁷¹ This elaboration combined all the enemies of the Republic into the single category of atheist. For Poultier these were not defeated enemies, but resurgent forces.⁷²

The Directory’s inability to resolve the conflicts of the Revolution emanated from its continued commitment to revolutionary principles. This commitment gradually isolated the Directors. The last pillar of support was the military, which was increasingly becoming the new center of gravity in the Republic. On 18 *Brumaire* this new state of affairs was consummated in a coup engineered by Napoleon. The Directorial era was a repetition of the radical period. De-Christianization, transformed into a secular legal regime and the revolutionary religion of Theophilanthropy vied for supremacy. However, it was Catholicism and the Concordat that won the day. Catholicism was the most viable solution because of its undeniable importance to France, but also because other options had been tried and failed. Investigating the first instance

⁶⁸ Ibid, xi.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 3-4.

⁷¹ Ibid, 4.

⁷² He pointed to Bossy-Anglas, Portalis, Camille Jordan (Clichy faction) as agents of the new fanaticism. Poultier, *Discours Décadaires, À L'usage Des Théophilantropes*, 5.

of secularization in modern France and Europe opens the way for some critical conclusions.
Secular policies are not inevitable and once established are not eternal.

CHAPTER 8

LEGACIES

The legacies of Theophilanthropy were greater than its initial advent. The first of three critical legacies were works written in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution which offered a post-mortem of Theophilanthropy. Crucial voices here were those of Henri Grégoire, a Constitutional Bishop who criticized Theophilanthropy from a Catholic perspective and Germaine De Staël. Coming from a Protestant background, De Staël was an important voice during the Directory and (as an *émigré*) the Napoleonic period. The Second critical legacy was the periodic resurrection of Theophilanthropy throughout the nineteenth century. These new Theophilanthropic movements returned the precepts of the revolutionary religion to confront the issues of their day. The third legacy was the desire to “invent” new religions known to scholars as New Religious Movements (NRM).

Grégoire greeted the Revolution with enthusiasm and saw no inconsistency between his devotion to the Catholic Church and the Revolution. This position was tested with his support and participation in the Constitutional Church. As a result Grégoire would be labeled a “schismatic,” someone who was doctrinally in conformity with Church teachings, but who had deviated from the organizational authority of the Church.¹ Yet beyond this complicated position, Grégoire continued to see himself as a Catholic apologist and rejected the various experiments on religion during the Revolution, from the two “Cults” to Theophilanthropy. He saw these experiments as attacks on Christianity. In his journal *Histoire des Sectes Religieuses*, the following appears. “...Theophilanthropy was less aimed at the establishment of an abstract

¹ Jeremy Popkin and Richard Popkin, *The Abbé Grégoire and His World* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2000), ix.

worship than the destruction of the Catholic religion.² For Grégoire the promise of a union between the Republic and Catholicism was both desirable and possible. He stood against Rousseau's dictum on the fundamental incompatibility between Christianity and a republic.

Germaine De Staël was an important thinker of the liberal and romantic tradition who presided over an important salon in the Directory. She was a moderate republican in temperament who abhorred the Terror and was active in the politics of the Directory. She became an implacable opponent of Napoleon, which ended in her exile from Imperial France.³ Like Grégoire, De Staël believed that France was in need of regeneration, but rejected both revolutionary religion and Catholicism as viable source for revival. In her work *Des circonstances actuelles qui peuvent terminer La Révolution* she gave significant attention to a comparison between Theophilanthropy and Protestantism.⁴

Interest in Protestantism as a civil religion was an important concern in the Directory. The praise of Révellière-Lépeaux for Calvinism was an example of this trend. Benjamin Constant, another intellectual of the period and a compatriot of De Staël was also interested in the intersection between Protestantism and Theophilanthropy as the historian Steven Vincent states. "Constant was fascinated with the spirituality valorized by the liberal Protestant theologians, and for a brief period during the late-1790's he was drawn to Theophilanthropy, a non-sacerdotal religion supported by the Directory at the end of the 1790's."⁵ De Staël was not

² Henri Grégoire and H. Carnot, *Histoire des sectes religieuses: qui sont nées, se sont modifiées, se sont éteintes dans les différentes contrées du globe, depuis le commencement du siècle dernier jusqu'à l'époque actuelle* (Paris: Baudouin frères, 1828), 453.

³ Sergine Dixon, *Germaine De Stael, Daughter of the Enlightenment: The Writer and Her Turbulent Era* (Amherst NY: Humanity Books, 2007), 10; Maria Fairweather, *Madame De Staël* (New York: Carroll & Graf Pubs, 2005), 211.

⁴ Germaine De Staël and John Viénot, *Des circonstances actuelles qui peuvent terminer la Révolution et des principes qui doivent fonder la république en France* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1906).

⁵ Steven K. Vincent, *Benjamin Constant and the Birth of French Liberalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 148-9.

content to use Protestantism as a theoretical test case she supported the institution of Protestantism as a state religion in France.

She began *Des circonstances* by praising Theophilanthropy and Protestantism as two religions established by reason. She further noted that any religion established in a republic must be based on reason for all the ideas and institutions of the republic are based on that same principle. Thus any religion based on dogmas and mysteries would not work, making clear her rejection of Catholicism.⁶ De Staël assented to the fact that Theophilanthropy was founded on reason, yet even though the religion claimed to be based on eternal ideas it was a modern creation. In her estimation Protestantism was already based on reason and also possessed ancient traditions, which expressed a splendor of worship and aided in the commitment to Protestantism's simple truths.⁷ In regards to compatibility with a republic De Staël stated that Protestant ministers were already citizens and fathers and there was also no foreign influence on the religion. This was a challenge to Chemin-Dupontès's concept of the *chef de famille* and a not so subtle reference to clerical celibacy and the Pope.

On the civil and political aspects of the issue De Staël firmly proposed that whether it was Theophilanthropy or Protestantism the state must have a religion.⁸ Her advocacy of a Protestant civil religion was complicated by her belief that some republicans wanted to use a new civil religion as a pretext to destroy the influence of Catholicism.⁹ She defended her own position from possible association with these partisans by saying that her position was not intolerant and that she strongly rejected any sort of persecution based on religious affiliation.

⁶ Ibid, 220.

⁷ Ibid, 221-222; Lyons, Martyn, *France Under the Directory*, 111.

⁸ Helena Rosenblatt, "On the need for a Protestant Reformation", in *French Liberalism from Montesquieu to the Present Day*, ed. Raf Geenens and Helena Rosenblatt (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 119.

⁹ Staël, *Des circonstances actuelles qui peuvent terminer la Révolution*, 223.

De Staël's final points spoke to a fundamental concern about the compatibility of republican government and Christianity. She stated that although Theophilanthropy was created to defend the Republic, Protestantism was the friend of freedom and equality and had stood against the despotism of both Catholicism and Anglicanism. De Staël suggested that because of its political nature Theophilanthropy seemed not to possess true faith (*croyance véritable*). De Staël claimed that Protestantism not only possessed this true faith, but since its foundation was renowned for its morality. She ended with an appeal to the reconciliation of post-Terror France when criticizing the founders of Theophilanthropy as "soaked in blood."¹⁰

De Staël offered a clear refutation of Theophilanthropy while agreeing with Rousseau and his revolutionary acolytes on their critique of Catholicism. These criticisms of Catholicism allowed her to appropriate Rousseau yet delineate her own case for a Protestant civil religion.¹¹ Her advocacy of a union of republican and Protestant principles used Theophilanthropy as a representation of Rousseau's ideas in practice. In this depiction Theophilanthropy was the perfect foil against which to challenge Rousseau's assertions. From this position she argued that Protestantism was "the pure religion of the Gospel" Rousseau described in his and therefore the best choice for a republican civil religion. De Staël's contribution to the debate over civil religion was written in 1799. Soon after Napoleon became first Consul and in negotiation with the Papacy enacted a new Concordat. The Constitutional Church was disbanded, Theophilanthropy suppressed and the Republic soon dissolved. The theme of civil religion especially in relation to republicanism did not disappear, but returned throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

¹⁰ Ibid, 225.

¹¹ Rosenblatt, *Liberal Values*, 35.

Theophilanthropy Reborn

Theophilanthropy's legacy was more widespread and influential than either the Worship of Reason or Supreme Being. Outside France the works of Theophilanthropy were translated into several European languages. Gaspard de Grégory translated *Elementary Instruction* into Italian (*Teofilantropi*).¹² Carlo Lauberg a leader in one of the sister republics in Italy advocated for the establishment of Theophilanthropy.¹³ In England John Walker went to Paris had contact with Paine and translated the *Manuel* into English.¹⁴ James Wollstonecraft, brother of the famous author Mary also came to France to study with Paine on 29 Nivôse Year V (18 January 1797).¹⁵ Paine and François Xavier Lanthenas another theophilanthropist signed off on Wollstonecraft visit. After returning to America, Paine further disseminated Theophilanthropic concepts.¹⁶ In German lands Dietrich Wilhelm Andreae translated and Johann Gottfried Dyck published Theophilanthropic works into German in 1799 (*Theophilanthropen*).¹⁷ The problems presented by natural religion continued to influence thinkers in Germany into the romantic period.¹⁸

¹² Jean Baptiste Chemin-Dupontès, *Instruzione elementare sopra la morale religiosa ad uso de' Teofilantropi*, trans. Gaspard De Gregori (Torino: presso Denasio, 1798).

¹³ Nicola Terracciano, "Carlo Lauberg: il patriota amico della libertà," *Monitore Napoletano*, 2011.

¹⁴ Jean-Baptist Chemin-Dupontès, *Manual of the Theophilanthropes, or, Adorers of God and Friends of Man: Containing the Exposition of Their Dogmas, of Their Moral, and Their Religious Practices; with Instruction Respecting the Organization and Celebration of Their Worship*, trans. John Walker (London: Darton and Harvey, 1798); John Epps, *The Life of John Walker* (London: Whittaker, Treacher, 1832), 245.

¹⁵ France, Antonin Debidour and Pierre Cheynet, *Archives nationales. Inventaire Général De La Série AF, Sous-Série AFiii (Procès-verbaux des séances du Directoire)* (Paris: impr. nationale, 2000), 434, plaq. 2497, 15-16.

¹⁶ Thomas Paine, *The Theophilanthropist: Containing Critical, Moral, Theological and Literary Essays, in Monthly Numbers* (New York: Reprinted for the proprietors, 1810); Eric Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 75.

¹⁷ Jean Baptist Chemin-Dupontès, *Gottesverehrungen der Neufranken; oder Ritualbuch der Theophilanthropen, einer unlängst zu Paris entstandenen religiösen Gesellschaft : Aus dem Französischen Zweytes Heft Zweytes Heft*, trans. Dietrich Wilhelm Andreae (Leipzig: Dyk, 1798).

¹⁸ George S. Williamson, "Theophilanthropy in Germany: Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the Question of Liturgy," *Journal for the History of Modern Theology / Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte* 9, no. 2 (Nov 2002).

In India there is a direct connection that ties Theophilanthropy to Ram Mohan Roy one of the founders of Indian modernism.¹⁹ He was integral to the Hindu revivalist movement of the Brahmo Sabha which later evolved into the Brahmo Samaj established in 1828. Roy associated with Unitarians in Britain and Transcendentalists in America (who read his translations of the Vedas). He was also directly inspired by Theophilanthropy. In 1829 he wrote a work titled *The Universal Religion: religious instruction* which drew from Chemin-Dupontès's elementary instruction.²⁰ In the 1830s the Hindu Theophilanthropic Society emerged in India with the same purpose as Theophilanthropy.²¹ Its major focus was the advocacy of monotheism expressed through an attack against "Hindu idolatry," superstition and atheism. The Society aimed at establishing a Hindu monotheism and still has contemporary offshoots such in the Arya Samaj.²²

Roy encountered Theophilanthropy through his association with Unitarians in England.²³ The influence of Theophilanthropy on Unitarianism is evidenced by the following examples. In 1811 the Unitarian William R. Peck published "Theological tracts, by a theophilanthropist." He had earlier called it "Theological tracts by a Unitarian," but after reading John Walker's translation of the *Manuel*, Peck changed the name and borrowed heavily from Theophilanthropy. In the late nineteenth century a Unitarian writer Joseph Henry Allen, expounding on the history of Unitarianism, incorporated Theophilanthropy as a precursor to Unitarianism.²⁴

¹⁹ Ramachandra Guha, *Makers of Modern India* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press, 2011), 26.

²⁰ Rammohun Roy, *The English works of Raja Rammohun Roy* (Allahabad: Panini Office, 1906), 135; University of Calcutta, *Calcutta Review* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1844) 2: 266; Calcutta review, *Selections from the Calcutta Review* (Calcutta: T.S. Smith, 1881) 1: 746.

²¹ Hindu Theophilanthropic Society, *Discourses Read at the Meetings of the Hindu Theophilanthropic Society* (Calcutta: P.S. D'Rozario, 1844).

²² Joscelyn Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, 315-319; Margaret Chatterjee, "Reflections on religious pluralism in the Indian context," in *Culture and Modernity: East-West Philosophic Perspectives*, ed. Eliot Deutsch (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 394.

²³ Alan D. Hodder, "Emerson, Rammohan Roy, and the Unitarians," *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1988): 133-148.

²⁴ Joseph Henry Allen, *Our Liberal Movement* (Boston, Roberts brothers, 1892), 147; William R. Peck, *Theological tracts, by a theophilanthropist* (Doncaster: Thomas and Hunsley, 1811).

Political events played a critical role in the revival of Theophilanthropy. With the onset of the second Republic after 1848 the first French Revolution became a source of inspiration for the later Revolution. In 1854 Henri Carle founded the *L'Alliance religieuse universelle*.²⁵ His project was the creation of a religion based on the concepts of Deism and natural religion much like Theophilanthropy.²⁶ He was also active in Masonic circles.²⁷ Carle reasserted Chemin-Dupontès's core ideas as *Qu'est-ce que la théophilanthropie* in 1868.²⁸ The historian Lynn Sharp states, Carle's *Alliance*, "...gained the support of people like Henri Martin, Jules Michelet, Edgar Quinet, Jules Simon, Adolphe Crémieux (founder of the 'Alliance Israélite Universelle'), and Victor Hugo, all in one way or another religious free-thinkers like Carle..."²⁹ Jules Michelet in particular was the standard bearer of the first French Revolution. He supported a civil religion for France, but one which flowed from the Revolution itself.

Michelet saw the Revolution as the negation of Christianity. He stated that, "The world is waiting for a faith, to march forward again, to breathe and to live."³⁰ Even considering this fervent rejection, Michelet also recognized the debt the Revolution owed to Christianity. He states here the complex relationship between the two. "The Revolution continues Christianity, and it contradicts it. It is, at the same time, its heir and its adversary."³¹ Quinet, a compatriot of Michelet, expressed similar views using Biblical metaphors to underscore the regenerative impulse of the Revolution. He likened the Terror to the exodus as a period of trial meant to burn

²⁵ Mathiez, Albert. *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, 712.

²⁶ Ibid, 716.

²⁷ Philip G. Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 22.

²⁸ Henri Carle, *Qu'est-ce que la théophilanthropie* (Paris: Aux bureaux du journal La Libre Conscience, 1868); Mathiez, *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, 715.

²⁹ Lynn L. Sharp, *Secular Spirituality: Reincarnation and Spiritism in Nineteenth-century France* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 30.

³⁰ Jules Michelet, *History of the French Revolution*, trans. Gordon Wright (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967) 20.

³¹ Ibid, 22.

away the corrupt culture of the old regime and affect a religious-like rebirth.³² Michelet's project was to provide a narrative of the Revolution, which could be used as the foundation of a new post-Christian civilization. Was their association with Carle's *Alliance* an indication that Theophilanthropy was a possible candidate? Carle clearly thought so and he had support among the most prominent intellectuals of his day.

There were those who took up the mantle of the Revolution like Carle and Michelet, but challenges emerged as well and here Alexis de Tocqueville is central. Like Grégoire, Alexis de Tocqueville responded to the concerns of his time which once again pitted Revolution (both 1789 and 1848) against Christianity. For him, American democracy provided the best evidence for refuting Rousseau. Tocqueville was interested in finding accommodations between the nascent democratic order emerging in France and America and the traditions of his Catholic upbringing. He also inaugurated a new phase in the civil religion debate centering on a comparison between Europe and America.

In *Democracy in America* (1835-1840), Tocqueville commented on the increasing equality of conditions in history, exemplified by the new American Republic and the French Revolution. This egalitarian impulse had produced a "great democratic revolution" everywhere, but its effects also sowed confusion and were potentially destructive.³³ Tocqueville did not greet this revolution with open arms stating that, "This entire book was written in the grip of a kind of religious terror occasioned in the soul of the author by the sight of this irresistible revolution, which for centuries now surmounted every obstacle and continues to advance amid the ruins it

³² Edgar Quinet, *La Révolution*. Littérature & politique (Paris: Belin, 1987), 465.

³³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 3; Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, 83.

has created.”³⁴ There were also positive elements of this democratic revolution such as abolition of slavery. Tocqueville expressed hope for immediate abolition in the French Empire on the basis of universal Christian brotherhood.³⁵

Tocqueville’s purpose was to show that Christianity and democracy were compatible and that the republic in America provided the best evidence. In the chapter “religion considered as a political institution” Tocqueville discussed the unique set of circumstances that produced American Christianity. A seminal contribution on American civil religion Tocqueville’s essential point was that, “From the beginning (of America), politics and religion were in harmony, and they have remained so ever since.”³⁶ American Christianity began as predominantly Protestant, but in Tocqueville’s time had been the subject of large scale Catholic immigration. This made mid nineteenth-century America the perfect test case for the compatibility of republicanism and Catholic Christianity. Tocqueville concluded that “It is a mistake, in my view, to regard the Catholic religion as a natural enemy of democracy.”³⁷ Tocqueville’s analysis is backed up by historians.

Bernard Bailyn describes the three central influences of the American Revolution as neoclassicism, Christianity and the Enlightenment.³⁸ It was not the City of God which influenced the American understanding of religion, but the City on the Hill. The dichotomy between the earthly and heavenly cities was replaced with a city chosen by God for a special destiny. Viroli also makes the following point. “The patriots who founded the republic of the United States were followers of Montesquieu rather than Rousseau. Instead of attempting to invent and

³⁴ Ibid 6-7.

³⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The European Revolution Correspondence with Gobineau*, trans. John Lukacs (Garden City N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959), 221, 305.

³⁶ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 332.

³⁷ Ibid 332.

³⁸ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 22-54.

popularize a new religion, they interpreted and taught Christianity as a religion of virtue.”³⁹ This spared the American experiment from collapse while the French Revolution suffered through episodes of de-Christianization and ultimate failure. In post-revolutionary America, Christianity successfully transitioned into the role of a republican civil religion as Alexis de Tocqueville and later historians like Tracy Fessenden describe.⁴⁰

Tocqueville’s position was further solidified after the Revolution of 1848 when he wrote the *Old Regime and the Revolution* in 1856. In this seminal work he makes the following point. “For the notion that democratic regimes are necessarily hostile to religion is based on a total misconception of the facts; nothing in the Christian faith or even in Roman Catholicism is incompatible with democracy and, on the contrary, it would seem that a democratic climate is highly favorable to Christianity.”⁴¹ Tocqueville explained that the conflict between Christianity and the first French Revolution was the result of contingent political and economic problems. He states that the Church was the object of such hatred because it was also a feudal landholder.⁴² When the Revolution sought to wage war against all established powers, this brought the Church and the Revolution into conflict.⁴³ Ultimately the Revolution was political in character, but it also behaved as a religious revolution.⁴⁴ This created the appearance of a religious war between the Revolution and Christianity.

The short life of the second Republic ended the debate as Napoleon III reasserted the close ties between the French state and Catholicism. It would not be until the end of Napoleon’s

³⁹ Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli’s God*, 20; Viroli also notes that Sheldon Wolin describes American Christianity as a “Machiavellian civil religion.” Viroli, *Machiavelli’s God*, 25, Sheldon Wolin, *Tocqueville between Two Worlds The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003) 297-98.

⁴⁰ Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

⁴¹ Tocqueville, *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, 7.

⁴² Ibid 7.

⁴³ Ibid 8.

⁴⁴ Ibid 11.

reign under Prussian arms that Theophilanthropy reemerged in the tumultuous birth of the Third Republic in 1870. In France the creation of the Third Republic inaugurated a period of interest in civil religion symbolized by Durkheim and Mathiez. Durkheim like his predecessors (Saint-Simon and Comte) wanted to resolve the fundamental issues between religion and politics, declaring that his own era was one of “moral mediocrity.”⁴⁵ For Durkheim imbedding religion in “society” achieved this. Thus his work was both a sociological treatises and a work of civil religion.⁴⁶ Mathiez of course, inspired by Durkheim, explored this issue with a study of Theophilanthropy.

In 1883, a new Theophilanthropic society was started under the name Décembre-Alonnier and began publishing a newspaper called the *La Fraternité universelle* (1885-1888).⁴⁷ According to Albert Mathiez it was a movement that republished many of Chemin-Dupontès’ works.⁴⁸ In reality the central figure was Joseph Décembre who published a great deal with a compatriot Edmond Alonnier (hence the combined name). Décembre was an assumed name. He was also known as Louis de Vallières, Carolus Desmonts and Joanis Longueville. Under these aliases Décembre wrote several tracks supporting Theophilanthropy.⁴⁹ Décembre was an important Masonic leader in France, part of the *Ordre Maçonnique Mixte International (Le Droit Humain)*.⁵⁰ He was also a spiritualist, and an ordained minister (in 1896) in the Swedenborgian

⁴⁵ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 322.

⁴⁶ Marcela Cristi, “Durkheim’s Political Sociology, Civil Religion, Nationalism and Globalisation,” in *Holy Nations and Global Identities: Civil Religion, Nationalism, and Globalisation*, ed. Annika Hvithamar, Margit Warburg, and Brian Arly Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 47; José Prades, “Religion civile et religion de l’humanité: retour sur l’anthropocentrisme durkhiem,” *Social Compass* 40, no. 3 (1993): 417-19.

⁴⁷ Comité central théophilanthropique de Paris, *Almanach de la Fraternité universelle* (Paris: Comité central théophilanthropique de Paris, 1885); Mathiez, *La théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*, 715.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 716.

⁴⁹ Jean-Marie Mayeur, Yves-Marie Hilaire and Jean-Pierre Chantoin, *Dictionnaire du monde religieux dans la France contemporaine* 10 (Paris: Beauchesne, 2001), 67.

⁵⁰ Alexandra Heidle and Joannes Augustinus Maria Snoek, *Women’s Agency and Rituals in Mixed and Female Masonic Orders* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 400.

Missionary Society. He attended several conventions in the USA sponsored by the Church of New Jerusalem in America.⁵¹

New Religious Movements

One of the momentous legacies of the Enlightenment understanding of religion and Theophilanthropy are the origins of New Religious Movements.⁵² The *Interpretatio Europa* in reimagining religion as a human creation opened the door for a supernova of experimentation that spawned a proliferation of new religions. Theophilanthropy was the standard bearer of this shift as it coursed through the nineteenth century.

After the Revolution, the idea of inventing a new religion first appeared with Saint-Simon. In 1825 he advocated a “New Christianity” stripped of its non-essential elements and devised to accompany a utopian scheme for society.⁵³ The historian Jean Dautry makes the connection between Saint-Simone’s “New Christianity” and Theophilanthropy in his article, “Nouveau Christianisme ou Nouvelle Théophilanthropie?”⁵⁴ Saint-Simon subsequently influenced the work of Auguste Comte who pioneered “positivist” analysis in the social sciences and what has come to be known as secular humanism.⁵⁵ Many historians note the connections between Saint-Simon and Comte with particular reference to Comte’s “religion of humanity,” a

⁵¹ General Convention of the New Jerusalem in the United States of America, *Journal of the General Convention of the New Jerusalem in the United States of America* 83-85 (Boston: Massachusetts New-Church Union 1932), 83:205, 85:233.

⁵² For scholarship on New Religious Movements (NRM) see: David G. Bromley, “Perspective: Whither New Religions Studies?” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 8, no. 2 (November 2004): 83-97; Jean-François Mayer and R. Kranenborg, *La naissance des nouvelles religions* (Genève: Georg. 2004); James R. Lewis, *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

⁵³ Roberto Cipriani, *Sociology of Religion: An Historical Introduction* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2000), 27.

⁵⁴ Jean Dautry, “Nouveau Christianisme ou Nouvelle Théophilanthropie? Contribution à une sociologie religieuse de Saint-Simon,” *Archives de sociologie des religions* 10, no. 20 (1965): 7-29.

⁵⁵ Edward Tiryakian, *For Durkheim: Essays in Historical and Cultural Sociology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 31-33, 101.

project spanning 1851-1854.⁵⁶ This new religion was a complete system of dogma, clergy and rites and held that the new Supreme Being was none other than man himself. This was followed by an incredible proliferation of new movements in the second half of the nineteenth century and here Theosophy is an exemplar.

One critical assumption in the invention of new religions must be explored before detailing the connection between Theophilanthropy and Theosophy. This assumption is most identified with Dupuis, Volney and Paine. One of their central attacks against Christianity was the assertion that Jesus never existed. This proposition called Christianity into question, which was its purpose, but it also created another conclusion. If Jesus never existed and a religion as profoundly successful as Christianity could result from mere manipulation then such an enterprise could be realized again. One could invent a founder and a religion and conquer the earth. In terms of the civil religion, the idea that a religion could simply be invented began with Numa. The work of Dupuis, Volney and Paine returned to this ancient precept and added Jesus. The fictive founder and the “pious fraud” returned in the nineteenth century and brought the civil religion tradition full circle.

Nineteenth-century Europe was time of exploration, experimentation, hope and disillusionment with new experiments on religion proliferating. Theophilanthropy set the stage as Christopher McIntosh relates.

Trite and naive though the pronouncements of the Théophilanthropes may seem, the cult is extremely significant historically. Here we have an attempt to find common ground between all religions and sects, an attempt which enlists the support of mysterious oriental sages—in short, exactly the sort of religious eclecticism that one associates with

⁵⁶ Cipriani, *Sociology of Religion: An Historical Introduction*, 28; Mary Pickering, “Auguste Comte and the Saint-Simonians,” *French Historical Studies* 18, no. 1 (1993): 211-236; Henri Gouhier, *La jeunesse d'Auguste Comte et la formation du positivisme* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique, 1933), 2:334; David Walsh, “Reflections on the Nature of Modernity,” in *National Identity As an Issue of Knowledge and Morality*, ed. N.Z. Chavchavadze, Gia Nodia and Paul Peachey (Bucharest: PAIDEIA Press, 1994), 111

Theosophy and similar late-nineteenth-century phenomena. When the Theosophical Society was formed in 1875 it was not setting a precedent, but merely following one that had been established seventy-nine years earlier by the Théophilanthropes.⁵⁷

McIntosh is right that Theophilanthropy set the patterns employed by the founders of Theosophy and other new religions.⁵⁸ These innovators did not have to mine the works of Chemin-Dupontès from the 1790's. They only needed look to the newest variation of Theophilanthropy extant in the 1880's. The late nineteenth-century Theophilanthropy and Theosophy emerged in a similar milieu of masonry, initiate societies and spiritualism. One of the best examples of this was a series of conferences (1888-1912) of similarly inspired movements called the *L'Initiation: revue philosophique indépendante des hautes études*.⁵⁹ *L'Initiation* was formed, as its introduction stated, to oppose materialism and positivism. Theophilanthropy was one of many organizations in this movement, but one which provided critical inspiration for over one hundred years.⁶⁰

Theosophy utilized many of the assumptions established by Theophilanthropy.⁶¹ But Theosophy, founded by Helena Blavatsky in 1875, also authored unique innovations in the evolution of the civil religion/universal religion dynamic. These were the return of the “pious fraud” and the spread of civil religion beyond the confines of the state. The social purpose of Theosophy was to resist positivism and materialism.⁶² The founders of Theosophy believed this aim was noble and forgery was an acceptable means to this end. Their reputation for fraud,

⁵⁷ Christopher McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2011), 46-48; Brian Gibbons, *Spirituality and the Occult* (London: Routledge, 2000), 119-120.

⁵⁸ The different movements of this era were expansive. Beyond Eliphas Lévi in France, Aleister Crowley and Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn come to mind. In some sense the proliferation of “religions” in the nineteenth century was the bringing into the public of previously secret initiate societies.

⁵⁹ George Montière, *L'Initiation: Revue Philosophique Indépendante Des Hautes Études* 1-95 (Paris, 1888-1912).

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 4:191.

⁶¹ The founders of Theosophy eventually settled in India because they associated the Vedas and ancient Indian religion with ultimate truth. There they encountered The Arya Samaj, which was founded the same year (1875) and for time they were joined together. Both received a part of their inspiration from Theophilanthropy, though they were not aware of this fact. Henry Steel Olcott, *Theosophy; Religion, and Occult Science* (London: Redway, 1885), x; Agehananda Bharati, “The Hindu Renaissance and its Apologetic Patterns,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 29, no. 2 (1970): 267-287; Joscelyn Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, 315-320.

⁶² Olcott, *Theosophy; Religion, and Occult Science*, 13.

plagiarism and invention was epic.⁶³ In Theosophy the founder remained central, but was a conscious invention. The case of Kuthumi and Krishnamurti are illustrative. Elliott Coues and Henry Olcott, two of Blavatsky's compatriots republished Dodsley's *Oeconomy* under the name of Kuthumi in 1886.⁶⁴ He was one of the "Mahatmas" hidden in the mountains of Tibet guiding humanity and Blavatsky through a psychic connection. Later another Theosophist Annie Besant who was a prominent mason in the *Ordre Maçonnique Mixte International* attempted to groom an adopted child to become a messiah by the name Jiddu Krishnamurti. He was styled as a world teacher or Maitreya.

The Oeconomy of human life by Dodsley became an essential document of modern civil religion. This was in part because the East became a central trop for a search of spiritual truth in the nineteenth century, just as Egypt was for the eighteenth (Masonry). The assumption was that the more ancient a civilization the closer it came to revealing eternal truths. After *The Oeconomy* was included in Theophilanthropy, it was incorporated into Theosophy. In the twentieth century *The Oeconomy* became part of the "Koran" of the Moorish Science Temple. The Moorish Science Temple was a pseudo-Islamic black nationalistic movement in America which placed the true origins of Africans in Asia (black people were an ancient race of gods whose advanced civilization was destroyed by the white race).⁶⁵ In Theosophy the "Great White Lodge" represented a lineage of Aryan paragons. In the Moorish Science Temple this was overturned and the black man became the ancient paragon (while still looking East for

⁶³ Mark Bevir, "The West Turns Eastward: Madame Blavatsky and the Transformation of the Occult Tradition," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 3 (Autumn, 1994): 747-767; René Guénon, *Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion* (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001); Vladimir Solovyov and Walter Leaf, *A Modern Priestess of Isis* (London: n.p., 1895), 358.

⁶⁴ Elliott Coues and Henry Olcott, *Kuthumi: The True and Complete Oeconomy of Human Life, Based on the System of Theosophical Ethics* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1886).

⁶⁵ Nathaniel Deutsch, "'The Asiatic Black Man': An African American Orientalism?," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 4, no. 3 (2001): 193-208.

inspiration). A likely scenario is that the founder of the Moorish Science Temple, Noble Drew Ali engaged in his own “pious fraud” aimed at empowering black Americans using Islamic symbolism. He copied elements of Theosophy in particular the already plagiarized *Oeconomy* and incorporated it into his “Koran.” The Moorish Science Temple was a precursor to the Nation of Islam and the Nation of Gods and Earths which has been a favorite source of black empowerment from the 1970’s to contemporary hip-hop culture. Jay-Z and Kanye West both use its symbolism.⁶⁶

The civil religion concept had now come full circle with the creation of religion as an act of willful forgery in support of an ostensible social purpose. No longer tied to the state these endeavors were worldwide movements or the domain of specific ethnic groups. Complete with fraudulent founders this is the return of the pious fraud in the modern period. Today the heritage of these trends is exemplified by Scientology. Hubbard established Scientology as a kind of self-help seminar and competitor with psychology. Régis Dericquebourg describes how Scientology claims that one can be a member of any religion and also be a Scientologist. For Dericquebourg this represents a kind of universal umbrella encompassing all religion which he explicitly associates with Theophilanthropy.⁶⁷

Laïcité

The debate over religion in the late nineteenth century was similar to earlier debates although the scale increased dramatically. All the solutions offered were dizzying and were perhaps overwhelming and for some cynicism and revulsion must have greeted this proliferation

⁶⁶ For more information see: Arthur Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis; Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971); Michael Muhammad Knight, *The Five Percenters: Islam, Hip-Hop, and the Gods of New York* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007).

⁶⁷ Régis Dericquebourg, “How should we regard the religious ceremonies of the Church of Scientology?” in *Scientology*, ed. James R Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 171.

of bizarre systems. In many ways Nietzsche was symbolic of this disillusionment. “This is the great and strange problem with which I have so long been occupied: the psychology of the ‘improvers’ of mankind. A small, and at bottom perfectly insignificant fact, known as the *pia faus* (pious fraud), the heirloom of all philosophers and priests who ‘improve’ mankind. Neither Manu, nor Plato, nor Confucius, nor the teachers of Judaism and Christianity, have ever doubted their right to falsehood.”⁶⁸ Echoing earlier critiques that religion was priestcraft and rejecting Christianity, Nietzsche savaged the underlying assumptions of the civil religion tradition from its earliest expressions to his own day. In the end the solution seemed to be to table the entire discussion. And this is where *Laïcité* comes into the picture.

Laïcité, in salaried leaders of only certain clergy, stripped many other groups of legitimacy. Even though the state supposedly remained neutral, in defining and legalizing only certain systems of worship, the state knowingly sought to eliminate others. Smaller fringe groups operating on the margins would be eliminated. No longer able to publically proclaim they would not be able to sustain themselves. However, the strategies used against one religion may be used against another in the future. Just as the state sought to purge French society of all the little bizarre religions in 1905, today it turns its hostility towards a much larger and well established religion, Islam.

Joseph Décembre, the founder of a new Theophilanthropy, like his predecessors in the first French Revolution struggled with the prospect of a new secular regime. At the Convention of the New Jerusalem held in Boston on June 1905, he lamented the potential negative effects of *Laïcité*. “Under the circumstances we have been obliged, for two years, to suspend public worship and meetings, and confine ourselves to individual worship and to the assistance of

⁶⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche and Anthony M. Ludovici, *Twilight of the idols; with The antichrist; and Ecce homo* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2007), 40.

members of the society only. This has seriously injured the propaganda of our teachings.”⁶⁹ So the supposed neutrality of the state was not extended to everyone. Spiritualist movements and other esoteric, exotic or peculiar religions found little hope in this new movement of secularization.

⁶⁹ General Convention of the New Jerusalem in the United States of America, *Journal of the General Convention of the New Jerusalem*, 85:164.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION AND EPILOGUE

The ontological reversal authored by the Enlightenment upended the previous view that the world represented a divine creation and established the world as a human centered reality. Part of this shift was that Enlightenment philosophers reimagined religion as a universal human phenomenon rooted in nature. This supposition forms the basis for the modern concept of civil religion and secularism alike, both of which see religion as manipulable. With this reversal the prospect of creating a religion became a conceptual possibility and opened up an era of experimentation that continues to this day. Along with those who continue to see the world as a divine creation these perspectives have come to define the relationship of religion and politics in modernity. And at the origin and nexus of these developments was Theophilanthropy.

The experimental process of the French Revolution provided a laboratory for the ideas of the Enlightenment to be implemented. Revolutionaries first attempted to bring the French Catholic Church under the dominion of the revolutionary state. Enunciated by Treilhard, the state now claimed to be the final arbiter over religion. The attempt to create a revolutionary Christian civil religion failed and provided the impetus for further experimentation. In the radical period revolutionaries rejected *religion* as a system of belief and institutions in favor of non-Christian systems of worship tied to the state. The Worship of Reason and Supreme Being along with de-Christianization defined an era of intense conflict. The failure of these endeavors and the crisis they engendered created the conditions for the emergence of the modern notion of civil religion, the invention of a new religion and the institution of secular law.

The Directorial era was a repetition of the radical period with de-Christianization and revolutionary religion pitted against one another. The Thermidorian Convention and Directory

revived de-Christianization in the form of a new legal regime proscribing all worship for the sake of public order. At the same moment Theophilanthropy rose in prominence with the aid of leading intellectuals and politicians. In this replaying of the radical period, de-Christianization and revolutionary civil religion evolved into more modern variants. By “modern” I mean that each movement came to resemble present practice to a greater degree.

The new claims of the state over religion were fully realized in the transition to the Directory. This was principally in the service of a new secular conception of the state established by the separation of Church and state and the laws forbidding public worship. The role of a civil religion in this new secular regime was affiliated with the state, but legally separate. From Ancient Rome to Rousseau religion was united with the state. With Theophilanthropy an autonomous religion was tied the revolutionary state, but remained legally and conceptually separate. Where religion remains important in the West this connected, but separate relationship is the norm. Thus the relationship between the Directory and Theophilanthropy resembles the relationship between religion and politics in modern pluralistic and secular states.

The Enlightenment assertion that religion was a human creation opened the way for the invention of a new religion. Chemin-Dupontès created Theophilanthropy based on the interpretation of reason and nature as representatives of essential truth and primal reality. While based on these intellectual assumptions, Theophilanthropy emerged from the specific climate of the post-Terror Revolution.

Not content with a mere system of worship, some revolutionaries sought to establish a *religion* with a fully formed system of dogmas, rituals, institutions and clergy. This was in part necessitated by the new laws separating religion and politics. Thus a non-Christian natural

religion was detached forcibly and willingly from the state and adopted a separate and autonomous structure. Now independent from the state its legacy while inextricably linked to the Revolution was also free to inspire myriad other movements into the nineteenth century. The French Revolution as the praxis of the Enlightenment “construction” of religion provided the incubator for the emergence of a newly created religion in the modern era. Theophilanthropy’s role as a precursor and originator in this regard cannot be undervalued.

Finally is secularization, which resulted from the assertion that religion was under human dominion and therefore the state could claim the right to remove religion from public life. While based on Enlightenment assumptions, secularization was also part of a process of trial and error. Secularization as a political solution only came about because other solutions failed and revolutionaries grew exhausted by the violence afflicting the Revolution. The conclusion for these men was the institutionalization of de-Christianization into a new secular regime. This legal system transmuted Christianity into a representative of a universal phenomenon of “religion” and thus the separation of Church and state became the separation of religion and worship from the state. And the prohibitions against Christianity in Year II became a suppression of all forms of worship.

This process exposes secularization as a political program aimed at domesticating religion to secular authority using the intellectual values developed in the Enlightenment. Instituted in 1795 by the Thermidorian Convention and then the Directory this secular regime was swept away by the Concordat. This lineage leads to several conclusions. Secularization is not inevitable. Secularization is not permanent once established. And the claims of the Enlightenment and by extension modernity that religion is a human creation are not sufficient justification for the proscription, coercion and violence employed by secular laws.

Epilogue

With respect to the “construction” of religion, one might say that this has always been so—that religion is always and everywhere a human invention. However, that point only underscores the pervasiveness of this Enlightenment perspective in contemporary understandings (in the academy in particular). But the historian must remember that this perspective is a product of particular time in history. When that is forgotten, the origins of this perspective are obscured. People did not always believe such, and Theophilanthropy was integral to a new way of thinking. The notion that religion was a human creation was not unique to the Enlightenment. It harkened back to the classical world, as exemplified by the civil religion of Rome. Therefore the assumptions and conclusions of the Enlightenment interpretation of religion ought not to be viewed as permanent or eternal, but a set of claims like any other, capable of surviving or perishing.

This reversal has produced a proliferation of different options which represents, in Charles Taylor’s words, a “supernova” of new religious and metaphysical possibilities.¹ One wonders if the vast proliferation of modernity is an aberration. As described in this dissertation there have been two inversions, broadly speaking: The rise of Christianity and the Enlightenment. This suggests that such changes are not unique or irreversible. Those who uphold the view that religion is a human creation are no doubt confident in its truth and continued stability, but as the study of religion shows a different way of thinking was, and still is possible. There are three trajectories of the shift in human consciousness explored here; the academic legacy of the Enlightenment view of religion, the contemporary practice of civil religion and secularization.

¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 299.

Academic Legacy

In antiquity the idea that religion was a human creation was tied to the city, beginning with the polis it found its ultimate expression in Rome. In the modern period “nature” became the vehicle for the return of this idea. However, in modernity the particular conceptual lens that defines religion as a human product does not stay the same. Modernity continually introduces new realms from which to interpret the world. Nature gave way to more elaborate visions each with its own delineation of “reality” and each universal in scope. In the nineteenth century this development was exemplified by structuralism, which established a hierarchical relationship between an ultimate reality and its secondary manifestations. The best example was Marxist and Freudian analysis and its derivatives in critical social theory. As this process evolved it transitioned into the academy. The most common categories used today are race, class and gender.

Once in the academy new interpretive realms proliferated and along with them new academic departments. The invention of these categories is one manifestation of a larger impulse. The drive that spawned new religions also birthed the innumerable conceptual realms of the academy. Throughout this process theorists interpreted religion as a byproduct of an essence, first from divine to natural essence and later to a social essence. The final transition comes with McCutcheon where religion ceases to be suspended in a dichotomy between essence and artifice. The essence is sloughed off leaving only artifice. Religion is reduced to a mere academic construct. McCutcheon’s critique accepts the fundamental truth claims of the Enlightenment: that religion is a human creation. He assumes modernity and only seeks to deconstruct the so called “construction.” He thus remains entrapped within modernist

conceptions. His aim is simply to relocate “religion” from the domain of human experience to the academy.

His argument itself is a repetition of the Enlightenment critique of religion. By claiming to have uncovered the occult “occluded” history of religion and having exposed the manipulations of a specialist class of interpreters (academics) McCutcheon has transposed the arguments of thinkers like Volney, Pain and Dupuis into the present. By exposing the “fiction” of religion McCutcheon has returned to the truth claims of the radical Enlightenment. His conclusions were inherent in the Enlightenment ontology and so McCutcheon has brought the Enlightenment concept of religion to its logical conclusion.

In the end when the use of these academic frames proposes that religion can simultaneously be everything and nothing, the Enlightenment project and its progeny are exposed as figments of human imagination baring no relation to any reality. But one wonders what the solipsistic imaginings of academic observers really have to say about religion? What McCutcheon says about “religion” can equally be said of any academic discipline. Are they not all artifacts of human ingenuity? What do these categories become, but “useful” fictions? Why not discard them all.

Civil Religion: Interpretatio Americana

The Enlightenment interpretation of religion, the *Interpretatio Europa*, provided the basis for contemporary American civil religion. Robert Bellah’s description of America civil religion defines a system which is centered on appeals to an abstract divinity because it can be universal without giving voice to sectarianism. Bellah quotes Jefferson as evidence of this unique American experiment. “I never doubted, for instance, the existence of the Deity; that he made the world and govern'd it by his Providence; that the most acceptable service of God was the

doing of good to men; that our souls are immortal; and that all crime will be punished, and virtue rewarded either here or hereafter. These I esteemed the essentials of every religion; and, being to be [sic] found in all the religions we had in our country, I respected them all,”² Jefferson, an American *philosophe* was elucidating the Enlightenment interpretation of religion. The basic parameter of his religion bears a striking similarity to Rousseau’s dogmas of civil religion.

Bellah understands current American civil religion as the worship (using Durkheim) of a non-confessional abstract God in conjunction with the sacralization of institutions, civil ceremonies and national festivals. Bellah quotes President Dwight Eisenhower to illustrate this. “Our government makes no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith—and I don’t care what it is...”³ Leclerc was suggesting something quit similar. What certain revolutionaries attempted with natural religion and Theophilanthropy, America achieved with a nonsectarian Christianity. Other religions were soon incorporated, after WWII Americas religious heritage became “Judeo-Christian.” Today those included in this civil religion grows ever larger, far beyond the initial Protestant Christian foundation.

A solely Christian civil religion is no longer possible and the state has adapted. American civil religion, sometimes called pluralism, sacralizes the state not as an object of worship, but as a temple where all religion can worship together and includes those individuals who believe in nothing. Like Rome, the American system provides a means to overcome religious diversity in multi-national and multi-confessional “empire.” Empires do this by establishing the nation/*patria* and the state as a channel through which innumerable religions can express their allegiance and devotion. American civil religion serves the same function as the imperial cult (as a unifying force in a diverse empire). Not by worshiping the nation, but by

² Robert Bellah, “Civil religion in america,” 42.

³ Ibid, 43-44.

folding many systems of worship under patriotic and civic participation. All faiths are welcome as long as they submit to the power of the state. This is the *Interpretatio Americana*. It remains to be seen whether this diversity become the new norm or will it collapse as it did in Roman Civilization?

Secularization and Islam

When secularization is no longer inevitable, but simply one perspective among others alternatives become conceivable or even desirable. If secularization cannot conceive of itself as an inherent good (which inevitability implies) it no longer has any rights of persecution against that which it considers an obsolete “residue” of an antiquated age. As a result secularists must rationalize their program of proscription as beneficial to society. In this vein one of the central tools secularists use to advance their agenda is to malign religion as a threat. The Thermidorian Convention, masking their policies of proscription as an issue of public security used this strategy. But the threat narrative obscures the role secular policies play in creating, sustaining and pursuing conflict with religion.

Lilla describes the experimental nature of secularization aptly, but his work is also a prime example of the contemporary political agenda of secularization. One of the most important theoretical pillars secularists use to rationalize the forcible removal of religion from public life is the political theology concept. At times this concept under the label political religion is used by believers to condemn ideology as a perverse inversion of religion and therefore advocate a legitimate role for “true” religion to inoculate against the poisonous influence of fanatical ideology.⁴ Political theology is, however, primarily used by secularists to

⁴ For believers who argue for the persistence of religion by comparing religion to movements like nationalism, fascism and communism it is something of a devil’s bargain. Comparing religion to ideologies which are known in

malign religion by associating it with the great crimes of history. Their aspiration is to thereby rationalize the quarantine of religion from public life, lest its influence unleash further calamities.

At this stage the concepts “religion” and “secularization,” intertwined as they are, have lost their coherence and become fluid. They can be molded and manipulated to suit any end. Scholars now have a variety of different “religions” from which to choose, each able to suit a particular purpose. In one instance religion may be conceived in such a way that it appears in decline and provides evidence for secular prophecies regarding the supposed extinction of religion. In another case religion is defined as a human artifact and subject to the demands of the civil state. Or religion can be resurgent, but only in the most abstract and vague terms. Thus “religion” becomes a means by which secularists can lay blame for the great horrors of the twentieth century, even those committed by avowed atheists, at the feet of God (or an abstract approximation of God).

As theories of secularization become unsustainable, a recognition that secularization is an experimental political program becomes necessary. This is not merely a theoretical debate because the methods of proscription employed by secularization have dire consequences. If religion does not acquiesce to a proscribed condition it is deemed illegitimate and marginalized; described as archaic, fanatical and superstitious. The state that employs secular policies then uses a variety of coercive tools to suppress dissent. These strategies are consistent from the French Revolution to the present day. There are numerous contemporary examples, but one stands out because it involves a religion (Islam) which continues to assert a political identity in the face of secular ideology which deems religion to be necessarily apolitical.

the world for great horrors may challenge the idea of disenchantment, but blackens the name of religion by basing such comparisons on mass murder, persecution and fanaticism.

In scholarship the primary vehicle for the attempted domestication of Islam is a variation of the political religion concept, “Political Islam.” What scholars describe as a useful theoretical frame is in reality an academic corollary to the political desires to domesticate Islam. Talal Asad has keyed in on the main points here.

...the insistence that religion has an autonomous essence—not to be confused with the essence of science, or of politics, or of common sense—invites us to define religion (like an essence) as a transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon. It may be a happy accident that this effort of defining religion converges with the liberal demand in our time it be kept quite separate from politics, law, and science—spaces in which varieties of power and reason articulate our distinctively modern life. This definition is at once part of a strategy (for secular liberals) of confinement, and (for liberal Christians) of the defense of religion. Yet this separation of religion from power is a modern Western norm, the product of a unique post-Reformation history. The attempt to understand Muslim traditions by insisting that in them religion and politics (two essences of modern society tries to keep conceptually and practically apart) are coupled must, in my view, lead to failure. At its most dubious, such attempts encourage us to take up an a priori position in which religious discourse in the political arena is seen as a disguise for political power.⁵

Part of the project of domestication is to define “true” Islam as apolitical. In this way a “true” Muslim will submit to secular authority. One is reminded of the Directorate of L’Isère’s claims that “true” Christians submit to the authority of the state. When Muslims reject domestication and banishment from politics it is “political Islam.” As if the normative state of Islam is nonpolitical and that if Islam interjects itself into politics this is a violation. The current practice of *Laïcité* exposes the truth, that secularization is force. It is instituted in law and imposed using police powers. The Muslim question in Europe has exposed the fiction of secularization’s inevitability and unmasked it as an ideological and political program.

The use of “political Islam” is largely confined to Western academics. The domestication of Islam in the political sphere is defined by the last fifty years of secular Arab nationalism. Secular Arab dictators have conducted the agenda of secularization in the same fashion as the

⁵ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 28-29.

French Revolution, through state terror. The consequences have been catastrophic, the heart of fanaticism in the world today beats in the ruins of secular regimes; in the crumbling societies of Syria and Iraq, once Baathist strongholds. These extreme solutions; secularism and fanaticism are two sides of the same coin. One extreme invariably leads to another.

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