

Rejoinder

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And so we have four responses to my attempt to link the rich field of nineteenth-century prose with today's abundant assertions about secularity, its current dimensions and historical roots. Two – those by W. Clark Gilpin and Colin Jager – come to a conclusion that is similar though hardly identical. In both cases my invitation to identify with theological and literary accounts of secularization thriving in the 1860s is thoughtfully considered but politely declined. Current commentators on the secular, Gilpin and Jager say in different ways, should recognize an interpretive legacy that is diverse and needs to be applied differently in different contexts.

But first each takes some nineteenth-century prose from the shelf, Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Carlyle's *On Heroes* in Gilpin's case. Gilpin does so to recapture and characterize the strong religious current in the literature of the period, one that reverberates across the Atlantic and culminates with William James's turn of the century description of the fundamentally personal nature of religion. He then highlights recent "spatial renderings of the secular" that are "more nimble" than the "displacement theories" that once dominated the sociology of religion and deeply influenced accounts of the making of Occidental modernity in both the social sciences and the humanities (36 above). Yet Gilpin does not set the older model entirely aside. He prefers instead "to call attention to the quite different ways" that both "describe *the problem of the secular*." The result, I find, is a powerful way to historicize a good deal of secularization theory past and present:

In the transfer of authority model, the secular represents
a framing worldview that challenges the religious

worldview and, in the modern West at least, supplants religion as the comprehensive interpretive framework. In the spatial model, the urgent difficulty to be addressed is hostility, oppression, and violence sanctioned by differing religious convictions or ideologies, and the secular establishes spaces within which these differences can be negotiated. The earlier model asks about the continuance of religion in the modern world. The more current model is all too aware of religion's continuance and asks how different forms of religion interact with one another and operate within the modern polity. (38 above)

Jager, for his part, uses Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* to recall a vocational juncture corresponding to my opposing categories, the literary and religious traditions of the nineteenth century and the post-theological academic theories of the twentieth century. This juncture also allows Jager to construct a longer history of my contrast between Weber (1864-1920) and Tawney (1880-1962) where the former's role as a foundational figure in a modern social science diverges from the latter's status as a notable literary heir to Victorian theological debates. By the essay's end, Jager's pertinent German departures include Coleridge's formative journey to Germany in 1798, his recollection of it in a text crucial to our genealogies of the modern literary critic, the elevation of Weber to a lofty place of authority within the sociology of religion, and contemporary critics of neoliberalism using Marxist tools of analysis.

Where Gilpin is agnostic about the ultimate value of either of his two models of secularization (38 above), Jager sounds these concentric iterations of my governing opposition – Coleridge might call them “sequacious notes” (236) – to dramatize his belief in an urgent need to continue to use “the theoretical version” of secularization in its alliance with critiques of liberalism (45 above). Noting how nineteenth-century religious liberalism was often programmatically entwined with economic liberalism, with the proponents of the freedom to worship – such as my exemplar Lecky – enthusiastically hailing free trade and the global circu-

lation of goods, Jager argues that this liberal faith "demands a critique, and the most powerful such critique comes from Marx and Weber" (46 above). I share Jager's understanding of parallels between some of the problems and conflicts of our day and those associated with an earlier era of traumatic industrialization, colonization, and imperialism. And any contemporary critic of neoliberalism can hardly avoid acknowledging debts to Marx as a theorist of the ways in which markets for labor and goods can be socially destructive, systems for the production of what Ruskin would call, in another prose classic of the 1860s, "illth" as opposed to wealth (126). But I also believe it's important to be precise about which portions of Marx and Weber one might prefer to leave behind in any ambitious attempt to make sense of our world and its nineteenth-century threshold.

Bourgeois global capitalism, for Marx, was an ultimately self-destructive post-religious social formation in which capital, above all else, was sovereign. This theory is wanting in the context of our current discussion because it goes hand in hand with a displacement model of secularization, one in which "the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor" had already in 1848 been drowned in "the icy water of egotistical calculation" and the "naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation" of industrial capitalism had already confronted and vanquished an older feudal order whose authority had been "veiled by religious and political illusions" (475). Moreover, Marx was convinced that industrial capitalism was being exported throughout the world in a manner that made it impossible for others to refrain from participating in it. "The bourgeoisie," as the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* put it, "by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation.... It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves" (477). Marx taken neat, in other words, doesn't help me to think in much detail about multiple modernities, including religious modernities.

Weber, whose work is routinely read in patchy, partial ways, is not known to most readers as an adherent of this Eurocentric, diffusion model for globalization. Yet the fact remains that much of his adult life was dedicated to a comparative sociology of world religions intended to demonstrate how one form of Christianity, Protestantism, allowed certain Europeans and their migrant kin to become the world's most economically productive peoples. His elaborate arguments about Confucianism and Hinduism preventing the peoples of China and India from competing with Western capitalists seem silly today, though it is easy to imagine how that project could be historicized in the context of nineteenth-century Orientalism.

My purpose here is not to make light of Jager's call to maintain theoretical models, especially since his scholarship successfully synthesizes learned history and dexterous theory. And he writes compellingly about the ways in which "the prosy toleration of the official English church" might be another name for conducting scholarly business-as-usual at a time when more critical work is in order (44 above). I also have no doubts that using Marxist and Weberian concepts, for Jager, involves participation in a broader tradition of social criticism that has adapted in different ways over time. But I still want to highlight how Eurocentrism – a faith in the West versus the Rest – masquerading as Universalism was present at the foundation of this tradition. It is this pseudo-universalism that many are now trying to unhitch from different concepts of the secular.

My guess is that Jager, Gilpin, and I might agree that secularization, rather than naming an historical event of one particular kind, is now more clearly seen as a complicated interpretive tradition that is being reassessed in a wide range of disciplines. These include some that are deliberately setting aside some powerful theories from the past. In two recent collections, *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* (2010) and *Rethinking Secularism* (2011), almost all of the essays have in common a tendency to speak about the secular, secularism, and secularization in relation to religion or theology. This, I think, is another way to phrase my

point in "Children of the Sixties" made with the audience for this journal in mind: many in the academy today actively resemble nineteenth-century writers who found themselves describing the secular in the course of participating in a "species of theological discourse" (27 above).

Joshua King, in the third response, takes issue with the application of this point to Spencer, presumably because he (Spencer) is not a promising participant in a theological conversation. I suspect other contemporary scholars would also object, though for different reasons, to my suggestion that their accounts of the secular are contributions to theological discourse. Am I trying to restore theology to a privileged place in our seminaries of higher learning by pretending to tether every comer within the reach of its light (or shadow)? No, my goal in this exchange has been quite different. I've sought an emphatic, rather than theoretical, way to call others to think about interactions between and concerns shared by the secular and the religious, two concepts that have been handled antithetically too often. For this reason I traced within a body of nineteenth-century prose a new genealogy of the principle that animates so much of the contemporary thought that we have been discussing: a sensitivity to the ways in which "'the religious' and 'the secular' are mutually constitutive" (Calhoun 21). Since the prevailing error of not long ago was a habit of treating the secular as a sequel to a sidelined or dismantled religion, I have emphasized how the secular in general and how individual advocates of different secular values are almost always in dialogue with religious values with theological roots. At times this dialogue can go unrecognized. At other times, the points of contact are all too apparent when rightly named by Gilpin's triad of "hostility, oppression and violence" (38 above).

To return to the more specific question about Spencer's participation in a species of theological discourse, I will first say that I am sympathetic to King's hesitations here. Second, his counterproposals to my formulations are lucid. When speaking of Spencer, Lecky, and Newman, he writes, "Perhaps it is better to emphasize their shared belief that the history and future of theology and religious devotion is vital to any de-

scription of modern change.” He goes on to suggest that “one can distinguish Victorian from twentieth-century secularization debates by the continuing importance, and sometimes interpretive authority, each gives to theology and religion” (59). That sounds right to me. But my intention in “Children of the Sixties” was to be more provocative. And my selections from Spencer, like those from Lecky and Newman, were hardly innocent. Spencer occupies, for me, an extreme position at one end of a broader theological spectrum. His status there is so marginal that some would deny he has any place in a religious or theological context. Nevertheless, the *Principles of Sociology* describes and praises an agnostic cosmic spiritualism that is “the ultimate form of religious consciousness” (3.157). Over and above Spencer’s powerful Nonconformist cultural inheritance, his belief that “analytic science ... enlarges the sphere for religious sentiment” (3.173) is, to my eyes, a theological position, even as it is certainly not an instance of Christian theology. The different ways in which King and I situate Spencer recalls how scholars today, like Victorian readers and writers, often attempt to establish the borders of secular space by characterizing religious sentiments or theological positions. King’s desire to keep Spencer in secular (or non-religious) territory is a good example of how this happens when some form of religious conviction is delegitimized.

This disagreement about the theological elements of Spencer’s sociology can also remind us of the extraordinary range of Victorian religiosity, a ground for lived experience that included innumerable expressions of different faiths and a corresponding range of errors, heresies, and false creeds to be deplored. The evolution of this dizzying diversity, closely connected to what I have called the erosion of “a theo-political ideology of Anglican hegemony” (28), has been taken as a sign of religious crisis or decline. Both King and I, on the other hand, see this diversity in connection with a great impetus for textual production in an age of increasing literacy, increasingly affordable print, and vital religiosity. As “the Anglican Church was forced to surrender many of its exclusive ties to the state” in the nineteenth century, writes King, “creative authors, journal-

ists, educators, and clergy" responded by using "print as a medium for imagining and participating in a virtual Protestant community spanning the British nation" (62 above). His representative case study of Victorian prose, based on responses in the periodical press to the death of John Keble, shows how some of the same readers who made Newman and Lecky best-sellers in the 1860s were also being instructed to understand *The Christian Year* – despite the original intentions of its author – as "a means for those in and outside the English Church to imagine their nation" (65 above).

The fourth and final response by Ruth Clayton Windscheffel includes a few closing paragraphs on *Lux Mundi* but otherwise steers clear of nineteenth-century prose. Much of it instead is concerned with an eccentric reading of *The English Cult of Literature*. If others took Windscheffel to be a trustworthy interpreter of my book, I'm afraid they would get the impression that it is focused on the following two-part argument: first, according to Windscheffel, it "argues that secularization, defined as the conscious and formally legislated separation of church and state, had occurred in the British polity by the mid-1880s"; second, it claims the primary consequence of this development is religion's destiny to be never again "a powerful political force" in Britain. Windscheffel goes a step further to say my book is dedicated to showing how religion has "no place for co-existence, dialogue, or revival" in Britain in the 1890s and after (51-52 above).

For the record I want to disavow holding these views and deny their propagation by any of my publications. I did write about an agenda for religious liberty and dwindling penalties attached to forms of nonconformity with the established churches during a particular period, from the 1770s to the 1880s. But I did so in the process of making another argument about what I called the sacralization of literature in the nineteenth century, one that is related to King's interests in how reading became "the means and the measure of the nation's religious – if not theological – community" (62 above). My main aim in the *English Cult of Literature* was to attribute to circumstances other than religious decline "the com-

monplace claim” that “literature had assumed a religious authority” during the nineteenth century. As I put it there,

... literature did not assume this authority only after religious experience became less possible. Nor did the cult of literature grow up in a space left vacant by religion. It developed in intimate collusion with religious culture and religious politics. The cult of literature had much business to do with secularization, but not that version of secularization defined as “a growing tendency in mankind to do without religion.” (35)

Windscheffel portrays one part of my actual argument, the one about the fate of an agenda for religious freedom from the 1770s to the 1880s, somewhat fairly but not wholly accurately. In place of her “conscious and formally legislated separation of church and state” to define what I meant by secularization in the *English Cult*, I much prefer my “political and legal process that leads to the state relinquishing opinions on theological subjects” (28), especially since the church and state remain united to this day, albeit in the largely symbolic figure of the monarch. More importantly, she leaves out the fact that this period is of equal interest to me as a particular epoch in the long story of the making of a reading nation (34, 32-35). Her second claim, that I devised this historical narrative to show how the church and its members could have no cultural or political relevance in the 1890s and later, is entirely of her own manufacture.

I am then assigned a reading of *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England* (2004) much like an emetic that will grant me relief of a kind after causing some initial discomfort. I’m afraid to report that I found Matthew Grimley’s book only pleasant reading, though I wonder how Windscheffel has digested the passages that refer to a religious decline in the 1960s and after that is “catastrophic” and “acute” (10-11, 226). Before that time, Grimley argues that church leaders and activists from 1918 to 1939 and beyond played an active role in national life, and he underscores how the highly circumscribed terms of the church’s establishment allowed these leaders to address a denominationally diverse

nation that no longer included any potent alliance calling for disestablishment. The Anglicans featured in this study, in other words, were members of an established church that had very few privileges other than the right to be so called. The millions of Britons who abstained from being part of this establishment, for religious reasons or otherwise, did so by renouncing almost nothing except an eligibility to be King or Queen, a job that probably seemed, to most people, inaccessible for a host of non-theological reasons.

The relatively stable terms of the church's establishment in the twentieth century stands in stark contrast to an earlier history of great change discussed in my book. I stand by what I wrote on this topic then:

In the 1760s, conformity with Anglican doctrine (expressed by the Thirty-Nine Articles) was deeply involved with civic rights and access to national institutions ranging from municipal and government offices to the ancient English universities and the primary professions; by the 1880s, (non)conformity with those same doctrines had negligible consequences. But while there is an important story to be told about the declining identity of church and state during the long nineteenth century, we must not confuse this event with a general decay of religion, or even a creeping rot within Anglicanism itself. (29)

I'll close this forum with a final quote from the same book and a final comment to suggest the wide range of arguments and topics I would wish to see appear in this Special Issue of *Nineteenth-Century Prose*:

a balanced account of the rise of print culture needs to show how the Protestant establishment in the late eighteenth century and after exploited print. In any long-term understanding of the printing press as agent of change, "enlightened," "revolutionary," or "plebeian" appropriations of the technology have to take their place beside this religious appropriation, one that had liberal and con-

servative manifestations. In the late eighteenth century, this tradition of interpreting moveable type in terms of religious destiny was only growing and would culminate in the Caxton Exhibition of 1877. During the same period, there were irreligious and radical traditions that appealed to a deadly feud between priestcraft and the printing press. But it was an explicitly religious version of the same contest – one featuring the rise and triumph of a bibliocentric Protestantism – that set the general tone for British cultural life. (27)

Even so, this preponderant bibliocentric Protestantism by no means obscured other traditions, including a Catholic revival within and without the established church, highly relevant to students and scholars of literature. The long history of violent Protestant and Catholic conflict in the British Isles was for the most part concentrated in the twentieth century in Ireland around the question of its potential political divisions. The negotiation, on-going to this day, of this volatile instance of religious difference has its place in a larger history of religious diversity that spans Britain's imperial and post-imperial identity. Recall that by the end of Victoria's long reign the British Empire included in India alone nearly two hundred and seventy million Hindu and Muslim subjects as well as many millions more of other non-Christian faiths (*Imperial* 493). The government of this diverse population is no longer seated in a parliament in London. That empire is mostly a memory now. But what remains prominent on the stage of world history is the relevance of religious and confessional identities in the shaping of everyday life and the conduct of politics within and between nation states. This is one reason "Religion and Prose" in the nineteenth century is a fruitful topic for today.

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