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CHRISTIANITY AND CRISIS

Religion and Ideology in Modern Europe

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With the rise of political populism across Europe, there has been an increased investment in religion.[1] Examples range from the apocalyptic rhetoric employed by far-right movements to more moderate references, by established nationalist parties, to Christianity as the backbone of Europe. A recurring feature in these discourses is the concept of crisis. Europe has been rattled not only by the "euro crisis" and the "refugee crisis" in recent years; underneath both lies a deeper cultural crisis—the crisis of Europe as such. This is also where religion enters the picture. As in traditional conservative narratives, the root of the crisis is traced back to the loss of traditional Christian values and the remedy is accordingly to be found in a re-establishment of those values. One consequence of these tendencies is that religion is increasingly being used as a demagogic device for excluding parts of the population from cultural and, by extension, democratic participation. In defining Europe as an inherently Christian culture, the public space for Europeans of Jewish, Muslim or other extraction is simultaneously curtailed.

In this chapter, I will discuss these tendencies by putting them in a larger historical perspective. More precisely, I shall examine how European narratives of crisis have been related to religion with varying ideological intentions during the past century. My aim is not to offer a general picture of the many and intricate ways in which religion and ideology have been interlaced in modern Europe. Rather, I wish to look closer at some general tendencies during three specific periods and reflect on some lessons that may be drawn from a comparison between these periods. In the first section, I turn to the interwar era, during which religion was used as part both of a conservative nationalist narrative of crisis and a progressive liberal one. Secondly, I revisit some of the postwar debates, in which religion—or, more precisely, the biblical legacy—was commonly depicted as the root of the ideological perversions

that had caused Europe's recent crises. Yet, at the same time, religion was also laid claim to as a constructive force in the building of postwar Europe, for example by the founding fathers of the European Union. In the third part, I return to the contemporary European situation. Like in previous eras, religion is today laid claim to for various and often conflicting reasons. What is new, in relation to most of the postwar era, are the growing populist discourses that once more invest in religion for nationalist purposes.

Having juxtaposed these periods and tendencies, I end with a brief reflection on what we can learn about present political discourses on religion by looking at the past. It is my contention that we should beware of drawing quick comparisons between then and now, especially when dealing with complex phenomena such as religion, ideology, and nationalism. However, as Timothy Snyder has recurringly stated—most recently in the discussion about the legitimacy of invoking fascism in reference to Trumpian propaganda—"greater knowledge of the past, fascist or otherwise, allows us to notice and conceptualize elements of the present that we might otherwise disregard and to think more broadly about future possibilities."[2] In other words, it is not in a naïve belief that the present repeats the past that I wish to draw comparisons between then and now, but rather with a view to enhancing our understanding of the various ways in which religion is again being put into play for ideological purposes.

The "Crisis of the West" in the Interwar Era

As is well known, World War I was followed by a widespread sense of crisis and decline. These years saw the publication of Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, an ominous prophecy of the end of Western civilization that would have an immense influence on European intellectual life in the 1920s. In the religious sphere, *Kulturprotestantismus* came to a brusque end and had to give way to the emerging dialectical theology, also known as "theology of crisis." This theological paradigm shift mirrors the more general shift from the optimism and buoyancy of the *Belle Époque* to the pessimism and inquietude of the interwar years. Yet one should not overdraw the contrast. Cultural pessimism and distrust in the rapid scientific and technological evolution was a well-established phenomenon long before the outbreak of World War I.

This was the case not least within the Catholic Church. Whereas Protestant theology since the Enlightenment had struggled to accommodate Christian belief to the modern liberal consciousness, the path followed by the Catholic Church had been the opposite. Culminating in the First Vatican Council between 1869 and 1870, the Holy See had consistently chosen the

path of resistance to current political, ideological, and scientific trends. This strongly anti-modernist attitude continued well into the twentieth century, as testified to in Pope Pius X's 1907 encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, summarizing the modernist "heresies," as well as in the 1910 Oath Against Modernism (*Sacrorum Antistitum*), which was required of all clergy until 1967. In 1922, Pope Pius XI issued his first encyclical, *Ubi Arcano Dei*, written in the wake of World War I. The Pope lamented the evils of World War I and took pains to explain the roots of these evils:

> It was a quite general desire that both our laws and our governments should exist *without recognizing* God or Jesus Christ, on the theory that all authority comes from men, not from God. Because of such an assumption, these theorists fell very short of being able to bestow upon law not only those sanctions which it must possess but also that secure basis for the supreme criterion of justice which even a pagan philosopher like Cicero saw clearly could not be derived except from the divine law. Authority itself lost its hold upon mankind, for it had lost that sound and unquestionable justification for its right to command on the one hand and to be obeyed on the other. Society, quite logically and inevitably, was shaken to its very depths and even threatened with destruction, since there was left to it no longer a stable foundation, everything having been reduced to a series of conflicts, to the domination of the majority, or to the supremacy of special interests.[3]

This passage gives among other things an indication of the conflict in the early twentieth century between the Catholic Church and the emerging secular states when it came to control over politics, legislation and education. Accordingly, among the further causes that Pius XI lists of the ills that had brought Europe to the brink of disaster, we find the loss of clerical influence over marriage law ("Again, legislation was passed which did not recognize that either God or Jesus Christ had any rights over marriage—an erroneous view which debased matrimony to the level of a mere civil contract," § 29) and over primary education ("Added to all this, God and Jesus Christ, as well as His doctrines, were banished from the school. As a sad but inevitable consequence, the school became not only secular and non-religious but openly atheistical and anti-religious," § 30). There is, however, still hope to be found. The Pope ends the encyclical by indicating the "appropriate remedy" for the precarious situation in which Europe finds itself. Not quite unsurprisingly, this remedy is found in a vision of the West moving toward a new Christendom, beyond the impasses of secularism, liberalism and communism.

Ubi Arcano Dei is of interest for our purposes because it offers a good example of one of the dominating narratives of crisis in the first half of the twentieth century. The root of the crisis is identified as secular modernity, and the remedy is to be found in a restoration of the Christian West. Although conservative and deeply anti-modernist, it is important to point out

that this narrative, in its official Catholic setting, was neither nationalist nor explicitly anti-democratic. It would, however, soon become so within certain factions of the Catholic intellectual milieu, both in Germany and in the Latin countries. In particular, the call for authority and order would appeal to a generation of Catholic intellectuals increasingly disillusioned with the Weimar Republic. One may here think of familiar names, such as Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt, but also less familiar names, such as the theologians Joseph Lortz and Karl Adam.[4] Disenchanted not only by the shortcomings of parliamentary democracy but also by the spread of Bolshevism, all those thinkers sought for a third way of organizing society. As the interwar years evolved, this also made them vulnerable to the lure of National Socialism.

By the early 1930s, both Heidegger and Schmitt had distanced themselves from their earlier theological engagement, and Heidegger would soon turn overtly hostile to Christianity in general and to Catholicism in particular.[5] However, this was not the case with Lortz and Adam; rather, they sought to adapt the conservative Catholic narrative of crisis to the new political situation by arguing that there was a basic kinship between Catholicism and National Socialism. At first glance, this may seem a surprising stance, given the general Catholic opposition to the emerging Nazi movement. Catholic clergy and laypeople had criticized National Socialism since its inception in the 1920s, and in 1931 the German bishops even banned Catholics from joining the Nazi Party.[6]

Yet, like many other totalitarian leaders throughout history, Hitler knew how to play his cards with regard to religion. Once in power, he seemingly distanced himself from the neopagan ideas advocated in *Mein Kampf* (1925). In February 1933, he gave a radio speech in which he promised to uphold Christian values, and a month later, in an address to the Reichstag, he recognized Christian belief as the "unshakeable foundation of the moral and ethical life of [the German] people."[7] That Hitler's newfound esteem for Christian values was merely instrumental would soon become clear. In January 1934, Alfred Rosenberg was appointed official ideologue of the state, an indication that the Chancellor favored the anti-Christian, anti-Jewish, and neopagan agenda that Rosenberg had presented in his *Myth of the Twentieth Century* (1930).

The reaction of the pro-Nazi theologians is revealing. Rather than assenting to the neopagan claim that there was an inherent conflict between Christianity and Nazism, they emphasized the essential compatibility between Christian belief and Nazi commitment. While a recurring argument in the neopagan rhetoric was that Christianity had weakened the German nation, Karl Adam, for instance, countered by arguing that Christianity, ever since St. Boniface's mission to the Teutonic tribes in the eighth century, had in fact

continually strengthened the German people. And when neopagan protagonists reproached Christianity for being a Jewish cult, Adam responded by toning down Jesus' Jewishness with reference to Mary's immaculate conception: "Through the miracle of the grace of God, she is beyond these Jewish hereditary traits, a figure who transcends Judaism. And, what has occurred in Mary took place too in the human nature of her son."[8]

At this point, a few clarifications are needed. First, it should be emphasized that theologians like Lortz and Adam were by no means representative of the Catholic clergy in general. Most Catholic theologians kept a low profile during the Nazi years, and some (such as Romano Guardini and Engelbert Krebs) were publicly critical of the regime. In fact—and this is the second clarification that needs to be made—the most notorious of the pro-Nazi theologians were all Protestants (for example, Paul Althaus, Emanuel Hirsch, and Gerhard Kittel), as was the advocacy group the German Christians.[9] While some Catholic theologians had de-emphasized the Jewish roots of Christianity, an array of leading Protestant theologians overtly denied these roots and actively encouraged antisemitic sentiments within the churches.[10] Nonetheless, even while they represented slightly different positions with regard to the Jewish origins of Christianity, all these theologians—as well as numerous other scholars, writers, and politicians—adhered to a larger anti-modernist narrative that saw secularism, liberalism, socialism, and other progressive movements as a threat to the Christian West.

However, there were other narratives of crisis with regard to the Christian legacy in the interwar era. The conservative and nationalist narrative referred to so far was challenged by a liberal narrative that saw a crisis of the Christian West in the growing totalitarian movements. As I have already indicated, the dividing line with respect to these rival narratives by no means ran between Catholic and Protestant Christianity. Just as Catholicism harbored both proponents and critics of fascism and Nazism, so did the Protestant churches. It should also be clarified that while the most notorious pro-Nazi theologians were Protestants, so were the most profiled theological critics of the Nazi regime, notably Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the other leading figures of the Confessing Church.

For obvious reasons, the sense of crisis was quite present among these theologians as well as among their international supporters. One example—which gives a good illustration of the second narrative—is given by Gustaf Aulén's pamphlet *Kristendomen och kulturkrisen* ("Christianity and the Cultural Crisis") published in 1936. Aulén, known as one of the founders of the Lundensian School of Theology, was at the time Bishop of Strängnäs and a significant figure in the international ecumenical movement. He was also a profiled critic of Nazi Germany.[11]

Aulén opened his pamphlet by stating that World War I marked a border between two ages. Even more so, it marked the end of an entire cultural era, the era of humanism that had defined Europe since the days of the Enlightenment. What the world was currently experiencing, Aulén contended, was a development in which "the ideals of humanism . . . were being replaced by ideals of sheer power with little concern for truth and justice, as long as their own interests were fulfilled."[12] To exemplify, Aulén pointed, on the one hand, to the expansion of bolshevism in the East, and, on the other hand, to the developments in Nazi Germany. Rather than describing these movements as degenerated political ideologies, Aulén characterized them as "alternative religions" offering quasi-theological visions of the ideal society and the highest good. This also brought him to what he regarded as the root of the European crisis: the deification of humanity that permeated large swathes of modern Western thought.

Interestingly, Aulén's analysis at this point comes close to that of Pius XI. Recall, for instance, the Pope's concern that a polity that relies on "the theory that all authority comes from men" will fall short of being able to warrant a secure basis for justice. And yet there is a crucial difference. Whereas Pius XI —along with his predecessors—considered modernism as such to be the cause of the crisis afflicting Europe, Aulén was a champion of the humanist ideals of the Enlightenment and even saw them as generated from the Christian gospel. Consequently, he had no concerns about modernism in general, but only about its excesses, and these excesses occurred precisely at the moment when modern humanism cut the moorings holding it to its theological past. Hence, the remedy proposed by Aulén was very different from the one offered by the anti-modernist narrative of crisis. In contrast both to the wholesale rejection of modern humanism and to the tendency of deifying humanity, Aulén championed a "Christian humanism" that recognized the limitations as well as the possibilities of humanity. The most distinct feature of such a humanism was its relentless *realism*: "It does not regard evil, which it calls sin, as something more or less peripheral in human life. Christianity . . . does not regard 'sin' as something that belongs to man's so-called lesser nature as opposed to a 'higher' one—on the contrary, we are here dealing with the innermost being of man, his selfishness, self-centeredness and self-glorification."[13]

Aulén was fiercely criticized for his pessimism by secular as well as theological opponents. Yet he would insist that only a sober realism could prevent humanity from falling prey to the illusory visions of the totalitarian ideologies. What made these visions illusory was precisely the belief that evil could ultimately be identified and eliminated. As the 1930s turned into the 1940s, Aulén's fears about the potential danger and brutality of such visions would

be amply confirmed and his purported pessimism would pale against the actual events.

"Never Again": Coping with Crisis in Postwar Europe

To Aulén and other European intellectuals writing in the years preceding World War II, the "crisis" at stake still had the character of an ominous shadow hovering over the continent. In the aftermath of the War, the crisis was no longer perceived as a future threat, but as a state of fact. Europe lay in ruins, ideologically as well as materially, and numerous were the European intellectuals who struggled to put into perspective the atrocities of the past decades. Like in the years following World War I, thinkers from various ideological quarters sought both explanations for the causes of the crisis and ways to cope with it. However, while liberal as well as conservative writers in the interwar years found the roots of the crisis in Europe's betrayal of its religious past, a different kind of narrative came to dominate parts of the intellectual debate in the wake of World War II. According to this narrative, the roots of Europe's recent ideological perversions were not to be found in the loss of religion, but rather *in* religion itself.[14]

A paradigmatic example of this narrative is found in Karl Löwith's classical work *Meaning in History*. When the book appeared in 1949, Löwith, who was of Jewish descent, found himself in exile in the United States. Like so many others in the postwar years, he sought an explanation as to how the Western political and philosophical tradition could have degenerated into the totalitarian movements of the 1930s, but also as to how a succession of prominent intellectuals—including his own teacher and mentor Martin Heidegger—could have so lost their political judgment as to align themselves with these movements.[15]

In *Meaning in History*, Löwith sketched the genealogy of the notion of progress, the key to understanding the ideological excesses of modern Europe. With a view to provoking the very idea of historical progression, he chose to present history in reverse. Taking his cue from Jacob Burckhardt, he presented a lineage running through Marx, Hegel, Proudhon, Compte, Condorcet, Voltaire, Vico, Bossuet, Joachim of Fiore, Augustine, and Orosius, ending with the Bible. While other thinkers—notably Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, but later also thinkers as different as Georg Lukács, Isaiah Berlin, and Eric Voegelin—tried to locate the roots of modernity's ideological excesses in the Enlightenment or in Romanticism, Löwith did not stop there. As indicated by the genealogy, he instead tracked the problem all the way down to the biblical legacy on which these secular ideologies ultimately depended. For it was there that humanity for the first time began to conceive

of history as "salvation history" (*Heilsgeschichte*), an eschatological drama of damnation and redemption governed by divine providence. All history was thereby to be seen in the light of a higher goal that conferred meaning on every historical event. The ancient Greeks, Löwith contended, had a more balanced view on this matter; they "did not presume to make sense of the world or to discover its ultimate meaning. They were impressed by the visible order and beauty of the cosmos, and the cosmic law of growth and decay was also the pattern for their understanding of history."[16]

Unfortunately, it was not the Greek but the biblical perspective that had lived on and become constitutive of the West's relation to history. It was also this biblical view that lingered in the progressivist and speculative philosophies of the new era. To be sure, the modern philosophers—with Voltaire at their head—had challenged the Christian doctrine of providence and the idea that history had a transcendent goal. Yet their view remained oriented toward the future. Although God had been replaced by humanity as the motive force of history and heaven reinterpreted as the ideal society on earth, there nonetheless remained a belief that history had a meaning—one that derived from an objective in the future.[17]

It should be clarified here that the argument of *Meaning of History* was not intended to be political. As Löwith explained in the introduction, his concern was purely philosophical, aiming to show "that philosophy of history originates with the Hebrew and Christian faith in a fulfillment."[18] However, viewed in the light of the context in which it was written as well as in relation to Löwith's wider thinking, it is hard to ignore the political undertones. At a few points, they also become explicit, as in the concluding words of the chapter on Joachim of Fiore's notion of a "third age" of the Spirit: "The third dispensation of the Joachites reappeared as a third International and a third *Reich*, inaugurated by a *dux* or a *Führer* who was acclaimed as a savior and greeted by millions with *Heil!*"[19]

Like so many other intellectuals—in Europe or in exile—Löwith was profoundly marked by the totalitarian ideologies that had brought Europe to disaster during the 1930s and now lived on in the rising dictatorships of the Eastern Bloc. If he had an ultimate purpose with his book, it was therefore to encourage the Western mind to eventually abandon the dream of creating a heaven on earth. While the cause of the present crisis could be traced back to elements in Europe's religious past, the remedy proposed by Löwith was, in other words, an encouragement to let go of this particular past. The question that has sometimes been posed to Löwith is what politico-philosophical alternative his thinking offered once it had deprived history of a purposeful direction of any kind.[20] As indicated by the quotation above on the ancient Greeks, Löwith's philosophical preferences lay in the Stoic ideal of *amor fati*, i.e. in recognizing historical and contemporary social phenomena, but as far

as possible entertaining neither hope nor fear for the future. Attractive as that may be as a philosophical stance, one can nevertheless ask where that leaves us politically. Does not politics require more substantial visions, if only for the reason that the ability to change the world for the better presupposes to some extent an idea of what a better world would look like?

That this was indeed the case was one of the cardinal convictions of another prominent German in the postwar years, Konrad Adenauer, who in the same year as Löwith published *Meaning in History* became the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. Like Löwith, Adenauer had witnessed his share of the Nazi brutalities, although he was never forced into exile. These experiences had prompted in him a deep belief that the visions of totalitarian ideologies could ever only be conquered by an opposing vision. Part of the appeal of totalitarianism was precisely its ability to offer a complete worldview with a given place and task for the people and the state. Correspondingly, the shortcomings of the prewar democracies had partly been due to their proceduralism and lack of substantial visions. If it was the case that politics was a struggle between competing worldviews, then a sustainable democracy would have to be based on a worldview able to provide an account of the human being and its place in history and society. Such an account, Adenauer suggested, was offered by the Christian tradition.[21]

While many Western intellectuals in the postwar years abandoned religion as a private as well as a public matter, Adenauer belonged to those who remained convinced that religion had not played out its role. Rather than blaming the biblical legacy for modernity's violent utopias, he found in this legacy a bulwark against totalitarianism. Even more so, he insisted that only Christian precepts could guarantee the dignity and liberty of the individual, which was the basis for any genuine democracy. This belief would not only be a motivating force in the formation of the Christian Democratic Union in 1945; it would also be an essential element in the new peaceful Europe that Adenauer envisioned together with Robert Schuman and Alcide de Gasperi. These three men, credited with the initiating of the European Union, were all devout Catholics who took significant inspiration from the social teaching of the Catholic Church.

Although often overlooked in later history writing, it is an intriguing fact that the original plans for today's European Union were formed by devout Catholics.[22] It is also in this context that we find one of the more interesting examples of a politico-philosophical narrative that, rather than refuting religion, laid claim to it as a constructive force in the building of postwar Europe. In the wake of the unspeakable crimes of the Holocaust, the desire to avoid another war was symbolized in the mantra-like words "never again." However, committing to this motto required more than the traditional approaches to political and economic reconstruction as manifested in the

Treaty of Versailles. The future Europe needed to be built on a vision that was communal, international, and—according to all three of the EU founding figures—deeply rooted in Christian values. The Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950, which is often seen as the genesis of the European project, could be read as an outline sketch of such a vision. As several scholars have pointed out, the Declaration was to a remarkable degree a conscious implementation of the Catholic social teaching that Schuman himself strongly embraced.[23]

Interestingly and importantly, the theological underpinnings of the Schuman Declaration remained assumed and unstated. To be sure, those familiar with Christian teaching could hear the biblical message of forgiveness and reconciliation echoed in the document's commitment to peace and to "the elimination of the age-old opposition of France and Germany."[24] Likewise, theological motifs such as neighborly love or the equality of all under God reverberate in the document's strong emphasis on solidarity and equal representation of the nations. But nowhere in the document is any reference made to Christianity or the biblical legacy. Like Adenauer and de Gasperi, Schuman knew that if Christianity were to serve as an inspiration for a future unified Europe, it had to be translated into a moral vision open to all people, irrespective of national, cultural, or confessional identity. It was precisely in this combination of substantial moral values and nondenominationalism that the greatness as well as the impact of the original idea of a unified Europe resided.[25]

Religion and Democratic Participation in Contemporary Europe

Despite being by and large a political success story, the European project has been marred by its inability to offer a persuasive political vision to its growing number of citizens. Indeed, many of the tensions in the past decades have been due to the problematic nature of the idea that one can have a supranational European economy without also having a supranational European policy. Such tensions were exposed during the debates on the preamble to the Constitution of the European Union in the first years of the new millennium. With a view to retrieving the original vision of Europe associated with the founding figures, a number of debaters—predominantly from Christian Democratic parties—argued for an explicit mention of God or Christianity in the preamble.[26] It was rarely pointed out by those debaters that the founding figures themselves had been reluctant to refer explicitly to the Christian faith from which they took their inspiration.

Eventually, there was no mention of Europe's Christian legacy in the preamble. One of the arguments against it was a concern that such a mention

would marginalize Europeans of other faith traditions. Almost twenty years later, one may fairly conclude that this was a justified concern. At the time of the debate, few could foresee the rapid expansion of xenophobic populism that Europe would experience in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008 and the migration crisis of 2015. I shall leave behind the question as to whether it is appropriate to describe these episodes as "crises" or not. What interests me here is how the populist movements relate to religion in their reflections on Europe's purported crises. Like in the interwar years, religion is once more laid claim to for nationalist purposes. However, while in traditional conservative narratives of crisis, "Christianity" was called for as a remedy for secularism and secular ideologies (liberalism, socialism, Bolshevism), it is now called for as a bulwark against another *religion*—Islam.

To be sure, there are varieties of this neo-nationalist narrative. In some movements, such as Hungary's nationalist Jobbik party, not only Muslims but also Jews (along with LGBT people, socialists and communists) have been depicted as a threat to a restored Christian Europe.[27] However, the more common version pinpoints Muslim immigration as the major cause of Europe's current tensions while simultaneously distancing itself from the antisemitism and homophobia characteristic of traditional far-right movements. Varieties of this motif can be found among representatives and supporters of most of the nationalist parties in Western Europe, from France's Front National to Alternative for Germany and the Sweden Democrats.[28]

Although these parties are in general Eurosceptic and in several cases wish to break up the European Union, they nonetheless share a firm conviction that Europe is and should remain a Christian civilization, just as their respective nations are considered to be bearers of a Christian heritage. A brief look at a policy document of the Sweden Democrats may serve as an illustration. While stressing the nonconfessional nature of the party as well its commitment to religious freedom, the document simultaneously underlines the unique status and role of Christianity in Sweden: "The maintenance of this cultural heritage is of concern for all Swedes, believers as well as non-believers . . . By virtue of its history, Christianity should be granted a unique position in relation to other religions in Sweden."[29] This formal wording is spelled out in more unctuous terms in another document, issued during the run-up to the Church of Sweden elections in 2017: "The Church is part and parcel of the Swedish national soul [*folksjälen*]—a place that has been there for Swedes in all times, good times as well as bad times. It is therefore important that the Church will be there, as it always has been, also in the future."[30]

This verbal commitment to the church and the Christian inheritance should not be mistaken for a substantial interest in the Christian religion.[31] Like their peers on the continent, the Sweden Democrats are attracted by

the church more as an idea on which certain ideals and values could be projected and less by the church as a living entity that in its practice embodies certain ideals and values. This tension becomes particularly apparent when the governing segment of the church expresses views that contradict their own agenda, notably in relation to refugee policy. In those instances, the church is reproached for being politicized and for betraying its true mission. Hence, the policy document of 2017 contends that the Church of Sweden "is increasingly lacking in its respect for classical Christian faith, while giving way to socialist and liberal postures."[32] What is here implicitly suggested is that "classical Christian faith" corresponds to the nationalist project proposed by the Sweden Democrats, whereas the values formally embraced by the existing church are depicted as a betrayal of this faith. Thus, religion is being used as a device in a political game, the ultimate aim of which is to exclude certain people and practices from the notion of Swedishness.[33] That this is the case is further clarified by a statement that appears in tandem with the party's underlining of the unique position of Christianity in Sweden: "Islam, and in particular its strong political and fundamentalist branch, is according to the Sweden Democrats the religious attitude which has proven least capable to co-exist with Swedish and Western culture in a harmonious way."[34] The conclusion drawn from this statement is that immigration from Muslim countries with fundamentalist traditions should be "radically restricted."[35]

In light of the narratological patterns depicted in the earlier parts of this chapter, it is possible to discern a continuity between those discourses in the interwar years that used Christianity as a device for nationalist projects and the rhetorical investment in Christianity made by contemporary nationalist parties across Europe. Yet there is an important difference that has already been indicated. While traditional conservative nationalism in general defined itself against secularism, today's nationalist parties acclaim secularism *alongside* Christianity (recall, for instance, how the Sweden Democrats stress the religious neutrality of their party while simultaneously defending the unique and important role of Christianity in Swedish society). This double investment in Christianity and secularism affects the broader political landscape in several ways. For one thing, it tends to obscure how a seemingly innocent claim to a disarmed cultural Christianity is in fact part of a political game that serves to marginalize people of other cultural backgrounds from the public sphere. Even more problematic is the way in which more established parties increasingly adapt to this political game with explicit or implicit reference to Christian or Western values. An illustrative example of this tendency is the 2018 decree by Bavaria's Christian Social Union government stating that the symbol of the cross should be displayed in all state offices.[36]

On a subtler level, the same tendency reverberates in the recurring debates on male child circumcision, the wearing of the head scarf or burkini,

or the use of greeting gestures other than a handshake. The last example was, for instance, epitomized in Sweden in 2016, when Prime Minister Stefan Löfven declared—apropos a Green Party Muslim politician who had been toppled because of his refusal to shake hands—that "in Sweden we greet each other. We do this by shaking hands—with women as well as with men."[37] Why, one may ask, could there not be more than one formal greeting gesture in a society? And in what way does an alternative gesture of greeting – for instance, by placing one's hand over the heart – impinge on democracy?

To reach an answer to these admittedly rhetorical questions, we need to keep in mind the extent to which a country like Sweden is still marked by a Protestant majority culture that defines public norms and customs. To be sure, shaking hands is not a particularly Christian gesture, but the exclusive decree to use this particular greeting form reveals how a certain quasi-secular majority culture is taken as a neutral and timeless norm that ought to govern Swedish public life. Hence its potentially discriminatory effects: while not an explicitly Christian greeting gesture, it is *not* the greeting gesture preferred by many Muslims and Orthodox Jews. What these quandaries ultimately reveal is how many of the secular norms referred to by more moderate parties and debaters are in fact not neutral or universal, but rather the products of a specific cultural negotiation that has been going on over centuries between Protestant Christianity and Enlightenment rationalism in Northern Europe. If this process at an early stage rationalized and domesticated Christianity, resulting in the liberal Protestantism that is representative of the Scandinavian majority churches, it also means that the secular liberalism that underpins these societies bears an unmistakable imprint of Lutheran Christianity. It is also this cultural amalgam that makes nationalist parties' double investment in Christianity and secularism so effective and yet problematic.

Turning now to a brief reflection on what we may learn by looking back at earlier political and ideological discourses on religion, I want to highlight a few key aspects. Especially in relation to the claims that are today being laid to Christianity as well as to secularism by nationalist parties, I think it is significant to emphasize that neither Christianity nor secularism is given or static orders. Above all, they are not necessarily opposite or competing orders. For this reason, traditional secularization narratives (of the kind offered by Löwith) that aim to leave the realm of religion behind will remain unsatisfactory, because they only risk repeating exclusionary Christian norms and ideals under a purported neutral guise. Even more importantly, such narratives are also insufficient in relation to the overt and often aggressive ways in which Christian symbols and rhetoric are today being put into play by moderate as well as far-right movements. As the initiators of the European project knew, dangerous or exclusionary claims to religion could only be con-

quered by opposing claims, not by the illusion that we could leave ideologies and worldviews behind – hence Adenauer, de Gasperi and Schuman's active investment in the Christian legacy. Much like Gustaf Aulén (and other prominent theologians) in the interwar years, they did not just reject the use of Christianity made by several of the totalitarian movements, but actively challenged it by a different interpretation that pointed to the democratic and humanistic impulses of the biblical legacy. However, in a Europe haunted by war and nationalism, and, most urgently, by the unspeakable crimes against the continent's Jewish population, they were also wise and realistic enough to see the impropriety in explicitly defining Europe and the European project as Christian. As I have shown, they were instead convinced that the Christian teaching from which they took their inspiration had to be translated into to a moral vision around which all could gather.

Let me conclude my reflections by returning to Timothy Snyder's remark that "[s]erious attention to the past helps us see risks but also suggests future possibility."[38] What we can learn—in terms of risks as well as possibilities—from the various ways in which Christianity has been put into play in recent European history is perhaps more than anything that the Christian legacy is neither more nor less than what we make of it. Given the extensive body of canonical texts, creeds, dogmas, and institutional regulations, such a claim may seem counterintuitive. But then we may only remind ourselves of the plurality of ways in which this legacy has been de facto interpreted and put into political and ideological play—not only in recent European history but also throughout history at large. I am thereby not promoting an attitude of indifference toward the conflicting ideological adaptations of Christianity that I have exemplified in this chapter. On the contrary, I have tried to show how some claims that have been made—and are being made—are deeply harmful and divisive. I also believe that such claims should be challenged—as they were challenged by liberal and democratic figures such as Aulén and later the ideologues of the European project.[39] However, doing so requires striking a balance between, on the one hand, the problematic illusion that we can leave the Christian past behind in any simple sense, and, on the other hand, the temptation to invoke Christian symbols and narratives—even with the best of intentions—in ways that become excluding. This is precisely what these figures knew and it is perhaps the single most important lesson to be drawn from imbrications of religion, ideology, and politics in Europe's recent past.

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Notes

1. This chapter is a revised and elaborated version of an essay originally published as "Christianity and Crisis: Uses and Abuses of Religion in Modern Europe" *Eco-ethica* 8 (2019): 101–18.
2. Snyder, "The American Abyss." See also Snyder, *On Tyranny*.
3. Pope Pius XI, *Ubi Arcano Dei*.
4. To be sure, by the time of Pope Pius XI's issuing of *Ubi Arcano Dei* in 1922, Heidegger had already broken with the Catholic Church and its official theology. However, as Hugo Ott, Judith Wolf, and others have argued, anti-modernist Catholicism was part and parcel of the formative years of his life, and it is difficult to understand the full dimensions of his later thinking—philosophical as well as political—unless one takes his Catholic background into account. See e.g. Ott, "Martin Heidegger's Catholic Origins"; and Wolfe, *Heidegger and Theology*, 9–32.
5. On Heidegger's growing animosity toward Catholicism, see Pattison, "Why Heidegger Didn't Like Catholic Theology."
6. The ban was lifted in March 1933 in order to avoid a direct confrontation with Hitler. On this episode as well as the general Catholic response to the emerging Nazi movement, see Krieg, *Catholic Theologians*, 1–30.
7. Quoted and translated in Krieg, *Catholic Theologians*, 4.
8. Karl Adam, "Jesus, der Christus und Wir Deutsche" (1943), quoted and translated in Krieg, *Catholic Theologians*, 103.
9. For a discussion of these particular theologians, see Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler*.
10. Such was, for instance, the goal of the so-called "Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Religious Life," which existed between 1939 and 1945 and became a vital organ in producing a nazified Christianity imbued with antisemitic sentiments; see e.g. Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*.
11. For an introduction to Aulén's life and work, see Jonson, *Gustaf Aulén*.
12. Aulén, *Kristendomen och kulturkrisen*, 6. Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
13. Aulén, *Kristendomen och kulturkrisen*, 26.
14. See also Svenungsson, *Divining History*, ch. 4; and Svenungsson, "After Utopia." In these two studies, I offer a more extensive analysis of the multilayered debates on the purported roots of totalitarian ideology following World War II.
15. The latter question is not explicitly articulated in *Meaning in History*, but was addressed by Löwith in several articles, e.g. "The Occasional Decisionism."
16. Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 4.
17. Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 60–114.
18. Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 2.

19. Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 159.
20. See e.g. Barash, "The Sense of History"; Wolin, *Heidegger's Children*, 98–99.
21. On Adenauer's life and work, see e.g. Schwarz, *Konrad Adenauer*. Although rightly celebrated as one of the great politicians of the postwar decades, there are aspects of Adenauer's political biography that should not be brushed over, notably his readiness to let former Nazi Party members back into the highest levels of business and government, but also his role in postponing West Germany's facing up to its past. On this darker side of Adenauer's legacy, see e.g. Winkler, *Das braune Netz*.
22. That the Catholicism of Adenauer, Schuman and de Gasperi was more than a formal confession is evidenced, for example, by the fact that the three retreated for meditation and prayer at a Benedict monastery on the Rhine before attending the conference that led to the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1951.
23. See e.g. Fimister, *Robert Schuman*; Wilton, "Christianity at the Founding."
24. "The Schuman Declaration."
25. Affirming the greatness as well as the impact of the European integration project is not to deny or downplay the fact that the project also had a colonial dimension. For an overview of the still emerging critical debates on this dimension, see e.g. Pasture, "The EC/EU between the Art of Forgetting."
26. See Milton, "God and the Constitution."
27. Although known for frequent antisemitic remarks by its politicians throughout the years, the party has in more recent years tried to distance itself from its far-right origins, including its antisemitism; see e.g. *Haaretz*, "Head of Hungary's Nationalist Jobbik Party Denounces Party's Past Anti-Semitism." In this move, the party is following suit with several other far-right parties that have denounced their antisemitic past, notably the National Rally in France and the Sweden Democrats in Sweden.
28. Examples could be added from most European countries; for some recent overviews, see e.g. Roy, *L'Europe est-elle chrétienne?*; Strømmen and Schmiedel, *The Claim to Christianity*; and Saarinen, "Populists, Identitarians and Integralists."
29. Sverigedemokraterna, "Sverigedemokraternas principprogram 2011." The document was removed from the webpage in 2020, but still serves as official "program" for the party; see "Sverigedemokraternas partiprogram."
30. Sverigedemokraterna, "Tro och tradition: Från (S)venska kyrkan till Svenska kyrkan."
31. This is, of course, not to deny that there are committed Christians who vote for the Sweden Democrats and who embrace their ideals. However, my focus here is the formal representatives at the top level of the party, including the official documents they have initiated.
32. Sverigedemokraterna, "Tro och tradition." Other examples could be given from various contexts across Europe, such as the rhetoric employed by Alternative for Germany's leader Alice Weidel when in 2017 she clashed with several church leaders over refugee policy; see Knight, "AfD Leader Alice Weidel."
33. For an enhanced analysis of populist investment in religion in the Swedish context, see Gustafsson Lundberg, "Christianity in a Post-Christian Context"; and Martinson, *Sekularism, populism, xenofobi*.
34. Sverigedemokraterna, "Sverigedemokraternas principprogram."
35. Sverigedemokraterna, "Sverigedemokraternas principprogram."
36. On the decree and the following debate, especially among theologians and church representatives, see Schmiedel, "'Take up Your Cross'."
37. Stefan Löfven, quoted in *Svenska Dagbladet*, "Löfven: 'Man ska ta både kvinnor och män i hand'."
38. Snyder, "The American Abyss."

39. As a recent editorial in *The Guardian* suggests, perhaps there are signs that liberal Christian politics is gaining ground again; see "The Guardian View on Liberal Christians."

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