

what made it aesthetically, historically, and spiritually appealing to Eliot. He argues that Eliot always felt tension between his commitment to Roman Catholicism, which he deemed the catalyst of European civilization, and his commitment to Anglicanism, which he deemed the catalyst of English civilization. Spurr also points out that Eliot, despite his fulminations against his Puritan and Unitarian roots, never entirely abandoned them. He adapted the vestiges of his American family's Protestantism—its preoccupation with original sin, devotion to strict morals, penchant for asceticism, love of the Bible, and sense of community service—to the Anglo-Catholicism he embraced in 1927. Although Eliot criticized pragmatism, he found practical value in scrupulously following the dictates of his new religion. It gave his life discipline, meaning, and contemplative exercises that helped him transcend the problems he found so intractable. Eliot once said, "I believe that all our problems turn out ultimately to be a religious problem" (p. 175). Spurr demonstrates convincingly that Eliot believed what he said and also believed that his version of Anglicanism offered the best solution to those problems. Spurr's lucid, well-researched, judicious book should be prized by anyone who wants a better understanding of Eliot's complex religious views and the profound influence they had on his writings.

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A Secular Age. By Charles Taylor. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007. x + 874 pp. \$43.50 (cloth).

Much expanded in scope and detail from his 1999 Gifford Lectures, Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* provides the means of conceiving how religion and specifically Christian faith are at once captive to the present age even while they shape and determine our outlook. Moreover, *A Secular Age* provides a means of making sense of religious sentiments and movements without which we are captive to naive enthusiasms or critical cynicism.

Taylor recommends reading the book "as a set of interlocking essays, which shed light on each other, and offer a relevance for each other" (p. ix). The chapters move from (1) an interpretation of the nature of secularization and the contemporary world of Western Europe and North America, to (2) an intellectual history detailing the shift from (using Max Weber's term) an enchanted world to disenchantment given an immanent worldview and the

possibility of unbelief, to (3) an account of religion and religious faith today, to (4) a philosophical and religious interpretation of what this all means and suggestions for possible futures. This makes *A Secular Age* a “big book,” the culmination of Taylor’s work as a philosopher.

Taylor’s argument is historical: meanings arise from history and are “true” as they make sense of the present and possible futures in terms of that history. Only with an historical understanding of religious belief and its transformations is it possible to understand what is assumed in the rejection of religious beliefs and so what are the alternative meanings and possibilities born or embedded in history. Taylor begins by recounting three meanings of “secular”: (1) separation of religion from other spheres of life; (2) the decline of religious beliefs and practices; and (3) the change of conditions such that God becomes a question and no longer axiomatic. The first two accounts of secularization describe the changes in Western culture marked by the collapse of Christendom and what is spoken of now as life in a post-Christian world. These first two accounts of secularization are “subtraction stories” in which past beliefs are lost to “enlightened” views of the world, as when religious belief is viewed as replaced by scientific understandings of the world. Such accounts (as most recently expressed by the new atheists, most notably Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens) are reductionist in that their critique and rejection of religious beliefs fail to comprehend the nature of religious meaning and how these meanings are themselves transformed and assumed in their secular claims (see note 27, p. 835).

The pleasure of reading Taylor’s account of secularization is the context for the understanding he provides for the religious and philosophical views of others. He reaches back into what has been called the pre-Axial Age, in which human agency is embedded in the social order which is embedded in the cosmos which incorporates the divine (p. 152), and also reaches forward to the breakdown of this sacred hierarchy (what he calls “the great disembedding”), where natural causality, human agency, and questions of the human good or human fulfillment are questioned and addressed. Relying on and making sense of primary sources in philosophy and theology, Taylor’s argument enables one to see differently. And for religious thinkers and practitioners, this enables a critical perspective on current movements in a secular age.

The windows which Taylor opens are given through two pairs of “ideal typical types”: the enchanted world and the porous self; and the disenchanted world and the buffered self. As ideal types, they draw together common features that focus attention on assumptions that make sense of larger changes, in this case differences in views of God, the world, society and history, and the human person. In the enchanted world of the pre-Axial Age, the world is sacralized and drenched with powers—spirits, demons, cosmic forces—that break in upon the self, that must be directly encountered, engaged,

placated, honored; hence the importance of holy things and holy places, sacred mysteries and sacramental rites, prayers and incantations. This is a world of theophanies where time itself is broken open by the experience of the eternal.

In the second pair of ideal types that describe a secular age, the world is disenchanted and the self is buffered from direct contact with spirits, demons, and cosmic forces. This describes a distance between the self and the world. The world is no longer sacralized, and the powers that press upon the human person are experienced and understood as affecting the self and then interpreted. In other words, the world is interpreted in terms of the experience of the self, and the process of disenchantment begins. This “turn to the subject” breaks the sacred hierarchy. Interpretive lenses come to buffer the self. By degree, time is flattened until meaning is tied to historical cause and effect, so that history is tied to a universal moral order and notions of historical fulfillment.

Beginning with its broad sacralization of society and the cosmos in the first millennium, the development of Christianity is understood for Taylor in terms of a series of puritan movements. Broadly marked at the beginning of the second millennium, movements within Western Christianity seek to purify Christian faith from its enchanted worldview and diversity of practices. Examples range from monastic reforms to the development of systems of doctrine and discipline, such as the reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and the requirement of oracular confession; the Protestant Reformation continues and radicalizes reform with an emphasis on the conversion of the person and commitment to follow in a holy way of life. Taylor describes here the progressive turn to the subject and the development of the buffered self in a disenchanted world that is, mistakenly, identified too narrowly with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. The reforms themselves seek a common order and as such are uniformizing, homogenizing, and rationalizing (p. 86). Such changes in understandings of the self and the world are possible, of course, only in connection to changes in the material conditions of life that mark the breakdown of traditional society. Developments in communication, mobility, and institutions of education and regulation, for example, make such reform possible.

At the heart of Taylor's argument is the claim that Christian faith is marked by three features: (1) the sacralization of life in which the human person is connected to society and the cosmos; (2) the conversion of the self which is grounded in and gives rise to a sense of the individual and his or her agency; and (3) a universal moral order and purpose which Christians are called to acknowledge, obey, and realize. However expressed, Taylor assumes that these three are tied together in the Christian story as given in Scripture and in Christian practices. Tradition for Taylor is always a process involving the interplay between these three central features of Christianity.

The first millennium, Taylor claims, emphasized the sacralization of life in which God broke into historical time at holy times and holy places. Conversion and a claim to follow a moral order were not absent; they were part of the Christian story and punctuated Christian practices, though they were not rationalized to be uniformly applied in order to insure a common identity of belief and practice. What then is most crucial to reform movements are the second two central features of Christian faith: conversion and a moral order as a common set of practices. Attempts to reform around these two features move Christianity toward a secular age but also produce their own reactions, as in the case of new forms of sacramentalism, contemplation, and mysticism. There is then no pristine faith found in the past or in a reform in the present. And what is taken up uncritically will yield its own surprising reaction.

Taylor's use of ideal types reflecting his claims about the central features of Christian faith are certainly open to debate, but there is much here that can shed light on our current situation. (The chapter on "Religion Today" is worth the price of the book.) Taylor suggests, for example, that Christian reform movements that seek to purify Christian faith in terms of conversion and an immanent moral order lead toward an "excarnation" of Christianity, a turning away from the experience of the sacred to right belief and practice, often with strong emphasis on duty and responsibility. In turn, reactions to excarnation and the flattening out of life have led to forms of romanticism and to the celebration of the erotic and sensual. Taken together, the conditions are set for expressive individualism in which the ethic for the self is to realize his or her own potential self, whether God-given or self-created. More radically, the excarnation of religious faith into a moral order is threatened by violence and the tragic so that atheism becomes thinkable since God has been defined as the guarantor of the moral order. At the same time, violence and the festive are fissures in the closed world structures which provide openings to a new sacralization of the cosmos beyond an immanent moral order.

In this pluralistic, fractured, postmodern world, religious expression will be varied and contentious. Competing forms may well include brands of moral idealism in terms of social justice (such as liberal Unitarians), puritan reformulations of the past (as in fundamentalism), repristinations of an embedded past (whether as Eastern Orthodoxy or Anabaptist countercultural communities), nature worship (new age spiritualities), and expressive individualism (being "spiritual but not religious"). Such forms will mix and match in a variety of ways. For example, the "emerging church" movement may be characterized as rejecting fundamentalism or any repristinations of an embedded past while appropriating past practices as shaped by a culture of expressive individualism. Meanwhile, as congregations diversify in belief and practice, denominational structures will continue to atrophy.

In the end, as sociologists have seen, a secular age does not mean the end of religion. Taylor offers a guide to the perplexed that provides an understanding that reform is inevitable, that sacred powers must be revered, and that conversion stands at the heart of Christianity and is tied to new life and a new way of life.

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The Question of Providence. By Charles M. Wood. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. xiii + 120 pp. \$20.00 (paper).

Those familiar with Charles Wood's previous work, especially *The Formation of Christian Understanding*, will recognize that the title of this study calls to mind his understanding of doctrine. For Wood, who clearly draws from Wittgenstein, doctrine is not a representation of a static essence, an information "worked out, preserved, 'believed,' and handed on" (p. 19). Rather, it is a dynamic field of learned information, skills, and aptitudes—that is, "wisdom" (p. 9). When the Christian community responds to the "question of providence" (p. 12), its teaching is never merely abstract, but is also the iteration of a manner of life that "makes a manifest difference" in how one "sorts things out, makes decisions, and responds . . . to circumstances" (p. 9). A doctrine of providence is directly relevant to a Christian understanding of "what God has to do with what's going on" and how to live accordingly (p. 16).

Wood believes that the doctrine of providence has been woefully neglected in contemporary theology, but confesses that he shares much with those who believe the doctrine is obsolete. For example, he concedes that numerous developments in modern biology and physics make the assumptions that undergird classical metaphysics untenable. He also maintains that the horrors of the last century, in particular, have made it necessary to reject the tendency of the classical position to understand providence as a sanctioning of the present order of the world.

Nonetheless, Wood argues emphatically that some account of the reality of God's providence is required for the coherent articulation of Christian theology, as well as for cogent Christian self-understanding. A rehabilitation of the doctrine is both necessary and possible. The key to this claim for Wood



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