

Christianity and World Religions

Disputed Questions in the
Theology of Religions

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WILEY-BLACKWELL

A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

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Modernity's Story

Introduction

There are a cluster of disputed questions here but the one that will keep us engaged in this chapter will also provide vistas on to later chapters. The single question is: what precisely is a “religion”? To address this question and indicate the complex landscape involved, I am first going to write an answer to this question derived from the work of a number of scholars in the form of a single narrative history. This particular story and various versions of it are deeply embedded in many European societies and in parts of North America. It is the story offered by “modernity,” by which I mean loosely the story of history told by those who more or less accept the Enlightenment as a necessary, mainly liberating, immovable turning point in providing our understanding of realities such as “religion,” “state,” “civic society,” “politics,” “law,” and “tolerance.” In the next chapter I will write an alternative narrative, which will unpick the first, trying to advance a different picture of the issues. Admittedly, reality is rarely a matter of either/or narratives, but this will at least highlight some important issues at stake. I have chosen this format, which is quite different from the previous chapter, as the history of the production of “religion” (for there once was no such concept) is so closely tied to a number of other issues, such as politics, economics, capitalism, modernity, and postmodernity, that story-telling allows the interconnections to become more clear. Just as a “character” in a biblical story or novel is only composed by their interrelationships to other characters and contexts constructed within that narrative, so is the character of “religion” in Europe’s narrative.

If you think you know what “religion” is and want to skip this chapter, I shall make a claim that will hopefully keep you reading: “religion” was an invention of the sixteenth century, and deeply rooted in the work of

the Cambridge Platonists; by the eighteenth century it was more a product of the European imagination than an encounter with an alternative form of power and discipline; and by the twentieth century “religion” became a shadow of its pre-modern self precisely because it was allocated a private, not public, role in the political sphere; a role policed by modernity. It might even help things greatly if we scrapped the word “religion” and instead replaced it with “culture” and asked ourselves about a theology of culture, rather than a theology of religions. Let me turn to the first narrative.

Modernity’s Story about Religions

The first stage of the story up until the Reformation needs to be fast-forwarded as it is a basic backdrop to the modern stage with which we are concerned. Christianity, after the fourth century, established a form of Constantinianism. From a minority fringe group that had been persecuted by worldly powers, it became part of the worldly powers with the “conversion” of the emperor Constantine. This conversion owed much to Constantine’s mother Helena and was also part of a rather politically astute move to consolidate and unite fractious and diverse territorial rulers. Christianity slowly became the imperially endorsed religion and there was sporadic persecution of Jews, and the often bloody territorial conflicts with Islam. This meant that “religion” was basically related to the big three – Christianity, Judaism, and Islam – and a dying fourth – paganism – which involved other religious and non-religious groups. The successful emergence of the Roman Empire meant that at least for most of what we now know as “Europe,” Christianity was the privileged and protected religion. Theologians variously worked out how the civic and armed forms of the body politic had duties to protect and defend the practices of Christianity. Theology and law were intrinsically interrelated; society was basically “Christian.”

Act I: the war of religions

Until the Reformation, the Catholic church in the West was only really opposed by Islam and various Catholic princes and rulers who came into conflict with the Papacy, although contesting groups usually liked to claim fidelity to the church as the motivation of their actions. After the fifteenth century, the Reformation brought about dramatic changes. Martin Luther

(1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–64), in their resistance to the Catholic church's corrupt practices and problematic theology, initiated internal wars in Europe that would cost the lives and liberty of thousands of citizens, as Catholics and Protestants battled for supremacy. The religious wars were bloody and protracted, the first starting with Charles V's attack on the Lutheran states in 1547, which only ended with the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. Augsburg recognized the existence of Catholicism and Lutheranism (but not Calvinism) in Germany, and provided that the people should follow the religion of their local ruler (*cuius region eius religio*). This "Peace" continued as the basis of the ecclesiastical settlement in the Empire until the later Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, concluded after the last and most bloody of the religious wars. In the meantime, in France for example, such barbarities as the St Bartholomew's Day massacre took place, where thousands of Protestants were murdered by Catherine de Medici in 1572. She sought to eradicate Protestants and wipe out the Huguenot leadership. Finally, between 1618 and 1648, the bloodiest of the wars of religion were fought, in which Emperor Ferdinand II tried to establish a Catholic Habsburg Empire. The Peace of Westphalia signaled the end of the Holy Roman Empire. Westphalia legitimated Calvinism, restraining princes from changing religions, and constricting the power of the Roman see. The latter, not surprisingly, brought a strong denunciation from Pope Innocent X (*Zelo Domus Dei*, 1648), but these were the last flaying movements of an ecclesial spent force.

Europe might at last struggle free from the authoritarian domination of "religion" understood as the power of a single "religion," thus facilitating real religious plurality. Anthony Kenny summarizes the situation thus, and I cite in full because of his succinct and now well established trope:

In the first half of the seventeenth century Europe worked out, by political and military means, the consequences of the religious reformation. It was the age of the wars of religion. In France, three decades of civil war between Catholic and Calvinist came to an end in 1598 when the Calvinist leader, Henri de Navarre, having converted to Rome and succeeded to the throne as Henri IV, established by the Edict of Nantes toleration for Calvinists within a Catholic state. In 1618 the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II formed a Catholic League to fight the German Protestant princes; it defeated the Protestant elector Frederick V at the battle of the White Mountain near Prague, and re-imposed Catholicism in Bohemia. But this Catholic victory was followed by a succession of Protestant victories won by the Swedish king, Gustavus Adolphus. After his death the Thirty Year War was brought to an end in 1648 by the Peace of Westphalia, which established co-existence in

the Empire between two religions. In Britain, after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, and the enthronement of King James I from Calvinist Scotland, there was little serious chance of England returning to Catholicism, despite the fantasies of the Gunpowder Plotters in 1605. (2006, 206)

What would be required to facilitate a religiously pluralist society had already been partly put in place by Luther in his treatise *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed* (1523). Luther established his two-kingdom doctrine, with two arenas of governance: the secular and the ecclesial. While God granted coercive power to the secular body, as society is made up of sinners and requires the rule of law, the ecclesial body must concern itself purely with preaching the Word of God. Its authority was the Word and the power of preaching, not social coercion. It took the genius of Hugo Grotius, who had entered Leyden University at the age of 12, to dismantle the connection between law and theology. Through his groundbreaking *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* (1625), Grotius became the father of international law. Grotius rooted justice in the unalterable law of nature whose source was the social being of humankind, not in any theological vision or datum. This would facilitate the possibility of a lawful society without roots in any specific religion.

Act II: the lessons of the wars and the emergence of free Europe

The religious wars taught many Europeans two very important lessons. First, when religion controlled society, that society was incapable of dealing with religious differences, for it was fundamental to the religious spirit that error should be eliminated, and that meant large numbers of men, women, and children dead. Second, if the concept of society led to bloody conflict when based on clashing religious allegiances, then it should be required that a non-religious, non-partisan form of government emerge to secure peace, freedom, tolerance, and prosperity, a state of affairs containing differences productively and non-violently. It is no coincidence that the emergence of the nation state in the seventeenth century dovetails with the waning public influence of religion. It is for this reason that modern political theorists like the early John Rawls, the early Jeffrey Stout, and Judith Shklar all concur with Stout's claim that:

liberal principles were the right ones to adopt when competing religious beliefs and divergent conceptions of the good embroiled Europe in the

religious wars. . . . Our early modern ancestors were right to secularize public discourse in the interest of minimizing the ill effects of religious disagreement. (1981, 241)

Or, in Shaklar's words, liberalism

was born out of the cruelties of the religious civil wars, which forever rendered the claims of Christian charity a rebuke to all religious institutions and parties. If the faith was to survive at all, it would do so privately. (1984, 5)

*Act III: "religion" applied more widely to the "world religions":
the Christianization of the religions*

If acts I and II are narrated from the emergence of the secular, act III fills the picture out by plotting Christianity's involvement in the process. We will find three trajectories here, and the third, deism, joins the currents of secularism in the nineteenth century. This conjunction of theological deism and the secular has been charted by Buckley in *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (1987). An important feature of the seventeenth century is the application of "religion" in relation to what we today call the world "religions" by theologians. The story runs something like this, and I am indebted to Peter Harrison's *Religion and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (1990). Harrison's study is seminal in examining the English Enlightenment's part in the production of "religion." He follows Wilfred Cantwell Smith's thesis (1962) that during the age of reason the name "religion" was given to external aspects of religious life, in contrast to the Middle Ages, which emphasized "faith," the dynamics of the heart, and personal piety. This externalizing process was now related to four "religions": Christianity, Judaism, Mahometanism, and heathenism (as they were called then). However, Harrison contests the often touted nineteenth-century starting date for the scientific study of religion, *Religionwissenschaft* (exemplified in the works of Max Müller and C. P. Tiele), and places the starting date in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England, in the debates between the Protestant Scholastics, Platonists, and deists. Harrison argues that this is the important precursor to the French Enlightenment, because nowhere in Europe at that time were such religious freedoms enjoyed as in England (with the possible exception of the Netherlands). His claim is monumental: "The whole comparative approach to religion was directly related to confessional disputes within Christianity" (1990, 3). What precisely were these disputes?

Just the ones we examined in chapter 1: who is saved? The connection between these two issues is vital and will be clearer as we proceed.

First, a note on the term “religion.” The modern expression “the religions” found its way into English vocabulary at about the same time as “religion.” The earliest occurrence of the singular form is in Hooker’s *On the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie* ([1593] 1632, 180), where we find the following usage: “The church of Rome, they say . . . did almost out of all religions take whatsoever had any fair and gorgeous show.” With the publication, eighty years later, of the first edition of Edward Brerwood’s *Enquiries Touching the Diversity of Languages and Religions through the Chief Parts of the World*, the plural expression, “religions” entered common usage. In his preface, Brerwood explains that there are “four sorts of Sects of Religion” – Christianity, Mahometanism, Judaism, and paganism – making it clear that these “religions” are species of the generic “religion.”

Harrison depicts three theological positions in English circles, which were crucial to the origins of “religion”: the Protestant Scholastics, the Cambridge Platonists, and the deists, who respectively drew upon the Reformation, Renaissance, and Classical heritages. The Protestant Scholastics came out of the Calvinist and Lutheran traditions in their approach. Because revealed religion (Christ and the trinity) equals the truth that is required for salvation, all non-Christian religions are inadequate. Indeed, while non-Christian religions may have natural revelation present, that which is present to all creation through the use of reason and an examination of the natural world, this is sufficient only to be grounds for their damnation. They know enough to be judged guilty. For the Christian, knowing about these religions serves no real purpose except in defeating the enemy.

It is with the second tradition that “religion” really begins to appear as a discrete object of study, even though constructed and inspected entirely for theological reasons. This is where our theological story gets off the ground and relates to the wars of religion narrative in act I. The Cambridge Platonists were a group of seventeenth-century English theologians and philosophers who were distinguished by their veneration of Plato and Plotinus, their opposition to religious fanaticism, and their preaching of a reasonable religion of holiness. Even so, there was serious diversity between the major figures of Benjamin Whichcote, Ralph Cudworth, Henry More, and John Smith. The Cambridge Platonists found that the Calvinist position rendered salvation a “lottery.” Everything seemed to depend on where one happened to be born. More significantly it also called into question the justice of God. The Platonists sought to harmonize the truths of revelation

with that of natural religion, rather than pit them against each other as had the Scholastics. This they did by emphasizing virtue and morality over belief and, in so doing, they safeguarded the “justice of God.” This meant two things in relation to our question. First, they realized that their claims about the religions required substantiation from actual history, and they turned to “religions” to show that natural religions did render the truths established through revelation. Second, this meant that either they discovered the doctrine of the trinity almost everywhere in other religions, in a mitigated Augustinian form as vestiges (see for instance the work of Cudworth); or they were pushed to play down various supernatural truths not found elsewhere. This latter path was not taken by most of the Platonists, but it would be the low road walked by the deists. Harrison says of the Platonists:

It may be objected that their efforts were tainted with dubious philosophy and theological bias, but for all this it was their unique theological insights which paved the way for the more objective study of the religions. (1990, 59)

Here then, we get the beginnings of comparative religion or, allegedly, the “more objective study of religion.” Harrison is more generous than many who narrate this story. Ninian Smart (1988), for example, emphatically stresses that the “objective study of religions” is incompatible with any Christian theological reading. He argues that theology is a “conceptual albatross around the neck of religious studies” (1988, 8). Harrison espouses this Smartian view in most of his book.

Harrison drives home his point about the Cambridge Platonists being the turning point in European history with regard to the emergence of “religion” when applied to world religions:

Four aspects of their thought were of prime importance in this process. First was their view that God’s activity must be as lawful and universal in the religious realm as in the physical world. Second was their application of a reason unshackled by subservience to institutional or even biblical authority to the problem of religious pluralism. Third was their insistence on the validity of the religion of nature, along with that theory of innate religion. . . . Finally there was the recognition, in Cudworth’s writings at least, that “innate ideas” are bound to have an historical correlate . . . making hypotheses about innate religiosity in principle verifiable in the pages of history, and in the religious practices and beliefs of the contemporary world. These changes meant that for the first time, the positive religions become

important sources for Western theories of religions. Only after these foundations had been laid did the dispassionate study of religion become possible. (1990, 59–60)

For Harrison, dispassionate study is the ultimate *telos* of the discipline “religious studies,” which historically had not yet been achieved.

Interestingly, returning to our earlier narrative of the wars of religion, much of the Cambridge Platonists’ theological efforts was used to show that Roman papism was a deeper disfigurement of “religion” than disfigurement by any noble savage! Henry More, for example, concludes in his *Antidote Against Idolatry* (1653), “We cannot say . . . that every Idolatrous Heathen must perish eternally,” but “we have no warrant . . . to think or declare any of the *Popish* Religion, so long as they continue so, to be in the state of Salvation” (Harrison 1990, 49). The birth of the study of non-Christian “religions” takes place at the same time as the birth of the modern notion of “religion” in European society. The two narratives have an interesting interconnection.

The third group in this period, the deists, take up the same tack, but can be said to secularize Platonism in decoupling reason as a mode of revelation, a central tenet of the Platonists. In the deist view, reason now became a natural property of every man (and eventually woman), a faculty that did not participate in the divine reality as did the Platonized reason of the Cambridge Platonists. For the deists, reason related us to a God who had acted and stood back. The deism of Lord Herbert of Cherbury perfectly exemplifies this move, found in a mature form in *De Religione Gentilium* (1663). Here, morality alone counts, even though morality is based on belief in God, a belief found in all religions. Beliefs and ethics are what “religion” is about. Revelation, in the form of trinity and incarnation, is unnecessary. Central to Herbert’s thinking was an epistemological insight. Aristotle held that the mind conforms to the object, whereas Kant reversed this to argue that the object is conformed to the mind. Herbert argued that the objects are received, *an sich*, by the *a priori* forms of the mind. This meant that all people were religious, as all had an *a priori* knowledge of God. The question then was: how did this religious *a priori* get obscured, almost cluttered over, with “rubbish”? Deism explained the “rubbish” accumulation through priestly castes controlling the masses. Some deists also developed a theory of the twofold philosophy, related to the elites and the popular. The populace were in the grip of the priestly castes and the elite were the enlightened forerunners of a new religion. The deists rejected Calvinism

and transformed theological Platonism through reaching back into the Classical heritage. Although deists prefigured a fully secularized approach to religion (discarding the initial *a priori* reasoning along with the “rubbish” accumulation), they still had not fully achieved this in their assumption that all religions were theistic. Nevertheless, even this position facilitated a trajectory that viewed all religions as of equal worth, accompanied by critical suspicion of all religions (modern pluralism). A trajectory out of this position, more skeptical and secular in its ideological sense, would find expression in David Hume's *The Natural History of Religions* (1757). Hume viewed all religions as equally illusory and, in the end, equally worthless. Hume provided a thoroughly reductionist naturalist reading of all religions (modern secularism).

We can see, in these three forms, typological anticipations of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. And we can also see, in this narration, the theological and slowly secularized motivations in engaging with other “religions”: the Cambridge Platonists trying to overcome the apparent injustice of God's election in strict Calvinism; and deism trying to overcome the apparent prioritizing of Christian revelation, an injustice of Christians, not God. All these traditions continued into the modern period, but the narrative that we are following favors the deist turn in the road: the attempt to understand religions in their own terms, rather than through *a priori* theological lenses that necessarily disfigure that which is viewed. In what follows, the final act, the story will continue from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, culminating in the present day.

*Act IV: the emergence of the “religions” from Christian theologizing
and the development of the scientific study of religions*

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are characterized by the influence of two of the greatest philosophers of that period, who carried forward our two currents: Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). Kant best represents the trajectory that struggles to free history from the shackles of theology and the churches, so that other religions can be viewed as they truly are. This paves the way for the kind of pluralist society sought for after the wars of religion. Kant argues that we all view the world through the categories of the mind, which limit, control, and shape our knowing. Kant emphasized the importance of epistemology over ontology. That is, our processes of knowing require attention prior to the question of what it is that we know. Before we attend to

our knowledge of God we have to ask the question: how do we gain knowledge? We can thus ask: are our claims about the contents of our knowledge permissible within the limits of reason alone? Kant understood “reason” as both practical (moral reasoning) and pure (speculative), forming the boundaries of our knowledge. This Kantian view had two important effects on later thought. First, some later scholars would be deeply sensitive to the “categories,” understood not only in a philosophical manner, but also in a broader cultural fashion. Hence, different cultures and religions would come to apprehend the divine reality in different cultural and religious categories, related to their context and mental constructs. Hick’s work is an example (see chapter 1). The point is that no religion now sets the criteria by which to judge authentic religion. Robert Neville nicely unpacks this consequence:

The objective study of religion then is neither the defence of one’s own religion against criticisms (although that is possible) nor the investigation of the various worldviews fostered and inhabited by different religions and cultures. Although personal and cultural biases are difficult to guard against, in principle this study of religions is empirical, investigating what various worldviews are and how they work. (2002, 111)

Kant had provided a very thin version of this project in his *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), in which all religions could be seen for what they are without giving any *a priori* special treatment to Christianity (or any other religion for that matter). Nevertheless, Kant also argued that Christianity was the best exemplification of the highest morality available, which existed, in part, in other religions. He conducted, in Neville’s terms, both an objective study and an intrusive judging process, allowing his own cultural and personal biases to enter. However, his favoring of Christianity was not a theological bias but, one might say, a moral bias, for it conformed to the yardstick of true morality that Kant had established through practical reason. As we have already seen, Hume took deist logic to its radical limits so that the study of religion would lose its theological bias.

Hegel’s theologized rendering of other religions continued the Cambridge Platonist tradition but brought back the supremacy of Christianity so central to the Protestant Scholastics, without their exclusivism. In his *Lectures in Philosophy of Religion* Hegel produced an imperializing rendition of world history whereby all the world religions were placed in an unfolding dialectic of the Spirit, such that their partial insights and truths led to the final and completed truth, to be found in (Hegel’s view of) Christianity.

However, his most important contribution lay in the way historical consciousness now began to permeate all worldviews and academic disciplines, and one of Hegel's legacies would be that one could not think "religion" other than in a historic modality.

In the nineteenth century the story takes off fully with the emergence of the scientific study of religion, *Religionwissenschaft*, which developed an anthropological, sociological, and fully historical way of apprehending "religion." The latter part of the nineteenth century saw a flowering of non-theological objective attention to religions. In the social sciences the massive achievements of sociologists Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) and Max Weber (1864–1920) injected serious energy into conceptually understanding religions on non-theological terms, as did the work of anthropologists Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917), Branislaw Malinowski (1884–1942), Ruth Fulton Benedict (1887–1948), and Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–), who forged various conceptualities through which the data "religion" could be best understood. Philologically, two figures in particular provided systematic translations of key religious texts into European languages and are often seen as the founders of the history of religions school.

Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900) is seen as the father of "indology." Under his editorship of the *Sacred Books of the East*, a massive 50-volume set of English translations of Eastern classics, Müller brought India to Europe. James Legge (1815–97) did the same for China and is the father of "sinology." Importantly, while both were Christians – Legge was in fact a missionary – they were both fully committed to the scientific study of religion, which meant using tools and conceptualities that could be shared by any scholar, religious or non-religious. Bishop Munro, the Catholic bishop of Glasgow, accused Müller of a crusade against divine revelation in his promotion of the "science of religion," and his appointment to the Boden Chair in Sanskrit was blocked due to his alleged Christian unorthodoxy. Müller went on to hold three different Chairs in Oxford.

The benefits of this new scientific attention to the religions were reaped by the development of comparative religious studies, initially in a phenomenological mode through Chantepie de La Saussaye and later and most influentially by Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890–1950), who was adamant about the distinction between phenomenology and theology:

theology speaks about God, and this the phenomenologist cannot do. . . . Because God, to be grasped by phenomenology, would have to be subject or object; and he is neither. So to the phenomenologist, though he may study

religious experience . . . and may observe men and women responding . . . to divine revelation, the revelation itself remains inaccessible. (Fitzgerald 2000, 37, citing Sharpe 1986, 232–33)

Comparative religion has moved out of a phenomenological mode and employed various philosophical and ideological conceptualities, although in England (where I write), Ninian Smart (1927–2001) is perhaps one of the most influential and prolific figures who has developed the discipline in a phenomenological mode under the rubric “Religious Studies.” Internationally, Mircea Eliade (1907–86) was a major theorist of the comparative school, with his influential theory that hierophanies form the basis of religion, splitting the human experience of reality into sacred and profane time and space. His theory of “eternal return” held that myths and rituals do not simply commemorate hierophanies, but, at least to the minds of the religious involved in such rituals, actually participate in these hierophanies. In Eliade and many others, we find a liberating attempt at understanding the world’s religions on their own terms, free of theological baggage. “Religion” has come of age.

I have not done justice to the internal dissonances within this story or its complex twists and turns, but there are two basic motifs throughout. First, the wars of religion precipitated the shaking off of the yoke of the mono-authoritarian dominance of Christianity in pre-modern times. This move could take a reductive path that views religions as false realities – as Marxism did. It could also take the path promoted in this narrative: the attempt to provide the context for religious plurality where mutual understanding and toleration are possible, without mono-authoritarian religion (as in pre-modern Europe) or mono-authoritarian atheism (as found in the worse days of China and Russia). Both are unhealthy.

Second, at the same time, and with obvious related significance, the study of religions developed. But not as an object of the theological gaze with its obstructing *a priori* reasoning, witnessed most bleakly in the Protestant Scholastics of the English sixteenth century or, more fruitfully but with remarkable obscurantism, in the Cambridge Platonists. Rather it developed out of the desire to understand the religions in their own terms, in their own languages (or in very good translations) and with appropriate attention to the complex interdisciplinary nature of the phenomenon: sociological, anthropological, linguistic, philosophical, and so on. This second goal served the first in the foundation of modern liberal society.

An interlude: some issues arising from this story

Before telling a different story, I want to make two points about “religion” prior to the period I have been focusing on to help our understanding of the two differing narratives being offered in this and the next chapter. First, it is fair to say that prior to the sixteenth century the religions identified in Harrison’s narrative did not actually exist as “religions” in the way we understand them today, for both Judaism and Islam were seen as deformations of the true religion, Christianity. In the case of Judaism, it was a family member’s failure to accept its own fulfillment and destiny, a failure to grasp the promises made to its own people and prophets. It was like a failed Christianity, a youngster refusing to grow up into its true potential. As for Islam, it was seen as taking up the truth of the Jewish–Christian heritage in its own sacred scriptures, but confusing it with errors, deceit, and a lust for political power. It was like a malformed development out of Christianity, a troublesome adult who has left home and insists the parents are in error. The latter two stories have been told often enough (see Perry and Schweitzer 2005; and Goddard 2001), and their consequences in outbreaks of Christian anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are very important to acknowledge. The causal relation between theological views and socio-political action is complex and I will return to this in chapter 5. I simply want to register the reality that most Christians viewed these “religions” not as “religions” as we understand them today, but as deviations of and from Christianity. It is anachronistic and historically inappropriate to criticize them for this, except when we have evidence that they ignored significant developing knowledge that suggested otherwise.

Second, and relatedly, non-biblical religions that had developed entirely out of contact, or with minimal contact, with the Western Semitic traditions were encountered from the thirteenth century on, when Franciscan and Dominican missionaries penetrated deep into Asia and Marco Polo encountered China. By the sixteenth century Francis Xavier the Jesuit missionary was in dialogue with Buddhist monks in Japan and had already conversed with the Brahmin priests in western India on the coast of Goa.

Several points emerge from this long process of missionary activity. First, through the writings of these missionaries, we have some of the most comprehensive accounts of Eastern cultures (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism), some of which are still used by scholars for their ethnological value. The French Catholic missionary, Abbé Dubois, is a case in point. His description of Hindu customs is still used in universities today. Brian

Pennington argues that Dubois' descriptions are far more rigorous and accurate than those of his Protestant counterparts whose rationalism meant that they were simply impatient with Hindu worship and failed to pay attention to details that the Catholic Dubois noted carefully. That the Protestant missionaries saw Catholic and Hindu worship as idolatrous is not a matter of chance! (Pennington 2005, 59–101). Pennington is still critical of Dubois for his theological prejudices in interpreting Hinduism, but this criticism requires questioning, as I shall be arguing in the next chapter. It is wrong to argue against theological critical reading, but right to argue that such a reading may be lazy, uninformed, not open to correction by evidence, and so on. The former should not be immediately identified with the latter.

As with the entire industry of criticism of colonial culture, there sometimes lurks an assumption that either a neutral secular description of Hinduism or alternatively a self-description of Hinduism (including its persecuted minorities) is the only acceptable form of description. While Marxists and feminists constitute a large number of colonial critics, ironically they cannot conform to these strictures, for they obviously introduce new biases. This highlights my point that theological interpretation *per se* does not necessarily reduce the value of a descriptive account, for all accounts are interpretative. Protestant rationalist missionaries truncated accounts of worship because they saw these as scandalously idolatrous; their accounts should not be relied on if we are keen to understand what the Hindu worshipper actually believed.

Second, and relatedly, Francis Xavier and other missionaries had to theologially interpret what they were encountering and it was not all negative. Indeed Xavier found in Japan a level of civility and refinement that moved him deeply. Drawing on his Parisian theological education, Xavier saw the operation of the natural law in the hearts (nature) of the native Japanese prior to China's incursions. He commended the Japanese for knowing that killing, stealing, and bearing false witness were wrong. Christian missionaries played a vital part in a new understanding of the importance of viewing religions in their own terms, even if "in their own terms" was only significant as a prelude to effective mission, or a means to successfully translate the Bible, to claim that the natural law was operative in that religion, or, in the modern period, to claim that ethical beliefs are present in such religions. In our first story there is a very strong assumption that Christians engaging with other religions generate distortions, negative images, chauvinism, and other problematic "interference," mirroring the Christian denominational wars. Historically, this assumption is informed

by some evidence that I would not contest, but it cannot lead to a binding or plausible general hermeneutical rule. When it becomes one, it is purely prejudice, and should be unmasked as such.

Third, I want to question the idea that in pre-modern time “religion” was an inward piety. This is the influential view of Wilfred Cantwell Smith. He argues that, in the pre-modern period, “religion” designated a “personal piety,” an attitude of “faith.” Only in the modern period does it become associated with “beliefs, practices and values” and associated with a “particular community” (1962, 15–50, quotations from 48–9). Smith uses this distinction for his own “revolutionary approach” to the world religions, to which I will return shortly. Smith claims that Augustine and Aquinas both viewed *religio* (Latin: to bind) in the first sense above, as personal piety. Smith argues that Augustine’s work *De Vera Religione*, usually translated as *The True Religion*, is often mistranslated. It should be translated *On Proper Piety* instead. When Augustine writes retrospectively about this work, he comes “close to saying, the book [*De Vera*] argues ‘at great length and in many ways that *vera religio* means the worship of the one true God.’ ” For Augustine, Smith argues,

“religion” is no system of observances or beliefs, nor an historical tradition, institutionalized or susceptible of outside observation. Rather it is a vivid and personal confrontation with the splendour and the love of God. (1962, 29)

Two criticisms are in order. First, Smith is too meticulous a scholar to avoid the Latin text, which he cites in a footnote. What does Augustine actually say? Augustine specifies that the “one true God” as cited by Smith is “the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (*unum verum deum, id est trinitatem, patrem et filium et spiritum* – all part of the same sentence, but the latter part omitted by Smith in the main body of his text). There is not only inner piety and theism, but a robust trinitarian confession of belief. To say that “religion” does not include a system of true beliefs for Augustine is simply false. Second, Augustine must be interpreted in the context of his overall approach to the matter of those who do not belong to the visible Christian church. His mature attitude is rigorist to the extent that he is happy to acknowledge that the just, prior to Christ, “belong to the church” from the time of Abel (*ab Abel*). However, after the coming of Christ, Augustine is clear that no one can be saved except through explicit membership of the Church. When writing against Christian heretics and schismatics, he is adamant that

Whoever is separated from this Catholic Church, by this single sin of being severed from the unity of Christ, no matter how estimable a life he may imagine he is living, shall not have life, but the wrath of God rests upon him. (*Epist.* 141:5)

For Augustine, there is an indispensable and necessary institutional dimension to true worship of God: the Catholic church. So much so that even if a schismatic were to suffer martyrdom in the name of Christ, Augustine is clear that this poor soul will still suffer damnation: “Nor will his baptism be of any benefit to the heretic if, while outside the church, he were put to death for confessing Christ” (*De Baptismo* 4:17, 25). For Augustine any martyr outside the church still faces damnation, as charity is lacking in his schismatic action. Augustine is a major definer and transmitter of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (no salvation outside the church); Smith’s comment on Augustine is therefore difficult to understand: “‘religion’ is no system of observances or beliefs, nor an historical tradition, institutionalized or susceptible of outside observation.”

Smith says that for Aquinas *religio* is not a central category, and while sometimes denoting “the outward expression of faith,” Aquinas’ other uses suggest “the inner motivation towards worshipping God, and that worship itself; and à la Augustine (whom he [Aquinas] cites), the bond that unites the soul with God” (1962, 32). Again, there are problems with Smith’s emphasis on inner faith and in his singling out of the soul and God as if there were no materiality involved in that relationship. Admittedly, Smith acknowledges wider uses, so he should not be pressed too hard. For Aquinas, in the *Summa Theologiae* II–II.81, articles 1–8, *religio* is the virtue that directs the person to the true God, and is also thus sanctity, although religion should be logically distinguished from sanctity, as “religion” denotes specifically the liturgical cultus of the church. Aquinas writes:

Accordingly, it is by sanctity that the human mind applies itself and its acts to God: so that it differs from religion not essentially but only logically. For it takes the name of religion according as it gives God due service in matters pertaining specially to the Divine worship, such as sacrifices, oblations, and so forth. (article 8)

This institutional emphasis is played down by Smith, but it pervades all three usages cited by Smith. Indeed, if we look at Aquinas’ view about worshipping the true God, which Smith interiorizes, Aquinas like Augustine

held that after the coming of Christ, worshipping the true trinitarian God was only possible through “explicit faith” and institutional baptism:

After grace had been revealed, all, both the learned and the simple, are bound to have explicit faith in the mysteries of Christ, especially with regard to those mysteries which are publicly and solemnly celebrated in the church, such as those which refer to the incarnation. (*ST*, II–II, q. 2, a. 7)

The *cultus* is essential; the public and solemn celebrations within the church constitute *religio*.

Two conclusions arise. First, Smith’s findings on the use of “religion” in the modern period are very important and I have no quarrel with that part of his groundbreaking work, but his characterization of “religion” in the pre-modern period is incorrect. He is right inasmuch as the pre-moderns hardly had the conception of “religion,” which we nowadays use, but he is wrong to emphasize individual piety as the heart of “religion.” Rather than conduct the search on purely linguistic grounds, as does Smith, I have drawn on wider assumptions and beliefs to illuminate the category of “religion.” Second, why does Smith, who is such a notable historian, seemingly skew his materials? It is, in part, because of his promotion of a pluralist theological agenda through his distinction between “faith” (inner piety related to the alleged pre-modern understanding of *religio*) and “cumulative historical traditions” (the modern encoding of *religio* for Smith, which has generated the history of religions and the science of religions). The latter consist of observable manifestations or religions that include beliefs and practices: “temples, scriptures, theological systems, dance patterns, legal and other social institutions, conventions, moral codes, myths” and so on. Smith uses this distinction to argue the unity and equality of all religions (1962, 157). He uses these liberal Protestant, rather than pre-modern, distinctions between “faith” and “cumulative traditions” to argue that all the world religions share the same faith (in a transcendent God), but express it very differently and sometimes even contradictorily in the various cumulative historical traditions. This is no different from Hick’s early theocentrism, a point made in Hick’s preface to the UK edition of Smith’s book (1978, ix–xviii). I have discussed Smith’s position in more detail elsewhere (1991), so I will not now pursue this issue.

I now want to tell the second account of the “same” story – a Christian narration, one might say. We will find it is a very different story indeed!

An Alternative: The Secular Construction of the Sacred

Modernity as the Establishment of a New Ruling Religion

*Act I: the story of the emergence of nation states,
not the wars of religion*

This alternative narrative does not seek to excuse Catholics and Protestants who murdered each other for denominational reasons, nor suggest that when violence did happen there were always other motives than religious ones involved. The scandal of violence by Christians cannot be avoided. However, I want to retell the story with a different central character, which might seem to some like telling an entirely different story. Imagine *Hamlet* without the prince! My alternative narrative has three goals. First, I want to suggest that the driving motor for the wars in Europe was not “religion,” but rather a new character on stage that has almost become invisible to us today: the sovereign nation state. This character had to contain, control, and subordinate all other actors if he was going to be center stage, and he argues with different accents and emphases in his various walks on roles in France, Holland, Spain, England, Germany, and Italy. He usually argues that for the peace, justice, and welfare of all, religions must be subordinate to the sovereign nation state. He would assert himself strongly in the imperial history of Europe, especially in France, England, and the Netherlands (the most vigorous imperialist nations). He would reappear after the empires of these European countries had crumbled, arguing that multi-religious Europe could only be redeemed by his presence, or else revert to the bloody wars of religion. Our princely character argues that peace in Europe requires the privatization of religion, for there cannot be two public sovereigns. Second, I shall argue that the sovereign nation state was thus central in generating

the definition of religion that shapes so much thought today: religion is a matter of private choice and should not shape the public square. Recall Stout's words:

liberal principles were the right ones to adopt when competing religious beliefs and divergent conceptions of the good embroiled Europe in the religious wars. . . . Our early modern ancestors were right to secularize *public discourse* in the interest of minimizing the ill effects of religious disagreement. (Stout 1981, 241, my emphasis)

The way this character unfolded in different European countries (and in the United States) meant important differences in constitution and law (more of which in chapter 5). Nevertheless, the overall structuring of society produced a new public "secular" arena. Any religion that is concerned with social power, as most but not all pre-modern religions were, is a public threat. Third, I shall argue that the "wars of religion," even if they are really wars of state, are dwarfed by the carnage exacted by the wars of the secular modern sovereign state where religion was certainly not an issue. The sovereign state has nothing to be proud about in its very short term of office, for it has generated relentless wars.

I draw heavily upon William Cavanaugh's *Theopolitical Imagination* (2002), whose research supports this alternative narrative (and see also Chadwick 1964; Dunn 1970; Milbank 1990). Let me take two examples offered in the first narrative (chapter 3) to help establish my first point: the wars were the effects of the emerging nation states, and not the inevitable outcome of religion being in competition.

The Catholic emperor Charles V's attack on the Lutheran states in 1547 inaugurates the first great war, but it is more appropriately viewed as a struggle to establish sovereign nationhood. Luther's two-state doctrine was one among many moves in the slow erosion and dismantling of the relationship between law and theology (canon law and ecclesiastical courts). It paved the way for the almost total autonomy of secular society, with the church's role being that of preaching and teaching within its own walls, without any relation to the secular. As Quentin Skinner puts it, in the Lutheran divide the "idea of the Pope and Emperor as parallel and universal powers disappears, and the independent jurisdictions of the *sacerdotium* are handed over to the secular authorities" (1978, 15). In the sixteenth century European rulers were keen to consolidate power through marriages, war, and alliances, and freedom from transnational allegiance that might conflict with the state.

Most troubling within the state's own borders were nobles and citizens whose primary allegiance lay to a transnational church, whose ruler lay out of their jurisdiction. One way of settling this was through concordats between state and church. These were agreements that allowed the church certain "privileges" at the cost of political non-interference. This meant that when concordats were established between state and church to curb the powers of an otherwise supranational church, such as in France and Spain, those countries remained Catholic, as the rulers now had secured power over the church. In England, Germany, and Scandinavia, no concordats existed, and these rulers would often prefer to be allied to the Reformers. Luther's two-state doctrine meant this was an even more attractive proposition, as the rulers could be assured of an obedient local church with no transnational commitment.

Charles, at 20, had a huge empire, thanks to the marrying skills of the Habsburgs. His empire covered most of the American continent, between a third and half of what the Turks had left of Europe, Spain, and later the Netherlands in 1506. Pope Leo X and Francis I of France opposed Charles' election, so the Catholic Charles turned upon the Catholic Francis. Charles' armies, made up of Catholic and Protestant princes, defeated the French in Italy, and then marched on to Rome to fill their coffers so as to pay the disgruntled soldiers. The sacking of Rome, not Wittenburg, followed in 1527 as this Catholic ruler was keen to establish his political power over and above the church. Luther was critical of this action. Charles, though embarrassed, was not unhappy at Rome's collapse, and opportunistically imprisoned Pope Clement VII, who spent the rest of his time trying not to displease Charles. Indeed, Charles insisted that Clement confront Henry VIII, who desired an annulment from Catherine of Aragon, Henry's first wife. Catherine was Charles' aunt.

With the pope in his pocket, Charles now wanted to extend his sovereign national boundaries further. He turned on the German Lutheran states, not as an act of religious bigotry, but simply to expand his political power. That national power was at stake, not religious adherence, is clearly evinced in the fact that the French Catholic king, Henry II, joined forces with the Lutheran princes to oppose and eventually defeat Charles, while the German Catholic princes remained neutral. This is the same Henry II who passed the Edict of Chateaubriand (1551), enjoining civil and religious courts to punish all heretics, and place severe restrictions on Protestants. The outbreak of the first of the great "wars of religion" was really the story of Europe being carved up by increasingly powerful rulers and of their emerging nation states.

The same is true about the second incident, the 1572 St Bartholomew's Day massacre in France, which is often portrayed as the massacre of thousands of Protestants by the Catholic queen mother and bigot, Catherine de Medici. After the Concordat of Bologna in 1516, the French king had the power to make all ecclesial appointments and to control church revenues; the French rulers remained staunchly Catholic and equally centralist. Catherine had as her sole goal the preservation of royal power – at any cost. If it meant supporting the Protestant Huguenots in France in internal disputes, she did it. If it meant marrying her daughter, Margaret of Valois, to the Protestant king, Henry of Navarre, she did it. If it meant proposing the abolition of both the Catholic and the Calvinist churches in her country at the Colloquy of Poissy in 1561, to bring together both under her rule as Elizabeth had done in her state-controlled church in England, she did it. Catherine was startled to discover that the ecclesiologies of both Catholic and Calvinist would not tolerate her statecraft. Almost two-fifths of the nobility and increasing numbers of bourgeoisie had adopted the Calvinist cause; the nobility to take back regional power as was enjoyed by various Protestant princes in Germany, and the bourgeoisie who resented the absolute authority of the crown draining away their revenues. The turning point came in 1572, when Catherine found the growing Huguenot influence over her son Charles, the French king, was undermining her own power over him. Catherine acted swiftly. If Catholics and Calvinists would not unite under her authority, then she would destroy the weaker of the two. Had the Huguenots been more powerful, Catherine would probably have supported their cause. She very likely instigated a plot to assassinate the Protestant leader Coligny and catalyzed the massacre of some 50,000 Huguenots in the St Bartholomew's Day massacre, although the extent of the massacre also reflects Catherine losing control over violent and unruly mob passion. But Catherine was quick to take the applause that came from some Catholic quarters. Catherine's ambitions only declined when her third son, Henry, succeeded to the throne after Charles' death in 1574. This battle between localized and centralized power was only resolved in the eighteenth century, with the French revolution, whereby the sovereign nation state won. The battle was not essentially between religions.

This counter-narrative could continue, taking in Emperor Ferdinand II and the last of the great alleged "wars of religion." In brief, the story again is about the attempt to consolidate and control, and thus shape the Habsburg Empire into a sovereign state. Ferdinand had allegiances with various Protestant powers, the Lutheran elector of Saxony, the Bohemian

Protestant commander, Albrecht von Wallenstein, and was opposed by various Catholic powers. Among these was Cardinal Richelieu, who subsidized an army of 36,000 Swedes in German territory. This alleged religious war ended in an imperial contest of power between the Habsburgs and the Bourbons, two Catholic dynasties, both fundamentally state dynasties, first and foremost. This was hardly a battle between Protestants and Catholics. Further, in almost all cases, these wars were never supported by the common people who were forced into armies through conscription and had much to lose and little to gain (Rothenberg 1973).

Terrence Tilley raises an interesting objection to Cavanaugh's argument. Tilley argues that the

time lapse between the religious wars and the formation of actual modern nations suggests that any who claim that the wars of religion were really not about religion at all may be overstated at best. (Tilley *et al.* 2007, 27)

France is perhaps the first to become a truly modern nation state through the revolution of 1789, Germany not following until the late nineteenth century, Italy in 1870, with the Austro-Hungarian empire only being carved up into nations after 1918. Two responses are in order. Cavanaugh does not claim that the wars of religion were not related to any form of religious rivalries. Rather, the claim is that this is not the sole or major character in the narrative. Second, Cavanaugh does not claim that there is a perfect correlation between the "religious wars" and the emergence of nation states. The latter, as Tilley rightly notes, take some time to emerge. But do they emerge from the already present chrysalis that I have sought to outline, or are they something quite distinct and different? Mixing metaphors, 400 years is actually quite a short time from gestation to chrysalis to full-fledged Leviathans, which is what we have by the end of the First World War. This trajectory is perhaps most clearly present in the controversy about the European charter (2006–7) and the contested and rejected preamble, which sought to mention the Christian contribution to the shaping of Europe, a point I will elaborate in chapter 5.

In telling this story I hope to have illustrated my first claim, obviously in inadequate detail: the wars of religion are in fact the effects of the emergence of the nation state seeking to consolidate power and thus oppose any and every other power that would claim allegiance from citizens. In order for the state to be sovereign, citizens owe the state total and unconditional allegiance. The churches – especially the Catholic church, being transnational

– were deeply problematic for rulers concerned with obedience. Hence both Catholic and Protestant rulers sought to eradicate the power of the Catholic church over the state and to establish the sovereign power of the state.

This slow and long process came to “fruition” in three distinct ways. First, what we now turn to: the slow privatization of religion in the public square through political theory and related legislation. Second, this “privatization” would take many forms: French, German, English, Dutch, Scandinavian, Spanish, Italian, American, and so on. We cannot recount all these twists in the narrative, but must remember significant variations. Third, in establishing nation states, the bloodshed did not stop, but accelerated greatly, and this was a bloodshed that perhaps exposed the driving engine of the earlier “religious” bloodshed: the nation state seeking ever-expanding power.

Act II: privatized religion and public discourse

We have already seen the early moves that helped establish the autonomy and slow sovereignty of law over and against theology and the church in the work of Luther in 1523 and later in Grotius in 1625. There is a line of trajectory connecting major intellectuals, which runs through from Luther to the modern nation state: the Frenchman Jean Bodin, jurist and political philosopher (1530–96), the Dutchman Hugo Grotius, jurist and philosopher (1583–1645), Thomas Hobbes, the English philosopher (1588–1679), John Locke, another English philosopher (1632–1704), and the French opera writer, novelist, philosopher, Catholic, then Calvinist, then neither, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78). I cannot here examine each of these figures in appropriate detail, but want to present a very selective story line, for it is these figures that intellectually form the context to the privatization of religion, the rise of the absolute sovereign state, and thus the modern rendition of “religion.” This is the private inner religion that Wilfred Cantwell Smith universalizes in his theory of religions.

Bodin’s classical definition of sovereignty in his *Six Books of the Commonwealth* is: “sovereignty is that absolute and perpetual power vested in the commonwealth” (Bodin 1576, chapter 8). For Bodin, religious allegiance was always possible within the state, but never if it called the state’s sovereignty into question or prompted rebellion against the prince. The St Bartholomew’s Day massacre and the Huguenot armed response to it were part of Bodin’s backdrop. He argued that political stability would only come with a single power that all obeyed, and that power was the state.

He argued for free choice in religion and supported religious tolerance, but only up to a point. He thought it best that a ruler's subjects remained unitary in their religious belief, which would reduce discord between the populace. Hence, Bodin welcomed the Peace of Augsburg, as it required subjects to follow their ruler's religion. Indeed, Bodin praises the ordinances of Spain and the king of Muscovy, where public discussion of religious issues carried the death penalty (Bodin [1576] 1967, chapter 7). He was keen to empower the state.

We have already seen Grotius establish international law based on human nature, independent of revelation. This move to ground law in human nature was not new, of course, and Aquinas made this central to the Catholic tradition. In Aquinas, however, nature was understood within a theological framework: original goodness and sociality, fall, redemption by Christ, final end as eternal communion with the saints and God. Now the framework slowly eroded and was eventually discarded. The story ran: we have a struggling and warring human nature, tending toward individualism and egotism, in need of law and regulation. Redemption comes through the sovereign state as our final end is peace and defense of the realm (Hobbes), ownership of property (Locke), or following the general will (Rousseau). Religious ends must fit within this framework of the state's final goals. There is a profound change in anthropological, theological, and cosmological vision. Salvation by state or salvation by Christ?

All of Europe was deeply affected by internal wars and England no less, with three civil wars between 1642 and 1651, and estimated casualties between 400,000 and 768,000. England unsurprisingly produced two of the greatest and most influential theorists. Hobbes lived through these three wars. To him, there was only one solution: an all-powerful centralist monarchy, which had the total obedience of the populace. Grant the monarchy this power and, in return, the monarchy would deliver peace, stability, and the defense of the realm. The power and omnipresence of the state and the subsequent positioning of religion within this body politic is starkly outlined in Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651). Hobbes argued that the natural state of nature would be a state of war, for our lives are "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short" (*Leviathan* I, xiii). There is considerable debate as to what is intended in this phrase. It could mean either that we are naturally self-interested, or that egotism is only a formal description, not a material one. Hobbes' wider writings seem to imply the first definition. If we are to avoid this perpetual strife, individuals must choose to enter into a social contract creating absolute government, preferably a monarchy. For that monarchy

to be effective, it must be above the law, it must have sovereign rule, for indeed it is the very creator, interpreter, and arbitrator of the law. Hobbes, it should be acknowledged, does not defend an “unadulterated absolutism” (Baumgold 1988, 164), although he does not allow for the right of rebellion as do Locke and Rousseau after him. Hobbes argues that if the state failed to provide “peace and defence” of its citizens, the social contract would become void and man would automatically return to a state of nature until a renewed social contract arose. Religion is swallowed in part III of *Leviathan* like Jonah is swallowed by the whale; the state is indeed a Leviathan. The original front cover of the book designed by Abraham Bosse, with Hobbes’ help, portrays a huge king, whose body is made up of all the people, standing high over his city, with sword and torch in hand. Subsumed within the lower half of the cover are two panels with images of the church, lower than the body politic and clearly under the rule of the king.

In part III of *Leviathan*, Hobbes considers a Christian commonwealth, and here we find even the interpretation of the Bible is now subject to the state. Why? Because revelation cannot be allowed to be higher than civil law, as this would weaken the state’s ability to deliver its part of the contract. But Hobbes also advances further arguments that undermine religious authority, or rather make it subservient to civil authority. Because we cannot be sure that another person’s word is infallible, we cannot trust individual testimony. However, we cannot undermine the Bible – which might be implied in this first argument as it is the testimony of individuals – so Hobbes turns to the question of the authority of the Bible. But here is no answer, for different Christian sects claim different books to be binding and offer varying interpretations of the meaning of these books. Perhaps miracles can give authority to a position. However, as miracles do not endorse any particular sect, the real question becomes: by what authority can any sect make claims upon any other than its own? Hobbes is very astute in seeing that theology is always imbricated with the question of social power. The only social body that can grant a sect any binding, rather than voluntary, authority is the state. Hobbes concludes:

He therefore to whom God hath not supernaturally revealed that they are His, nor that those that published them were sent by Him, is not obliged to obey them by any authority but his whose commands have already the force of laws; that is to say, by any other authority than that of the Commonwealth, residing in the sovereign, who only has the legislative power. (*Leviathan* III)

But this is not all, for the sovereign can now carry out offices within the church:

Christian kings are still the supreme pastors of their people, and have power to ordain what pastors they please, to teach the Church, that is, to teach the people committed to their charge. (*Leviathan* III)

The church sits comfortably digested within the stomach of the state. It is precisely this nominalist–voluntaristic contractualism that prompts John Milbank's judgment that in Hobbes we discover "the kinship at root of modern absolutism with modern liberalism" (1990, 13). Theologically speaking, the church becomes disincarnate as a social body and the authority of Christ becomes incarnate in the sovereign state. Any religion, not just Christianity, is allocated this ingested private space within Hobbes' body politic.

Does Locke's social contractualism ameliorate Hobbes' teleological drive toward absolutism? Certainly, within Hobbes, there is either the dissolution of the contract (and endless strife and war) or the contract with its absolutist tendencies. The scholarship of Peter Laslett and John Dunn has made it fashionable to play down Locke's philosophical contribution and emphasize the contextual occasion for each of his political writings. In contrast, A. John Simmons and Jeremy Waldron integrate this historical dimension with a philosophical appreciation. Locke's influence on modern sovereign states is undisputed, and his thinking affected not only European politics but also the formulation of the United States' constitution (as did Rousseau's). Locke discusses whether it is possible to question sovereign power's obedience to the law. Hobbes thinks not, for the court of adjudication dissolves in such a conflict. Locke, however, allows, in the *Second Treatise on Government* (1689), that state power has limits: the property rights of the individual, which it is, after all, the basic purpose of the state to safeguard. However, there is an interminable debate as to what precisely these property rights constitute. Locke then distinguishes between the executive and legislature, and the latter must be trusted to make final determinations in deciding on disputed questions of property rights. But what of the scenario where executive and legislature are in conflict? If all refuse to accept the sovereign power of the legislature, and are determined to pursue their goals, there is no other option than war. Waldron, in comparing this answer to that given by Hobbes, rightly says:

But it is not an answer at all. Hobbes said that if there is disagreement between sovereign and subject or between subject and subject as to whether the sovereign has broken the law, the matter will have to be settled by fighting. And Locke did not deny that. He was unable to come up with any institutional solution to the dilemma Hobbes had posed: either the matter is settled by an earthly institution, in which case the problem is reproduced when someone accuses that institution of breaking the law; or it is settled outside the political framework, by “an appeal to heaven”, i.e. by fighting. [In the *Second Treatise* Locke uses the phrase “appeal to heaven” to indicate there is no earthly judge on a matter, and thus only war; see paragraph 168.] The only difference in this regard between Locke and Hobbes has to do with the value of preserving the practice of accusing the sovereign of breaking the laws, and the estimation of social dangers associated with it. (2003, 195, my brackets)

Locke in this respect is more “liberal,” but this is more a matter of emphasis, not signaling a substantial difference from Hobbes.

What about Locke and religion? His famous *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) differs from Hobbes’ theoretical position. Locke argues that the acceptance of religious differences within society can act as leaven, for when religious sects are suppressed, these groups can constitute civil unrest in desiring their social freedom. Locke is referring to the many sects within Christianity. But this acceptance of religious differences takes place on two conditions. First, one must “distinguish exactly the business of civil government from that of religion.” This distinction works neatly if religion accepts its disembodied, inner sphere of activity. For Locke, government properly promotes external interests, relating to life, liberty, and the general welfare. The church, on the other hand, exists to promote internal interests, such as the salvation of the soul:

Civil interests I call life, liberty, health, and indolency of body; and the possession of outward things, such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like. . . . [T]he whole jurisdiction of the magistrate reaches only to these civil concerns, and that all civil power, right and dominion, is bounded and confined to the only care of promoting these things; and that it neither can nor ought in any manner to be extended to the salvation of souls. (*Letter*)

Luther’s two-kingdom doctrine has now been fully established. The state and the church serve entirely separate functions, one worldly, the other

internal and otherworldly, and the church must accept this or violate civic order. Locke's second condition is that tolerance cannot be extended to Roman Catholics (and, thus, neither to Muslims) or atheists. This is a very telling exclusion. Locke writes:

[The Roman] Church can have no right to be tolerated by the magistrate which is constituted upon such a bottom that all those who enter into it do thereby ipso facto deliver themselves up to the protection and service of another prince [the Pope]. For by this means the magistrate would give way to the settling of a foreign jurisdiction in his own country and suffer his own people to be listed, as it were, for soldiers against his own Government. [He analogically applies the same argument to Muslims.] . . . It is ridiculous for any one to profess himself to be a Mahometan only in his religion, but in everything else a faithful subject to a Christian magistrate, whilst at the same time he acknowledges himself bound to yield blind obedience to the Mufti of Constantinople, who himself is entirely obedient to the Ottoman Emperor and frames the feigned oracles of that religion according to his pleasure. But this Mahometan living amongst Christians would yet more apparently renounce their government if he acknowledged the same person to be head of his Church who is the supreme magistrate in the state. [Finally, Locke turns to the different case of atheists.] . . . Lastly, those are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of a God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all; besides also, those that by their atheism undermine and destroy all religion, can have no pretence of religion whereupon to challenge the privilege of a toleration. (*Letter*, my added brackets)

Different Christian denominations are tolerated by Locke. By deduction, toleration would be extended to non-Zionist Jews and those of other religions who had no "ecclesiastical" or equivalent authorities outside England to whom loyalty, or as Locke renders it, "blind obedience," was owed. Locke's thinking is prescient on Islam, for only one sort of Islam would pass his test: a form that denied a transnational *ummah* (the community of the faithful, which can technically sometimes include Jews and Christians). Such an Islam is a contradiction in terms, although in theory the obligations to the *ummah* lead to very different practices. What we are seeing is that with the state policing of the public square, religious discourse cannot play a public role, and religious practice is a private choice that must not ever question the state. This is true for Locke as it is for Hobbes. We see through these thinkers the emergence of the political philosophy determining the

marginal place of religion and the center-stage character of the European nation state. The nation state's narration of religion becomes identified with the scientific study of religion: a neutral view beyond religious bias.

Was the third father of another form of the social contract, Rousseau, different from his English predecessors? In one way, yes; and in two other ways, no. His *Social Contract* of 1762 was deeply influential in European and American history. Rousseau is very different from Hobbes and Locke in criticizing the notion of rights arising out of nature. His conception of human nature was dramatically postmodern in one sense for, although he used the vocabulary of natural law, deriving from Grotius, Pufendorf, and Burlamaqui, he thought natural law theorists read back into individual human nature arbitrary universal rules deriving from social relations. Rousseau's individual natural man was neither moral nor immoral, and certainly not rational *per se*, but first and foremost able to preserve himself and exercise sympathy. Rousseau could be read as a Romantic critic of the Enlightenment, who prefigures postmodernism. "Self-preservation" should not be read in a Hobbesian fashion, for Rousseau thought it preposterous of Hobbes to imagine that humans perceived their welfare to depend on the destruction of others. Contrary to Locke, Rousseau also believed that property rights were not part of man's nature. Rousseau's view of human nature, un-fallen and innocent, was condemned by both the Catholic and the Calvinist churches for undermining the doctrine of original sin. Even so, like Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau starts with the individual, natural man, who then forms community; and like both, he realizes that this is when the trouble with religion becomes particularly acute.

Rousseau was closer to Hobbes and Locke in his view of the state's absolute power and religion's private and subservient place within the state. Rousseau's central and deeply contested concept here is the "general will." Rousseau emphasized will, rather than reason – and, here again, he is perhaps a precursor of the Nietzschean postmodern. He argued that the will follows either the passions or reason. The first leads to what he called the particular will, which always favors a part rather than the whole; the second, which is more universal, he called the real will. The real will represents a higher level in not being self-seeking and sectarian. It can, but need not, approximate to the highest level: the general will. This latter seems to represent the true good for all, such that 'whoever refuses to obey the general will will be forced to do so by the entire body. This means merely that he will be forced to be free' (Rousseau 1762, 150). Since the general will could not be automatically identified with the particular or real will, it seemed

to clash with many of Rousseau's strongly expressed democratic impulses, and became, like Locke, closely associated with what Rousseau calls the "lawgiver." But, differently from Locke, Rousseau associated this figure with a charismatic leader, who would appear to the rulers to have divine authority, for he must convince them of this "authority of a different order, which can compel without violence and persuade without convincing" (Rousseau 1762, 164). Whether or not Rousseau actually intended an aspect of his work to be made central to its entire reading, I think Lester Crocker has a point when he argues that Robespierre implements the "total collectivist state of the *The Social Contract* in which 'virtue patriotism' would rule" (1968, 120), and that the fascisms of the twentieth century (Hitler, Stalin, and others) are also grounded in the primacy of the "general will," which allows man to be "forced to be free." This is a highly contested reading, and while it may not capture the full balance of Rousseau's corpus, it perhaps highlights a trajectory that is possible once neither nature nor the divine are given dominion.

What of religion? In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau defines three types of religion:

The first, which has neither temples, nor altars, nor rites, and is confined to the purely *internal* cult of the supreme God and the eternal obligations of morality, is the religion of the Gospel pure and simple, the true theism, what may be called natural divine right or law. The [second], which is codified in a single country, gives it its gods, its own tutelary patrons; it has its dogmas, its rites, and its external cult prescribed by law; outside the single nation that follows it, all the world is in its sight infidel, foreign and barbarous; the duties and rights of man extend for it only as far as its own altars. Of this kind were all the religions of early peoples, which we may define as civil or positive divine right or law. There is a third sort of religion of a more singular kind, which gives men two codes of legislation, two rulers, and two countries, renders them subject to contradictory duties, and makes it impossible for them to be faithful both to religion and to citizenship. Such are the religions of the Lamas and of the Japanese, and such is Roman Christianity, which may be called the religion of the priest. It leads to a sort of mixed and anti-social code which has no name. (Rousseau 1762, book IV, chapter 8)

All three forms are subversive of good government and, interestingly, the least embodied, the first, is especially so (although Rousseau calls it gospel "pure and simple" and "true theism"). Why is it so subversive? For Rousseau, it produced a slave mentality preaching servitude and dependence, thus

producing citizens incapable of enjoying the liberty of the republic. Here Rousseau sounds like Nietzsche, with a disdain for the meek of the earth.

The conclusion regarding religion and the state is Hobbesian: the state must control religions, for they are a threat to the state in different ways. Toward the end of this final section of the *Social Contract*, Rousseau defines Christianity conveniently for the purpose of slotting it into its pre-aligned space: “Christianity as a religion is entirely spiritual, occupied solely with heavenly things; the country of the Christian is not of this world.” Even with such an emasculated “religion,” to ensure social stability and the power of the state, like Hobbes, Rousseau takes the extra step by giving the sovereign supreme power over determining the meaning of religion:

There is therefore a purely civil profession of faith of which the Sovereign should fix the articles, not exactly as religious dogmas, but as social sentiments without which a man cannot be a good citizen or a faithful subject. While it can compel no one to believe them, it can banish from the State whoever does not believe them. . . . If any one, after publicly recognising these dogmas, behaves as if he does not believe them, let him be punished by death: he has committed the worst of all crimes, that of lying before the law. (Rousseau 1762, book IV, chapter 8)

To conclude this section: from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century we have seen the slow emergence of the nation state and its construing of “religion” in the key liberal theorists whose thought has shaped the constitutional democracies of European, American, and most non-European ex-colonized nations (in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa). My second goal of the narrative had been to show that the sovereign nation state was central in generating the definition of religion that today shapes our thoughts. Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau are all aware of “world” religions and “Christian religions” as we have seen from their texts. The Catholic, Muslim, Buddhist, and Japanese religions are all incapable of being tolerated in these states because of their dual allegiances. Locke also discounts atheists because their promises cannot be based on any higher belief or authority. These are the presuppositions and positioning of a liberal tolerant society free of religious bigotry.

Act III: state wars: the irreligious reign of terror

My third goal is to question the claim that drives narrative one: religions and religious wars cause bloodshed. Statistics are highly disputed so I do

not want to make definitive claims. I use Philip's (2004) and White (2005) for my figures. Since the emergence of nation states in the nineteenth century, and the efforts of each to try and secure and expand its sovereign territories, even if we restrict ourselves to European and American involvement in the twentieth century, the figures are terrifying. The First World War saw 19 million dead (excluding related medical illness, which would bring the total to 100 million more). The Second World War saw 55 million dead. After 1945, the death toll from the Vietnam, Korean, French Indochina, and Algerian wars alone comes to 4.8 million. Between 1946 and 2002 there were 226 armed conflicts according to the definitions of the Uppsala Conflict Data project and most of these were related to colonial powers carving up territorial boundaries that were disputed during and after colonial occupation. Much of the Middle East, Asia, and Africa was subject to these new sovereign boundaries. For example, David Fromkin has argued in *A Peace to End All Peace* (1989) that the European powers created the modern Middle East between 1914 and 1922, and in their boundary creations bequeathed many of today's intractable problems to the Arabs. The Iraq–Kuwait border, which has caused recent international tension, was drawn up by the British high commander Percy Cox, who was intent on keeping Iraq dependent on the British by blocking access to the Persian Gulf. The inclusion of the Soviet Union and China in war deaths during this period brings in a further 71 million dead. None of these wars were fought in the name of religion. They were the wars of irreligion, the wars of the nation state that had replaced God with capital, nation, and state. John Gray sees this secular death drive as the inverse of apocalyptic religion, which it replaced, and which threatens to return (Gray 2007), although Gray paints “religion” with too broad a brush (see Rengger 2007).

It is facile to compare figures between the twentieth century and the so-called “wars of religion” in the pre-modern period, in part because body counting is always unreliable, and possibly more so, the further back we go; and the technological power of modernity, as Zygmunt Bauman (1989) argues, is capable of producing killing machines on an unprecedented scale. Nevertheless, I would like to make three points about the figures and the irreligious bloodbath that our century has witnessed. First, as the eminent British sociologist Anthony Giddens has argued in the second volume of *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism: The Nation State and Violence* (1987), since the sixteenth-century emergence of the doctrine of the state, its sovereignty, and the inviolability of its territorial boundaries, war has been the major means by which territory has been secured and

boundaries expanded. War and violence have become the state's prerogative, its monopoly and its main tool, to which the economy is harnessed. If we add to this Bauman's point about modernity and the technologically efficient killing machines, there is a powerful conjunction of forces explaining the inevitability of a war-torn twentieth century. David Fromkin, the American lawyer and historian, nicely reverses the question of the modern irreligious period into: how was peace ever possible? In his *Europe's Last Summer: Who Started the Great War in 1914?* (2004) Fromkin confirms the glorification of violence as the underbelly of the nation state:

In the opening years of the 20th century, Europeans glorified violence. . . . A panoramic view of Europe in the years 1900 to 1914 would show prominently that the Continent was racing ahead in a scientific, technological, and industrial revolution, powered by almost limitless energy that was transforming almost everything; that violence was endemic in the service of social, economic, political, class, ethnic, and national strife; that Europe focused its energies on an escalating, dizzying arms race on a scale that the world had never seen before; and that, in the centre of the Continent's affairs, powerful dynamic Germany had made strategic arrangements such that, if it went to war, it would bring almost all Europe and much of the rest of the planet into the war for or against it. Given these conditions, does not the question, "How could war have broken out in such a peaceful world?" rather answer itself? Would it not have been more to the point to ask how statesmen could have continued to avoid war much longer? . . . Which is not to say that war could *not* have been averted, but merely that, by 1914, it might have taken extraordinary skill to keep on averting it . . . in a world in which war was considered desirable – even necessary. (2004, 41–2)

As heirs to this civilization, we are confronted with some difficult questions, posed so strongly after the First World War: how could a once Christian Europe tear itself apart in so ferocious a manner? This takes me to my second point.

Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, the Russian Nobel Literature laureate, offered an answer to the question just posed in his 1983 Templeton Prize Address at Buckingham Palace. Admittedly unfashionable and deeply pessimistic, Solzhenitsyn saw 1914 as the outcome of a Europe that had abandoned God and, with that, humanity. The savior state had no other *telos* than the naked power of the nation state's self-assertion:

The failings of human consciousness, deprived of its divine dimension, have been a determining factor in all the major crimes of this century. The first

of these was World War I, and much of our present predicament can be traced back to it. It was a war (the memory of which seems to be fading) when Europe, bursting with health and abundance, fell into a rage of self-mutilation which could not but sap its strength for a century or more, and perhaps forever. The only possible explanation for this war is a mental eclipse among the leaders of Europe due to their lost awareness of a Supreme Power above them. (Solzhenitsyn 1983)

Solzhenitsyn interestingly extends his analysis to the Soviet Union and it bears remarkable parallels with the European story, not to be pressed, but certainly to be noted:

In its past, Russia did know a time when the social ideal was not fame, or riches, or material success, but a pious way of life. Russia was then steeped in an Orthodox Christianity which remained true to the Church of the first centuries. The Orthodoxy of that time knew how to safeguard its people under the yoke of a foreign occupation that lasted more than two centuries, while at the same time fending off iniquitous blows from the swords of Western crusaders. . . . But in the 17th century Russian Orthodoxy was gravely weakened by an internal schism. In the 18th, the country was shaken by Peter's forcibly imposed transformations, which favoured the *economy, the state, and the military* at the expense of the religious spirit and national life. . . . Russia felt the first whiff of secularism; its subtle poisons permeated the educated classes in the course of the 19th century and opened the path to Marxism. By the time of the Revolution, faith had virtually disappeared in Russian educated circles; and amongst the uneducated, its health was threatened. It was Dostoevsky, once again, who drew from the French Revolution and its seeming hatred of the Church the lesson that "revolution must necessarily begin with atheism." That is absolutely true. But the world had never before known a godlessness as organized, militarized, and tenaciously malevolent as that practiced by Marxism. (Solzhenitsyn 1983)

While Solzhenitsyn's style of apocalyptic declamation is not always attractive to European intellectuals, there is something significant in his argument, which brings together the emergence of the nation state with the silencing of religion in the public square, the eclipse of Christianity ("religion" in Europe), ideological secularism (one of whose strongest forms was Marxism), the eruption of endless violence, and a "rage of self-mutilation." If these factors are actually related, as I am inclined to think is the case, then the question of "religions" in the public square is a most pressing issue. Part III will address this issue further. I now need to return

to my main concern: the effect that the term “religion” has on its application upon the world religions.

Act IV: modernity’s construal of the academic “field” of “religions”

To draw a conclusion to my alternative narrative, I want to develop three more arguments in response to the last part of modernity’s narrative about “religion.” You will recall modernity’s story contained three claims: first, of Christianity’s distortion of the other for its own theological interests, emblematic in sixteenth-century England; second, the slow struggle to throw off this theologizing of non-Christian religions; third, the emancipation of the study of religion from theological tutelage that facilitates an understanding of religions on their own terms, the victory of the scientific study of religion. In this section I want to challenge all three claims to tell a different story, which, in brief, runs something like this: Christianity actually provides the best conceptual space to understand another religion in its own terms, followed by an entirely legitimate theological engagement that can entail appreciation, learning, and social collaboration, at the same time as immanent critique (intra-textual criticism) and mission (inter-textual criticism). Modernity, both in its politics and in its allied academic rendering of religions, fails to engage with religion’s otherness, but neutralizes it for the sake of control. Second, the attempt to throw off one interpretative framework (Christianity) only results in new interpretative frameworks, which can be criticized by theology for failing to meet their own objectives. Third, the victory claimed by some proponents of religious studies is spurious, for they have brought their own presuppositions into play in understanding and interpreting the religions, which has no more justification than a theological interpretation, but may have more social esteem in a secularized society. In fact, it may have less justification because of the belief that there is no interpretative framework (the spurious claim of neutral objectivity). From a theological viewpoint, it certainly has less justification, as it fails to tell the full truth about the phenomenon in question – the full truth meaning speaking in the light of the triune God who is the fullness of truth. Only from this theological narrative can other religions be truly understood, simply because Christianity is true.

Harrison’s narrative actually demonstrates that different types of theology generate differing types of interest in other religions, including those that try and properly describe another religion based on the best available findings, culled from a multi-disciplinary perspective (philology, history,

archaeology, and so on). I will assume this type when I speak of theology's interpretation of culture for the rest of this chapter, for this type has developed and mutated, in a trajectory between the Cambridge Platonists, Hegel, nineteenth-century comparative theology (see below), and, to a limited extent, the comparative theologies of today (see chapter 2). Panikkar's early work is a role model of what I seek to develop. While most of the Protestant Scholastics were simply not interested in other religions, the Cambridge Platonists were, and they were intellectually serious about this task. They were motivated by their concern for God's justice, for they felt that the Scholastics in their presumption of damnation regarding non-Christians had compromised God's justice. They were thus called upon to demonstrate their thesis that some truths of revelation were found in pre-Christian religions and they drew upon the ancient *prisca theologia* tradition – it was held that Old Testament revelation affected all pre-Christian cultures, so that traces of divine truth were to be found everywhere. As evidence many pointed to the *Hermetica*, which was believed to originate from ancient Egypt. What is important is the responsive flexibility and appropriateness of categories to the material being investigated, and their engagement with the best scholarship on the religion in question. For example Cudworth, one of the leading Cambridge Platonists, acknowledged that, in the light of Casaubon's historical findings about the *Hermetica*, which dated them much later than previously held, it was no longer possible to view these texts as pre-Christian. The theory of their influence from the Old Testament had to be abandoned. Whether Casaubon was correct or not, we see here a responsiveness to historical claims. After Casaubon, new categories were sought that would serve as conceptual lenses through which different cultures could be better understood. The *prisca theologia* hypothesis was eventually abandoned by many (and reinterpreted by others). New interpretative categories arose with Hegel in the eighteenth century, as we saw above, and with the Anglican divines, Frederick Denison Maurice and James Freeman Clarke, in the nineteenth.

In her important study, *The Invention of World Religions, Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (2005), Tomoko Masuzawa makes some astute observations about Maurice and Clarke's type of theological reading, which she calls "comparative theology." She is unaware of Clooney and Fredericks, for the nineteenth century is her remit. She shows that Maurice and Clarke both made good use of scientific studies as the basis for theological engagement and interpretation of the religions. They concluded, with differences, that there was much that was good and

noble in these traditions, and that they would find their fulfillment in Christianity, which alone responded to their desire for true worship (Maurice and Clarke: see Masuzawa 2005, 75–86). It is interesting that Charles Hardwick, writing slightly earlier, came up with a very negative assessment of the religions, but he also took the time to learn about these religions (Hardwick: see Masuzawa 2005, 86–95). The point I want to stress is that regardless of their respective theological verdicts on the “religions,” what we see is a growing sense that a good initial understanding is required of what is then theologically praised or criticized, or declared as being bewilderingly complex. Understanding, to the best of one’s ability, is a prerequisite to any form of judgment. Of course this understanding is not neutral, as it is structured by particular research questions, interests, and methods. Some philosophers of science agree this is true of any research paradigm (Kuhn 1970) and this has been applied in the arts and social sciences as well (see Polanyi 1962; McGrane 1989; Asad 1993).

Further, because Christianity calls for a critical engagement with *all* human culture, the world religions become a necessary object of theological interest, which requires understanding them as best as possible from the “inside,” as they understood or understand themselves, before “outside” interpretation can proceed. This whole area can be illuminated greatly from the debate in social sciences, especially anthropology, regarding insider/outsider observation and participation (McCutcheon 1999). For the moment, however, I shall simply specify the following and then proceed. Insider reporting is a descriptive interpretation that would usually be agreed on by an insider or a well-informed and sympathetic outsider. Outsider reporting is an interpretation of insider reporting, which may be entirely congruent with the insider account, or may diverge. If it diverges, a plausible explanatory framework within the outsider report needs to be provided. It is quite possible that an insider might learn constructively from an outsider reporting process, or indeed contest and argue against it. Or simply ignore it. The question of truth operates in both areas, insider and outsider reporting, but obviously in different ways.

For inside reports to be true, they must be intra-systematically coherent with the beliefs and practices of the insider group, and the question of their referential ontology might be part of the insider report, or it might not. For outside reports to be true, they must be intra-systematically coherent with the world of the outsider reporter, who is of course an insider to her own world, and their persuasiveness to the insider about whom they are reporting is entirely contingent on a whole range of factors. If, for example,

a problem is located in the insider's world by both the insider and the outsider, the outsider may claim that it is best resolved by actually leaving that worldview, adapting it in a certain way consonant with an insider report, or adapting it in ways that would create intra-systematic dissonance. This process might happen through rational discussion, rhetorical persuasion, example of life lived, and in a whole range of explicit and implicit ways.

Masuzawa acknowledges the important social impact of these Anglican divines. In its heyday, "comparative theology was a very popular, highly regarded, and respectable intellectual-spiritual pursuit" (2005, 22). This reflected a strong Anglican presence within English universities and among the general public at the time. Masuzawa notes that

it may be credibly suggested that the popularity of world religions was more a legacy of the religious-evangelical enterprise of comparative theology than of the arcane and scholarly tradition of the nineteenth-century science of religion. If this should be the case, the present-day suppression of – or, at least, what appears to be wilful ignorance about – comparative theology may be an intriguing historical conundrum in its own right. (2005, 23)

The conundrum may be explicable by fashionable prejudice from the history of religions school, both then and now. Masuzawa is aware of this:

The proponents of the science of religion in the twentieth century and thereafter, however, have been careful to keep their own practice at a distance from [comparative theology] reserving the privileged term "science" for studies based on objective appraisal of empirical data, supposedly unmixed with pious sentiments or partisan denominational interests. (2005, 22)

The problem is that the religious "scientists" simply promoted different interests with alternative "pious" sentiments, not pure objectivity.

I want to suggest that there are two alternative trajectories to the theological engagement when it comes to the description/interpretation of world religions – which bear a close parallel to the political arrangements emerging in modern Europe. The political counterparts will appear in examining the debate about religion in the public square in chapter 5. The first school I shall call ideological secular readings (ISR), which has as its modern father David Hume. His *Natural History of Religions* (1757) viewed all religions as equally illusory and, thus, equally worthless. ISR uses religion to further its own agenda and develop its own vantage point, which historically has been inherently in conflict with the self-understanding of the said religions.

The other school I shall call principled secular readings (PSR), which has as its modern father the founder of the *Religionswissenschaft*, Friedrich Max Müller. Müller tried to describe the religions primarily through philology and historical–critical reconstruction, establishing a “scientific” understanding of the religion, shorn of any religious prejudice. He was more concerned to understand and interpret the religions as they understood themselves, integrating the insider and outsider reporting. Müller and his successors practiced under various terms, with strong internal differences, but they shared the same basic goal. Hence, PSR covers history of religions, comparative religions, religious studies, and scientific study of religions.

Let me examine ISR and PSR briefly in turn to establish my claim that theology does not provide a biased reading of religions *compared* to non-theological readings. Only then will I move to a second claim: that theology provides the truest interpretation of the religions. First, the ISR group. Mircea Eliade (1969, 12–36), in an extensive review of over 50 years of the scientific study of religion, chooses 1912 as his decisive start date, because that date marks the publication or completion of five groundbreaking works that, to Eliade, establish the field: Emile Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*; Sigmund Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*; Carl Jung’s *Psychology of the Unconscious: A Study of the Transformations and Symbolisms of the Libido*; Raffaele Pettazoni’s *Primitive Religion in Sardegna*; and Wilhelm Schmidt’s untranslated *Der Ursprung der Gottesidee*, on primitive monotheism. Durkheim, Freud, and Jung belong to ISR, and Pettazoni and Schmidt to PSR.

Few scholars today would class Durkheim, Freud, and Jung as “scientific.” They are rather clearly ideological in holding various presuppositions that construe their interpretations quite radically. Durkheim claimed a positivist understanding, dispassionate and scientific, but actually explained religion in purely sociological terms: as maintaining the social order, providing social cement, such that God is society writ large. He saw religion as originally totemic, with its designation of sacred and profane, such that these distinctions ordered and structured social behavior. Durkheim’s “objectivity” was such that he positively argued for a common civic religion in the light of the demise of traditional religions, to serve their purpose of social cohesion. The sociologist Kieran Flanagan is blunt:

[Durkheim’s] solution is untenable and is itself founded on an illusion. . . . A religion without God now functions to sacralise social bonds and to effect a harmonisation between the actor and the collective. Religious rituals now

function to sustain this collective purpose and to affirm social bonds. But in this account *any* ritual is deemed to work. It need not be religious in intention but could be civil or it could be mass forms of entertainment. But by abandoning what is distinctive about religion, its exclusive functions, Durkheim blunts sociological critiques of religious belief. (1966, 116)

He also paves the way to evacuating the truth with which religion is concerned and recoding it entirely in terms of social function. This is a form of sociological reductionism.

Freud was deeply reductive, both in his early and in his later work, where religion masked various neuroses and psychoses, which a mature personality or group would eventually grow out of into mature adulthood. Jung was far more sympathetic to religions than either Durkheim or Freud, but classed them around organizing psychological themes that he thought were central in reflecting immanent psychological cross-cultural archetypes, rather than relating to any transcendent ontological reality. Jung eventually translates all religions into his own psychological worldview. (See further on these brief readings: Milbank 1990, 61–71, on Durkheim; and Palmer 1997, on Freud and Jung.) With Freud and Jung, it is clear that we are dealing with men of genius and profound insight, whose work has shaped intellectual disciplines and generated important research work on religion. Both remind theologians of an important and sometimes neglected aspect of what Christianity embodies. But it is their psychological reductionism that is problematic, their actual portrayal of religion as *being about* social cement, neuroses, or universal archetypes, without sufficient attention to the fact that they are not at all describing, but interpreting, and interpreting with little reference to the self-understanding of the religious groups in question. The science of religion, in these three instances, inscribes the religious worldview being “studied” into its own non-religious worldview (sociological, psychoanalytical, and psychodynamic respectively) without much appreciation of that culture in its own terms.

It is one of the important achievements of postmodernity to undermine the pretensions of these great “modern grand narratives” (Foucault 1970; Deleuze 2004), by showing how their “objectivity” was actually the cultural adoption of a specific way of viewing things, with all its necessary policing and punishment. Modernity’s grand narrative had plausibility because it had social and structural endorsement. Its actual claim to truth in terms of its universality was undermined by locating its particularity. However, some currents in this unmasking established a void as the only

real, upon which we scratch our cultural markings, and denied the possibility of metaphysics, a discourse that might enact participation with a divine reality, outside our constructions. The year 1912 simply marks a high point in secularized readings of religion, which is called history of religions in Eliade's comprehensive account. If, and only if, the Christian worldview is discounted or objectively wrong can the objectivity of these views be possible, otherwise a lot more argument is required by ideological secular readings.

Before proceeding, I need to address an obvious objection: "surely Christian readings are guilty of the same ideological character as ISR, although obviously not secularist? Even in your two-tiered strategy of attaining insider-reporter understanding, you finally advocate reading religions in ways those religions might not agree with, from an outsider report." Four responses need to be made. First, drawing on chapter 1, I would argue that one concern of mine is to understand, to the best of our interdisciplinary ability, how a religious culture intra-textually understands itself. This is vital for theology and is the foundation of both mission and apologetics. Without a truthful understanding of the other's difference, the latter two are hampered. Here there is no parallel with ISRs. Second, in the next move, that of theological interpretation, there is admittedly a similar process of outsider interpretation, as with ISR. The only difference will be that insider and outsider reporting may have more substantial common ground (with, say, forms of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) than the outsider reporting of a Freud or Durkheim where the reporting has little point of contact with the self-understanding of the group. Admittedly, this is a contingent matter and would require explication case by case. Third, the Christian can claim the same epistemic validity as any of these other interpretative strategies, rather than accept the notion that there are some biased and some unbiased forms of outsider interpretation. Fourth, because of the Christian belief that the triune God is the true story of our world, it is a task of theology to argue this case with other alternative claims. In chapter 2 I argued that missionary rational dialectics and out-narration are always part of Christian engagement with other religions.

Principled secularists come in two varieties: modernists (the early generation like Müller, and recent writers like Donald Wiebe); and post-modernists (like Timothy Fitzgerald, Gavin Flood, Jonathan Z. Smith, and Robert Cummings Neville). Some of the postmodernists criticize the modernists just as I have the ISRs, but instead charge them with theological rather than ideological secularist bias! For example, Fitzgerald, in his

incisive work *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (2000), starts with Müller and continues his trenchant line of criticism, with textual evidence, against the heirs of Müller: Chantepie de La Saussaye, Nathan Soderblom, Gerardus van der Leeuw, C. Juccho Bleeker, Joachim Wach, Joseph M. Kitagawa, Eliade, right up to Wilfred Cantwell Smith.

As I have argued this of Smith in chapter 3, let me take two other important figures in this group to illustrate Fitzgerald's argument: Müller and Eliade. Müller's theory of the origin of natural religion, "the individual's perception of the infinite in or beyond the finite, and the association of moral feeling," is irreducibly "theological" according to Fitzgerald:

It implies that the relation between the individual and the Infinite is a universal phenomenon because all humans naturally are born with this faculty, which accounts for the existence of "religions". This is a metaphysical claim that reflects a development of the assumptions of western Christian culture, especially liberal Protestantism, both in its positing of the individual's capacities and also in its concept of the Infinite. (2000, 35).

Likewise for Eliade, Fitzgerald cites the criticism of Ninian Smart (whom I have criticized for falsely claiming objectivity through a modified phenomenological method; D'Costa 2005, 20–5). Smart criticizes Eliade's hidden ontological interpretative categories:

Now of course Eliade's fixing on the sacred–profane polarity as ultimate involves various other limbs of theory. For the sacred is conceived by him ontologically: what is perceived as sacred in a hierophany reflects an archetype and attests to the primordial ontology, which Eliade characterises as Parmenidean (the real is timeless and inexhaustible), Platonic (archetypal) and Indian (temporal experience is illusory). (Smart 1978, 176)

Two points regarding the modernists in PSR: they all have interpretative frameworks, which take a Christian, Indian, secularist, or some other philosophical stance. This should not be surprising, given the arguments deployed against the ISRs. In this sense, the PSRs fail in their goal (neutrality), without in any way minimizing their huge contributions to the study of religion, their philological, historical, and cultural findings and researches, or detracting from their noble concern to understand world religions without distortion. Second, the only distinction between the modernist and postmodernist PSRs is that of greater reflexivity regarding the interpretative task and its necessary presuppositions. This is seen in the

lingering sense of a freedom of interpretation beyond religious readings in some of this latter group, which is worth looking at. Let us keep with Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald's consistent line is that the very construct "religion" is shored up by various ideological presuppositions held by scholars, primarily religious, not always Christian, but always deeply "Western." In summarizing his argument, Fitzgerald says he seeks to show how "religious studies"

imposes on non-western institutions and values the nuance and form of western ones, especially in such popular distinctions as those between religion and society, or between religion and secular, or religion and politics, or religion and economics. In addition, and in pursuit of this constructed image of the other religions, it draws up typologies of Judaeo-Christian monotheistic categories such as worship, God, monasticism, salvation, and the meaning of history and tries to make the material fit those categories. (2000, 9)

Fitzgerald has a point. His careful historical work helps to support my own argument about the way in which religion in the West became privatized, and this privatization was then exported to the world ("religions"). Fitzgerald is a healthy reminder to be careful that we do not simply see what we would like to (either negatively or positively). He also reminds us not to smuggle in theological or alien interpretative categories *without being clear* that this is happening. But all this presupposes some vantage point that will allow things to eventually appear as they really are.

Where is this vantage point for Fitzgerald?

My proposal is that those of us who work within the so-called field of religion but who reject the domination of ecumenical theology and phenomenology reconceptualize our field of study in such a way that we become critically aligned with theoretical and methodological fields such as anthropology, history, and cultural studies. (2000, 10)

And the greatest of these is "cultural studies" or, more precisely, cultural anthropology. It would seem that, at the crucial pressure point, Fitzgerald creeps back into the modernist camp. Why should cultural anthropology provide a non-ideological platform, a pure, rather than interpreted, viewpoint, when Fitzgerald has already earlier acknowledged in his argument that "ultimately all our attempts at understanding are based on metaphysical assumptions and articles of faith" (2000, 43)? But at the final step Fitzgerald

does not unfold or admit his own metaphysics and articles of faith, and assumes this the best perch from which to view the world. Anthropology has been strongly criticized for just this evasion by the distinguished anthropologist Bernard McGrane in his *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other* (1989). Fitzgerald is aware of McGrane's work and cites it approvingly. He adds, with reassurance, "a great deal of the most cogent criticisms that have been made against the culture concept, and indeed against anthropology itself, have come from within the discipline itself" (2000, 237). This reflexivity does commend the discipline, but it does not show how Fitzgerald is going to escape the trap he has set for every other investigator that he has criticized: their ideological constructivism. He is too intelligent to ignore this, but never shows us the way out, except for commending endless reflexivity, which is of course claimed by most intellectual disciplines within the academy. In the end, Fitzgerald is guilty of cultural, anthropological, ideological reading strategies, ISR and PSR.

However, some other postmodern writers acknowledge the "ideological" trap is inescapable; every investigator is theory laden. This is found resolutely in the illuminating work of Jonathan Z. Smith, but he, too, in the end, seems to find a place to stand, which is contrary to Sam Gill's (1998) defense of Smith's strength being the recognition that there is "no place to stand" when we study religions. Smith's self-conscious coming from nowhere is expressed in contrast to Archimedes' "Give me a place to stand on and I will move the world." For Smith, we cannot do this any longer. We can only place things side by side like the modern comparative theologians. He writes:

The historian has no such possibility. There are no places on which he might stand apart from the messiness of the given world. . . . The historian's point of view cannot sustain clear vision. The historian's task is to complicate not to clarify. He strives to celebrate the diversity of manners, the variety of species, the opacity of things. (1978, 289–90)

But note, despite the important trait of resisting simplification, this historian is particularly inscribed: he cannot have any sense of religious truth; he cannot have any "clear vision" such that a good God created this world, and he foundationally rests with the "opacity of things." Once there was modernist positivist history that promised the dissolution of opacity: the neutral platform. Now there is postmodernist historicism that requires opacity for its authenticity: a new, but not neutral, platform.

Neville allows the possibility of a theological religious study in his *Religion in Late Modernity* in arguing that “we must squarely face the question of the integration of theological studies into religious studies” (2002, 214), as does Flood in his *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion* (1999). Even though Neville and Flood do not practice theological readings themselves, they both recognize that tradition-specific readings of one religion by another are entirely legitimate and, indeed, can be very productive. In this brand of postmodernism we come full circle. We can justify theology’s engagement with a chastened self-critical form of religious studies that must serve a theological end.

I promised one final argument to conclude this chapter’s alternative narrative: that theology’s reading of world religions, in their particularity and complexity, is the most truthful reading available. Perhaps, by now, the gist of this claim will be apparent. It means this: once the multi-disciplinary insider/outsider reports about the doctrine of self and compassion in Tibetan Buddhism in the sixteenth century; or the tradition and practices of *sati* in Hinduism culminating in twentieth-century practice; or the doctrine and practice of *jihad* in Sunni Islam in the modern period in Egypt and Pakistan are closely studied and understood, then, and only then, is theology able to make certain judgments that are internal to theology about these findings. These judgments might be very simple: this is compatible with our faith and indeed might be seen as a stepping-stone toward true faith (*preparatio*, fulfillment); this is not compatible with the faith and, in certain instances, this is evil and to be challenged (discontinuity); this aspect seems compatible with faith, but neither a positive nor a negative relation is presently discernable (don’t know, but be attentive); it is impossible to judge whether this is compatible or incompatible with faith, and it may actually be incommensurable for the time being (time-bound provisional incommensurability); this aspect actually helps us understand either a doctrinal or a practical aspect of our faith with a refinement not earlier available, because such resources were never present within the Christian tradition before (for example, Aristotle for Aquinas, or Sankara for Panikkar), or because, contingently, this has never been part of the tradition (meditation by the laity), or used to be present in the tradition but is not much used contemporarily (praying the rosary, use of indulgences that can be prompted when confronted by the analogical use of the “rosary” or “indulgences” in Buddhism). These latter questions deal with the questions of truth that none of the alternatives I have looked at address.

Conclusion

In this and the previous chapter I have tried to trace the contested manner in which “religion” has been understood to show that modernity’s discourse on “religion” has powerful theological, social, and intellectual consequences: it rendered religion an increasingly immanent sentiment, a matter of private choice, its role being consequently de-socialized, in part because of the rhetoric that religions always fight with each other, and in part because the sovereign state co-opted the social space of religion. From my alternative narrative, I tried instead to show that what happened was the replacement of one religion by another. The new religion of secularism (in both its IRS and PRS modalities) and its accompanying idol, the sovereign state, required war and violence for its perpetuation and maintenance and the destruction of any loyalties that were transnational or contrary to the state’s sovereign rule (Catholicism and Islam being two obvious examples). If a theology of religions is to be developed in the light of this narrative, it is unavoidably political and engaged in a cultural critique that not only requires “religions” to be understood as cultural forms of power, but also the often invisible state and its apparatus, which we take as givens, as cultural forms of power that can be deeply inimical to religious adherence. This is what I hope to show in the next part, addressing a much debated question: the role of religion in today’s public square.