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## Religion and the New Politics

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### 4. Beyond Western Civilization

#### Toward the Recentering of Catholic Politics

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#### Abstract

A number of Catholic political movements have developed in recent decades contesting Catholic accommodations with political liberalism since World War II, particularly in the areas of human rights and religious liberty. Some of these thinkers, such as Remi Brague, Pierre Manent, and to some extent Pope Benedict XVI, seek to reconstruct liberal rational discourse around its Catholic roots in pursuit of civilizational defense. Others, such as Patrick Deneen, seek to move past liberalism in favor of a more organically grounded localist (or nationalist) politics. This essays argues that such a turn against liberalism is mistaken and should be opposed by a “liberal post-liberalism” integrating the most important elements of liberalism and the postwar consensus while embracing course corrections in certain areas. Dialogue partners in this effort include Martha Nussbaum, Enrique Dussel, and Pope Francis. Ultimately, the turn Francis has made in Catholic social teaching toward the common good and the earth is far more constructive than the anti-liberal trajectory.

Keywords: Western Civilization, Antiliberalism, political theology, Catholic politics, Postliberalism

## Introduction

Giuliana Chamedes, in her masterful study of the Vatican's role in European politics and diplomacy between the First World War and the eve of the Second Vatican Council, notes that at the end of World War II, Pope Pius XII experienced a surge in popularity. Not despite but because of his neutrality during the war itself, he was viewed by Americans and Germans alike as a fair arbiter and particularly an enemy of Soviet Communism. He was thus dubbed by some with the title "*defensor civitatis*," defender of civilization (Chamedes 2019, 257). This title, and the worldview that it represents, serves as a fitting beginning for this study, which will seek to question the implications of a title like this and a role like this for the church vis-à-vis its heritage of cultural associations.

Western civilization, however defined, has consistently been framed by conservatives as in need of saving. From Oswald Spengler to Samuel Huntington, right-wing thinkers have framed themselves as defenders of civilization against barbarism. This is perhaps most recently and infamously expressed in Michael Anton's pseudonymous 2016 essay, "The Flight 93 Election," in which he laments threats to the West both from within (progressive liberalism) and from without (immigrants) (Publius Decius Mus). This civilizational defense has not been exclusive to the right – many American and European liberals have also regarded Western civilization as worth defending but for different reasons. On this conception, which takes a variety of forms, Western civilization has thrived precisely on Enlightenment values that it must seek to defend and spread, though the means for the latter in particular is frequently disputed.

Western civilization as a concept has particular purchase in Catholic thought. Given the church's historic role in building up European culture following the end of the Roman Empire and the key role it has had in many European countries up until very recently, there is a sense in which many Catholics view the church as a kind of stakeholder in this civilizational project. The dramatic fire at Notre-Dame de Paris in April 2019 underscored this point and seemed to provide confirmation for many of the inextricable link between the church and the great intellectual and artistic monuments of Europe. Beyond this popular sense, however, lies a great conflict over the future of the global church as well as the path of the church in the Western world.

This essay examines how discourses around secularization and "Western civilization" have informed Catholic political discourse and the Catholic vote in ways that have benefited the nationalist right in the United States as well as Poland, Italy, and Brazil among other nations. The first part details the theoretical foundations behind such politics in the works of Pierre Manent, Remi Brague, and other thinkers, as well as the practical ways in which this dynamic has weaponized discourses around secularization and the cultural siege mentality (particularly around abortion and LGBTQ concerns) in the American context. It follows in the second part by tracking the Catholic engagement with liberalism and other related discourses such as human rights following World War II. It proposes that a way forward can be found by in the form of what I provisionally call a "liberal postliberalism" and with

reference to contemporary concerns brought to the fore by Pope Francis, particularly economic inequality and climate change.

The relevance of this discussion extends well beyond intra-Catholic political debates. The discussions described here have important implications for the future of American political institutions writ large, particularly given the influence of conservative Catholics within institutions such as the U.S. Supreme Court. They also have important implications for debates about the future of the European Union, which itself is rooted in Catholic politics on that continent after World War II. As the conclusion will demonstrate, the global nature of the Catholic church and the hegemony (up until now, at least) of Western civilization means that Catholic debates about Western civilization end up exercising an outsized influence of the lives and freedoms of neutral observers relative to their percentage of the U.S. or global population.

### Western Civilization and the Contemporary Political Situation

Pierre Manent's work seeks to situate Christianity against Western culture taken more broadly and particularly the modern phenomenon of secularism. For Manent, France and indeed Europe stand at a crossroads between secularism and the rise of Islam (2016, 17–19). His thinking on this point oscillates in some sense between the liberal defense of Western civilization as having bequeathed certain rational values that must be accepted to be a good-faith discourse partner and a conservative defense of Western civilization as a particularly Christian project under threat from outsiders. On such a reading, the rational discourse of liberalism ought not to be abandoned, but it needs to be rooted more firmly in its Christian origins to truly achieve its goals. Civilizational defense is not possible without a proper understanding of what civilization one is seeking to defend and why.

For Manent, then, the important project for the current moment is not the defense of a political order such as liberalism but rather a defense of a certain kind of civilization from threats internal and external. This kind of thinking will recur in some of the other thinkers considered here, and its implications are significant. Given that political structures are utilitarian, there is implicit in this form of thinking a preparedness to seek alternate structures that better preserve the deeper veins of civilization, namely, religion and culture. For thinkers like Manent, the postwar consensus around democracy can and should be questioned because, on their accounting, it accomplishes one kind of good (political representation) while sacrificing deeper values such as cultural heritage. Manent has further revealed his priorities in the framing of his book *Democracy Without Nations?* where he argues that the European project has undermined national identities (2007, 34–35). The European project, while of course reflecting the traditional boundaries of Christian Europe in various ways, for thinkers like Manent undercuts the cultural particularities and self-governance of nations and thus threatens to homogenize them into a bland collective. Such a framing naturally opens out toward a kind of Christian nationalism in which the nation and its Christian identity are foundational for any political projects.

Remi Brague, like Manent, has pursued the question of the West's departure from its best ideals. He does so in terms of critiquing what he calls the "modern project," which diagnoses the world as in "a chaos: there is no order except where it is created by human effort" (2018, 4). For Brague, the problem is that the Enlightenment project ultimately has as its goal a remaking of humanity. This may seem like a highly abstract point, but this train of thought in

fact has political implications that appear more clearly in some of Brague's less theoretical works. For example, in Brague's essay "Can Europe Survive Modernity?" he situates the development of European culture squarely within the Christian Middle Ages, particularly its dependence on internal material resources and external modes of thought, what he calls a kind of "self-development" (2019, 19–20). Modernity inverts this dynamic by exploiting resources from abroad and turning within intellectually. Brague's proposal here is provocative in its implication about the European colonial project and exploitation of resources from abroad but does not get beyond the overall rhetoric of civilizational defense (the essay's ultimate objective is to resist any inclusion of Turkey in the European Union). I will argue in the conclusion that this critique of European exploitation of external resources can be taken in another, more constructive direction.

It should come as no surprise that France has produced perspectives such as those of Brague and Manent. France since the Revolution and particularly the Dreyfus Affair has been one of the major sites of tensions between Catholicism and the secular state. Indeed, the importance of French theologians of the twentieth century such as Henri de Lubac and Marie-Dominique Chenu is inseparable from their positioning within the political milieu of Vichy and the Resistance (Kirwan 2018). This same milieu brought about modernizing shifts within the church and Europe after the war. Though some of these figures would later forswear political theology as such, there is no doubt that their theological perspectives were politically grounded. Manent and Brague are clearly trying to avoid an overly reactionary framing while still fundamentally questioning some of the presuppositions that have been widely shared in postwar European Catholic thought.

Against the backdrop of these French thinkers sits perhaps surprisingly the German right-wing thinker Carl Schmitt. Schmitt is most known for his work in the 1920s and 30s, where he was a steadfast defender of the Nazi regime. Schmitt's career, however, lasted until the 1970s, and his later work has even clearer implications for today's world inasmuch as he commented there on the Second Vatican Council and the rise of contemporary political theology as embodied in figures such as Johann Baptist Metz. Schmitt takes issue with Metz particularly on the issue of eschatology: "I think that such a progressive, plurivalent, hominising society permits only that kind of eschatology which is immanent to the system and therefor also progressive and plurivalent" (2008, 54). For Schmitt, Metz's political theology – and by extension the postwar and conciliar Catholic move toward a more inclusive political vision – is grounded in an inadequate anthropology in a way markedly similar to Deneen and Brague's critiques of Enlightenment liberalism. Schmitt ultimately embraces a conflictual vision of politics in which conflicts have to be settled by shifts in power relations; to think otherwise, on his accounting, is dangerously naïve (2008, 113–14). For the present discourse, Schmitt is increasingly relevant in that his willingness to countenance and advocate for an illiberal political Christianity over and against postwar developments has taken on new life in contemporary conservative thought.

In the U.S. context, right-wing thinkers have relied to a large extent on those discussed above while adapting to the local context. The most important expositor of this approach in American Catholic discourse has been Patrick Deneen. His book *Why Liberalism Failed* has diagnosed a two-pronged liberalism which encompasses much of what is typically seen as "liberal" and "conservative" politics in the U.S. context. Such political oppositions, he argues,

are two sides of the same coin, both feeding from the same ultimately liberal trough. Both embrace different kinds of libertarianism, emphasizing freedom from economic constraint on the one hand or from sexual and behavioral constraint on the other. Liberalism creates what he calls a liberal society that “commends self-interest, the unleashed ambition of individuals, an emphasis on private pursuits over a concern for the public weal, and an acquired ability to maintain psychic distance from any other human” (2018, 165). The political dichotomy between the two, then, is really no choice at all. Deneen’s solution is to abandon ideology in favor of culture, rooted ultimately in the practices of organically-formed communities.

Deneen’s argument has deep resonances with Manent’s and Brague’s. Indeed, these thinkers give big-picture analyses of how the Enlightenment constructed a vision of the human person that has failed to deliver happiness and prosperity. Rather than accept a Nietzschean or Foucauldian postmodern critique that would center this problem in power relations and the incompatibility of Enlightenment reason with human desire, these thinkers have rather sought to reconstruct a traditional counter-Enlightenment narrative. Like all such reconstructions, however, these visions presuppose the very utopianism they seek to critique. The location of that utopia simply shifts to an imagined past such as Brague’s Middle Ages, but still would require substantial ideological reconstruction of society to attain today. Just as the Enlightenment itself was a constructive project, so too attempts to get behind it to reclaim premodern values are attempting similar constructions upon the vision of the human person bequeathed by it.

What is new in the U.S. context is the rise of the illiberal right, particularly in certain Catholic circles. This movement has a history, particularly in the 1960s and 70s, that is illustrative and worth briefly sketching. Much of it owes to L. Brent Bozell and his *Triumph* magazine, founded as a Catholic alternative to more mainstream conservative journals (Allitt 1993, 141). *Triumph*’s tone is effectively summed up in an essay by Bozell emphasizing that the U.S. “is not a Christian country. The case can be made that it never was in the sense that its public life, as opposed to the private beliefs of its citizens, had a distinctively Christian character.” Bozell’s proposal amid this secular nation that is not Christian and certainly not Catholic is to propose a Christian program or “city” in which the church would provide through her “divine and natural laws . . . the constitution of the city with which any human legislation would be expected to comport” (Bozell 2004, 32). Bozell’s is thus a kind of neo-medieval model of the church standing over and against the state exercising a decisive power over it. This model fits awkwardly into the U.S. context, particularly as a Catholic contribution in the Vatican II era when the church had begun to embrace religious liberty as a positive good.

Bozell’s project tried to map European debates onto the U.S. political context in other ways. *Triumph* notably ran a February 1974 article by Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn criticizing Christian Democratic parties as a contradiction in terms inasmuch as they seek to baptize a form of government that does not fully acknowledge the fact that all authority ultimately comes from God (2004, 604). These parties, he argues, “have sometimes not made full use of their rights to abolish laws incompatible with Christian values,” and have on the whole failed to fully recognize “the enemy on the left” (2004, 604). The “enemy” discussion evokes Schmitt’s conflictual vision, and the argument that laws incompatible with Christian values need to be abolished suggests that the role of a politician promoting Christian values in the

public square is not to persuade others of them but rather to use political power to make them enforceable by the state. While seemingly alien to the American context of the time, it articulates a vision that has become increasingly relevant in right-wing circles.

The illiberal right in U.S. Catholic thought, then, has gained new prominence in part due to a sense, occasioned in particular by social change on issues like same-sex marriage, that the structures of liberalism have failed to produce a fair ideological playing field. Rather than a neutral sphere in which competing values can be contested, these voices consider liberalism (the political vision rooted in the Enlightenment which stands behind institutions such as American democracy) to be an ideologically freighted project which itself imposes values on people it encounters. This illiberal tradition has always coexisted as a minority voice within the conservative coalition particularly within U.S. Catholicism. It accounts for the stridency that has often characterized segments of the right-to-life movement, though this has also come from more neoconservative voices (Millies 2018, 128–29). The pace of social change, particularly on issues surrounding gender, and the sense that persuasion has failed have thus increased the appeal of illiberal, anti-democratic points of view on the right. The participation of conservative Catholic groups in advocacy to overturn the 2020 election results demonstrates this point.

This movement has gained traction in part because it has played into existing “culture war” narratives whose rhetoric frequently approaches the apocalyptic in tone; the saga of Father Frank Pavone, a once-“mainstream” pro-life leader whose rhetoric has become particularly extreme and politically partisan, is telling (Millies 2018, 190–92). Given the repeated failures of culture war conservatives to attain their goals – and the triangulation they have received from conservative political figures who rely on their votes – they have become increasingly desperate. The Trump administration, then, has been accepted by many Catholic conservatives as a means to an end through vanquishing of shared enemies and promotion of common goals. Rather than the God-sent King Cyrus of the right-wing evangelical or fundamentalist embrace, then, Trump figures for conservative Catholics more as a figure who despite his noxious personal qualities and lack of true personal interest in any of their causes opens a possible space for the advance of their vision. Catholic “Never Trump” thinkers who embrace Deneen’s right-liberalism such as George Weigel seem particularly adrift under these circumstances, since many of their causes have benefited even as their political philosophy has run completely aground (Weigel 2018, 40–44). The neoconservative Catholic project always had contradictions, particularly surrounding the Iraq War, but in the Trump era it has lost any claims to political trenchancy while also increasingly being out of touch with the direction of the church under Pope Francis.

For the illiberal project, civilizational preservation is more important than any given form of government. Given that there is no foolproof government and liberal democracy is relatively young, this argument goes, it is no tragedy to go in search of a more adequate, though less representative, form of government for civilizational preservation. Inasmuch as this project seeks to embrace Catholic social teaching, it can draw upon the corporatist tradition of Catholic thought particularly from the 1920s, and from the ways in which Popes Pius XI and Pius XII sought to carve out space for Catholic movement within some decidedly illiberal regimes precisely because of the wider threat that they perceived in the form of international communism (Chamedes 2019; Chappel 2018; Moyn 2015).

The later career of Joseph Ratzinger, particularly some of his notable works as Pope, has played into this narrative in important ways. Ratzinger's Regensburg address became infamous for its treatment of Islam, and indeed that issue is relevant for this discussion inasmuch as fear of Islam lies behind much of the right-wing civilizational rhetoric. Yet it is ultimately more important for its rhetoric surrounding de-Hellenization, which asserts Greek thought as having epistemic superiority for Christianity over any other (Benedict XVI 2006). Here and elsewhere, Ratzinger insists on the inseparable relationship between Christianity and Western culture. The letter that Ratzinger, as emeritus Pope, wrote concerning the sexual abuse crisis, betrays a similar fixation on Western culture and its norms (Benedict XVI 2019).

Ratzinger is important for this narrative because his hermeneutic of Vatican II functioned also as a civilizational hermeneutic. For Ratzinger, Vatican II served as a necessary path-straightening for the church that allowed it to move past Tridentine models that were no longer functioning, even as the institution itself remained basically the same in its essential elements. This took full form in his articulation of a "hermeneutics of reform in continuity" as opposed to a "hermeneutics of rupture," with its danger of forgetting what was essential in the name of novelty (Benedict XVI 2005). In the same way, the events of the twentieth century, particularly the Second World War, forced European civilization to confront many of its demons and to embrace ideas such as a robust social safety net that cohered with Catholic social teaching. In a parallel way to the discussion of the church previously, Ratzinger's critique of the 1968 movements diagnoses in them a kind of decadence that in fact undermined rather than strengthened the European project. In the second part of this essay, I will argue that the narratives about Western civilization put forth most prominently by Ratzinger, but also by some of the other figures described above such as Brague, need to be countered by what I call a liberal postliberalism that internalizes legitimate critiques while also valuing the contributions of liberalism to Catholic political thought particularly after World War II.

### **Toward a Liberal Postliberalism**

The second part of the essay argues that the rightist discourse described above is ultimately destructive and proposes a Catholic politics (rooted in core theological convictions) focused not on defense of cultural privilege but rather on gospel values. Such a politics, I argue, offers correctives to liberal and neoliberal orthodoxies (particularly individualism and the utilitarian approach to nature resulting in the ravaging of the climate) that have rightly come under criticism by Catholics and others, while defending the institutions of liberal democracy and human rights as the best options for securing the aforementioned gospel values. In order to do so, it is necessary to keep in mind why these ideas ascended as they did in the twentieth century.

Where, then, does this situation leave us? Clearly, it is the end of the post-World War II consensus, which itself informed the end of the Cold War. For some, such as Deneen, it is a "post-liberal" moment. This term has had much traction in theology for representing a movement to go beyond the insights of liberal Protestantism and related areas such as Biblical scholarship while not wholly rejecting their insights. In some cases, however, postliberalism translates to anti-liberalism or illiberalism. In the case of some of the thinkers profiled above, this certainly seems to be the case. I argue here for a "liberal" postliberalism not to advance any particular existing agenda, but as a placeholder for the idea that a postliberal political

theology must not become unmoored from the context and crucial insights of the liberal political order.

I would like to begin this discussion with reference to Christian Meier's thesis that European history has Athens at its start and Auschwitz as its definitive end (Meier 2005, 1). Meier perhaps overstates the case but gets, I think, at something very insightful. The Second World War and particularly the Holocaust gave the lie to Western civilizational superiority in a way that has yet to be fully internalized. Many have viewed the Shoah as a kind of tragic lesson – learned or not – whereas for Meier it ought to be seen definitively as the end of something. Its enormity, combined with the movement against colonialism that immediately followed the war, mean that something about Western civilization as it had emerged particularly out of the nineteenth century had become outmoded and destructive. In Meier's words, "the essential foundations of an entire continent failed," and this necessarily entails a reckoning (2005, 160). For Catholics, who in James Chappel's words embraced two forms of modernism that "were not fascist and Communist but *antifascist* and *anti-Communist*," this required a particular kind of reckoning, namely, the need to make a choice and become modern in a positive sense (2018, 13).

Following World War II, Christian Democratic parties emerged in Western Europe as standard-bearers of human rights and democracy, which they advocated in a center-right register. Samuel Moyn has described at length the work that Jacques Maritain and others pursued intellectually and that Christian Democrats pushed politically in order to make human rights a widely accepted, mainstream framework for thinking about some of the challenges that had arisen during the war and how to prevent them. These Christian Democratic parties were largely center-right parties, and they became increasingly sclerotic over time particularly in their opposition to further-left parties such as the Social Democrats (Moyn 2015). One does not need to endorse what these parties became – or the model of a Christian or Catholic political party – to acknowledge the immense contribution that these parties made in a tense historical moment. Caught between American libertarian capitalism and Soviet authoritarian Communism, these Europeans constructed a consensus based on ideals of human rights and with a deep appreciation for Catholic social teaching and often in tension with the institutional church, particularly under Pius XII in the 1950s. That they were far from perfect and would in some cases take turns further to the right themselves should not detract from this accomplishment.

Martha Nussbaum, not a Catholic thinker but engaged with many Catholic thinkers from Augustine to Charles Taylor, has considered deeply the limitations of liberalism particularly in today's political climate. According to Nussbaum, fear runs deep within our systems going back to early childhood and is particularly prone to animating our politics (2018, 44). The challenge of the current political moment, then, is fear run rampant in such a way that it undermines our impulses toward fairness and democracy. Nussbaum thus serves as an important corrective to Schmitt above, arguing that constructive politics means building on and harnessing hope rather than exploiting fear. Her vision, particularly her advocacy of a renewed attention to the common good as necessary for moving past fear, is a helpful articulation toward the kind of postliberalism I am proposing (Nussbaum 2018, 241).

In 75 years, then, liberal democracy and its support within Catholic circles have become increasingly brittle in part because of their own success and the fragmentation that has come along with it. This has opened up space for new illiberal approaches, particularly as neoliberal economics (free trade, austerity policies) and neoconservative foreign policy (the Iraq War) have failed to deliver their promised benefits to wide swaths of the population. George Weigel's ideas demonstrate the incoherence of this approach; he still attempts to defend a marriage of libertarian economics and liberal democracy even as it has become clear that this attempted synthesis has failed (2018, 110–11). Precisely because the version of liberalism proffered (and critiqued) by such thinkers is so shallowly rooted, it stands little chance against movements that draw upon even baser human instincts than the profit motive and that offer the prospect of victory rather than procedural correctness or advocacy. Given that Weigel and his allies have always positioned themselves on the right and against the left (whether on Communism, war and peace issues, or economics), it is not surprising that their failure to offer a coherent vision has led many of their followers to go further to the right rather than build bridges to their left.

Pope Francis has simultaneously been a critique of the neoliberal project that has characterized the post-1989 situation and one of the major enemies of the new postliberal right characterized by Trump, Orban, and others. This tension does not reflect an impossible third way but rather I think points to a revision of the consensus that produced Christian Democracy in Europe in such a way as to acknowledge and incorporate the growth of pluralist social democracy. By rejecting the extremes of liberal individualism and nationalist chauvinism, Francis points toward a Catholic communitarianism similar to that which inspired the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but which, in a renewed way, can make important contributions to today's politics.

Francis reflects the Latin American experience in which liberal democracy has been frequently undermined, particularly given U.S. foreign policy priorities that have often focused more on friendliness to American policy goals than resemblance to democratic ideals of governance. Yet he also reflects an attempt to revisit the Second Vatican Council in its original political context, namely, the European effort to process the lessons of the Second World War. The acceptance of religious freedom politically in *Dignitatis Humanae* and the outreach to other religions in *Nostra Aetate* were not simply movements in a theologically liberal direction or attempts to integrate American ideas into the church. Rather, they represented a reckoning with the failures of the church's prophetic voice in the period leading up to and during the war, particularly owing to self-preservation efforts put over and above witness. These were the tentative steps into a kind of Catholic modernity, and they indeed have been decisive for Catholic engagement in the public sphere since both for the laity and for very different Popes. It is thus not surprising that Archbishop Carlo Viganó (2019), who has styled himself as an opponent of Francis and supporter of Trump, has emerged as an opponent of these developments.

The first priority that Francis has refocused the church on is building a more just economic framework. Such a framework builds on the kinds of social democracy that Christian Democrats in Europe helped to pioneer even while realizing that the best approach to such goals might not be through particularly Christian parties. This trajectory is far from new and in fact largely reasserts a magisterium stretching back to Leo XIII, yet it is one that

has been consistently cast aside amid the temptations of various forms of capitalism. Economic injustice and the so-called “throwaway culture” have consistently fueled reactionary politics, and this is particularly the case today where they are enabling plutocracy and kleptocracy even in countries that appeared to be stable democracies.

The second and related priority for Francis is the human relationship to the climate and particularly to the rising dangers of climate change. In addition to its clear moral challenge, this issue also relates very clearly to the political challenges discussed above. Ecofascism represents a dangerous political temptation whose arrival is already upon us, particularly in Brazil. Without a robust vision of a common ecological good shared by all on the earth, it is abundantly clear that many will seek to exclude others, particularly the poor, from aid and particularly from migration, as indeed is already happening. This approach has come under criticism, notably by Daniel Mahoney (2020), one of Manent’s American advocates and interpreters, who has argued that Francis has forsaken civilizational defense as understood by Manent or Brague in favor of reconciliation with malign secular influences.

### **Conclusion: Recentering Catholic Politics**

A “recentered” Catholic politics that appreciates the achievements of Western civilization, while refusing to treat it as a shibboleth, offers the possibility of a new prophetic voice for the church as a global, not simply Western, reality in a postsecular space. This kind of church has been emerging demographically, but has been slower to emerge as the defining structural reality for the institution. Such an approach does not require abandoning or forsaking Western achievements or values, but it does mean relativizing them such that other cultural expressions in particular are viewed as coeval rather than inferior. The drama of the so-called *Pachamama* statue at the Amazon Synod illustrated this point very well: Christian adoptions of indigenous traditions in Europe, such as the Christmas tree, are taken for granted while similar appropriations in the Amazon are accused of syncretism and paganism (Clooney 2020).

Enrique Dussel represents one of the most compelling contemporary thinkers for moving this conversation forward. As a Latin American thinker steeped in European traditions, Dussel builds bridges between different kinds of discourses. While a practitioner of liberation theology, Dussel pushes it in the direction of decolonial discourse as embodied in the work of Walter Mignolo. I would particularly like to consider the idea of a “Trans-modern Pluriverse” as described at the end of his *Twenty Theses on Politics* (2008, 119–20). Dussel raises this idea, which resembles the mantra of Pope Francis that the world is not a sphere but a polyhedron (in other words, that it cannot be reduced to a “sameness” all around), in order to think about how to incorporate the contributions of indigenous peoples into national cultures in Latin America. Like many of the thinkers described in this essay, Dussel is a critique of the Enlightenment, but in his case the critique centers around its Eurocentrism and totalizing character. Dussel’s synthesis, which argues for political and educational structures rooted in the “multicultural character” of the community, incorporates what Meier calls the best of the European contributions while simultaneously seeking to move them into a non-Eurocentric space. Dussel does so with respect to the particularities of the Latin American situation – as indeed everyone must attend to particularities – but provides a worthwhile model for thinking through our own challenges not in terms of civilizational defense or culture war but rather in search of a political system that sustains human life, in Dussel’s words, “ecologically,

economically, and culturally” (2008, 135). Returning to Brague and Manent’s critique of modernity, then, Dussel’s work in a sense answers it by offering a solution to its “flattening” tendencies, but perhaps not in a way that they would find comforting. Rather than situate the Enlightenment as a radical departure from which some return must be sought, Dussel envisions the Enlightenment as not radical enough in enabling the encounter with peoples and ways of thinking outside of the European framework.

It is true, then, that there is a crisis of Western civilization – the implications of the Great Recession, Brexit, and rise of figures like Orban and Trump, as well as global events such as the rise of China, have raised the question of whether Western hegemony and particularly its postwar form will last. The implications of this crisis, however, are quite distinct from those described by the thinkers dealt with above. Instead of a destructive crisis, the present moment is a constructive crisis moment that forces a reevaluation of the way in which the West functions vis-à-vis other parts of the world. Within the Western world itself, it raises questions about Christian engagement in politics. Such engagement cannot and should not be a version of civilizational defense. It is rather a project of civilizational transformation through advocating for Christian values that will ultimately be more conducive to human flourishing. Thus, the crisis for Christian theology is to find a way to function politically that avoids simply upholding party lines while simultaneously avoiding the self-righteousness of the homeless observer standing on the sidelines and awaiting the historical verdict that has rightfully come to Pius XII for his studied neutrality in the midst of unspeakable horrors during World War II.

In addition to “*Defensor civitatis*,” Chamedes points out that Pius XII was also referred to in the 1950s as “The Coca-Cola Pope” owing to his embrace of America as a bolster against communism (2019, 271). Like the prior title, this epithet is revealing, both in the shift in discourse about Western civilization that it indicates and in its *pathos* indicative of the future that a capitalist West would bring about after the end of Communism. Francis has sought to become a Pope for the poor and marginalized, not on a romantic quest to evade modernity or postmodernity but in an attempt to call people to be better versions of themselves. The same hold true for Western civilization: if it does not stand for and live out its own best ideals, it is not worth defending.

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