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The Unbearable Political Incorrectness of Martyrs: Living after Richard Rorty

Abstract

When one looks back to those in Romania who confessed the faith under torture and died as Orthodox martyrs after the First World War and before the fall of communism, many puzzles emerge. There is the general question of how to write a balanced history of this period marked by the murderous regimes of Hitler and Stalin, the slaughter of Jews in the Holocaust and of Orthodox Christians in the Soviet Union. Some of the martyrs in the period had misguided political and social commitments by which they lived, but for which they did not die. Their deaths were for Christ and true belief so that the blood of their martyrdom separated them from their past. But it is the present, not their past that makes their



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glorification a major cultural challenge. Romania, having freed herself from the secularist tyranny of international socialism, currently faces the soft laicism of the European Union, which takes on ever more the character of a secular fundamentalist state demanding the removal of traditional Christianity from the public forum and from the public square. This post-Christian laicist ethos requires an affirmation of religious diversity and difference as cardinal cultural goods so that the recognition of right belief and right worship becomes an act of intolerance, while the condemnation by Orthodox Christians of what the Church knows to be sinful sexual acts becomes bigotry. In terms of the now-dominant secular culture, the martyrs of the 20th century, apart from their early lives, are culturally problematic because of their exclusivist affirmation of right worship and right belief. Romanians confront the deep political incorrectness of the glorification of their 20th-century martyrs, within a dominant secular culture that Richard Rorty recognized as losing any sense of the divine. The martyrs underscore with their blood the existence of God in a culture that wants to deny the transcendent.

Keywords

martyrs, secularization, tolerance, weak thought

1 Martyrs as Counter-Cultural

It is difficult to imagine a more politically incorrect and divisive act than the glorification of contemporary Orthodox Christian martyrs. This is not a consideration against their glorification, but in its favor. In a public culture that Richard Rorty (1931–2007) correctly characterized as on its way to losing every intimation of the divine, dying for right worship and right belief violates the secular cultural canons that require the affirmation

of religious diversity and religious difference. It is a context after God.¹ As Rorty describes our cultural context, once upon a time we felt a need to worship something which lay beyond the visible world. Beginning in the seventeenth century we tried to substitute a love of truth for a love of God, treating the world described by science as a quasi divinity. Beginning at the end of the eighteenth century we tried to substitute a love of ourselves for a love of scientific truth, a worship of our own deep spiritual or poetic nature, treated as one more quasi divinity.²

Affirming Hans Blumenberg (1920–1996), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), and Donald Davidson (1917–2003), Rorty recognizes that our dominant culture aspires “to get to the point where we no longer worship anything, where we treat nothing as a quasi-divinity, where we treat everything – our language, our conscience, our community – as a product of time and chance”.³ Rorty’s reflections are taken as a point of particular focus for this essay, given his frank recognition of the consequences and implications of an immanently directed culture after God, a culture “after martyrdom”. The glorification of Orthodox martyrs is at loggerheads with the commitments of this dominant secular culture, because Orthodox Christian martyrs died for an exclusivist appreciation of religious truth that denies the culture of immanence. The historical proximity of martyrs whose death lies within the memories of some still living is particularly challenging.

Martyrs, those who confess the Orthodox faith with their blood, declare to the world the presence of Christ and affirm the cardinal importance of right worship and right belief. For this reason, as Tertullian put it, “[T]he blood of Christians is [the]

¹ H. T. Engelhardt, Jr., *Dopo Dio, Morale e bioetica in un mondo laico*, (Turin: Claudiana, 2014).

² R. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 22.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

seed” of the Church.⁴ The relics of the martyrs became integral to Christianity’s public statement of the importance of maintaining Orthodoxy. The relics of the martyrs have been revered as transformed by the energies of God and therefore to be placed centrally in the Church’s acts of worship. Regarding St. Ignatius (ca. 50–ca. 110/117), it is reported that the faithful at once preserved his remains. “For only the harder portions of his holy remains were left, which were conveyed to Antioch and wrapped in linen, as an inestimable treasure left to the holy Church by the grace which was in the martyr”.⁵ The martyrdom of St. Polycarp (A.D. 69–155) also attests to this great regard of his relics in the early Church:

Accordingly, we afterwards took up his bones, as being more precious than the most exquisite jewels, and more purified than gold, and deposited them in a fitting place, whither, being gather together, as opportunity is allowed us, with joy and rejoicing, the Lord shall grant us to celebrate the anniversary of his martyrdom, both in memory of those who have already finished their course, and for the exercising and preparation of those yet to walk in their steps.⁶

Because the Church appreciated that the bodies of martyrs had been sanctified as had been the living body of St. Paul (“when the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them” – Acts, 19.12), the Liturgy was celebrated over their relics. Canon VII of Nicea II (the Seventh Ecumenical Council, A.D. 787) requires that all altars contain a relic of a martyr, thus recognizing this centrality of the relics of the martyrs to the celebration of the

⁴ A. Roberts, J. Donaldson (eds.), *Tertullian, Apology L*, vol. 3, in: *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), p. 55.

⁵ Idem., *The martyrdom of Ignatius vi*, vol. 1, in: *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), p. 131.

⁶ Idem., *Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna xviii*, vol. 1, in: *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), p. 43.

Eucharist as integral to the tradition of the Church (see, for example, Canon XX of Gangra, A.D. 340). Martyrs are integral to the normative celebration of the Eucharist.⁷ In the cultural context of pagan Rome, this veneration of the martyrs was a supremely counter-cultural act. It involved a public rejection of the dominant culture of the Graeco-Roman world.

Glorifying contemporary martyrs is particularly counter-cultural, because it is tantamount to rejecting the dominant secular culture of the European Union and of North America.⁸ Martyrdom is an act that breaks through the horizon of the finite and the immanent, while also refusing to affirm religious diversity and difference. Martyrdom involves throwing down the gauntlet in the culture wars, the struggle over determining the character of the public space.⁹ In the now-dominant secular culture, any hint of traditional Christian faith is through state power to be replaced by an affirmation of religious diversity and cultural difference that forbids the public recognition of unique theological truth and therefore of theological error. In the emerging secular fundamentalist state¹⁰, the public space is to be free of canonical theological statements, as shown in the court cases forbidding the requirement of crucifixes in Bavarian schools and the reduction of crucifixes in Italian schools to

⁷ A. Doig, *Liturgy and Architecture: From the Early Church to the Middle Ages*, (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008), p. 89, and C. Freeman, *Holy Bones Holy Dust*, (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 340.

⁸ P. Cumper & T. Lewis (eds.), *Religion, Rights and Secular Society: European Perspectives*, (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2012), A. Gutmann, *Identity in Democracy*, (Princeton NJ: University Press, Princeton, 2003), L. Zucca, *A Secular Europe*, (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁹ J. D. Hunter, *Culture Wars*, (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

¹⁰ H. T. Engelhardt, Jr., *Notizie di Politeia*, 26.97, (2010), (59-79), 26.97, (2010), (91-99).

mere cultural objects.¹¹ Even the traditional patriarchal family is to be recast.¹² Martyrs especially make a public theological statement at odds with the secularizing agenda. Martyrs show that it is better to be dead than united with false belief. Within the secular culture, the death of martyrs and their glorification border on being a form of prohibited speech and action.

2 Against the Background of the Twentieth Century

The 20th century was a terrible time. Despite the bloodshed of the French Revolution and its Reign of Terror, Europeans passed the 19th century in growing expectation of endless progress towards perpetual peace, guided by reason, and supported by an increasing secularization.¹³ Although their dreams of progress did not die, they were largely deformed and in part crushed on the battlefields of the First World War. The moral, social, and political catastrophes of the 20th century, all of which were built on secular visions of progress, emerged from these ruins and led to the Holocaust in Germany and to the killing of tens of millions of Orthodox Christians in the Soviet

¹¹ G. Andreescu and L. Andreescu, The European Court of Human Rights' Lautsi decision: Context, contents, consequences, *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 9.26 (Summer 2010): (47–74), Classroom Crucifix I, 85 VerfGE 94 (1991)., Classroom Crucifix II, 93 BVerfGE 1 (1995)., European Court of Human Rights, Lautsi v. Italy, Second Section, November 3, 2009, European Court of Human Rights, Lautsi v. Italy, Grand Chamber, March 18, 2011.

¹² M. J. Cherry, *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 35/3 (June 2009): (274–295), H. T. Engelhardt, Jr., *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 35.5 (October 2010), (499–517), H. T. Engelhardt, Jr., *International Journal of Chinese and Comparative Philosophy of Medicine* 11/2 (2013): 11–12, (113–127), M. Wang, P.-C. Lo, R. Fan, *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 35/5 (October 2010): (493–498).

¹³ Philipp Blom, *The Vertigo Years: Change and Culture in the West, 1900-1914*, (New York: Basic Books, 2008), A. N. Wilson, *God's Funeral*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999).

Union, then to the killing of even more millions in Mao Zedong's China, and finally to the killing fields of Pol Pot's Cambodia. Integral to the establishment of the Soviet state was the brutal torture and killing of Orthodox Christian laity, monks, and priests. In short, the aftermath of the First World War, which itself was marked by a wave of increased secularization in much of central Europe, was followed in Eastern Europe by a second wave of secularization imposed by international socialism.

In the early post-WWI years, as the persecution of Christians and of Orthodox Christians began in the Soviet Union, Europe fell into economic crises, which generated political crises, making way for the Fascist movement in Italy and the National Socialists in Germany. As Walter Benjamin, a man of remarkable influence¹⁴, observed, this involved a deadly aestheticization of politics.¹⁵ These terrible times were profoundly troubled, indeed evil. In the midst of civil wars, financial distress, and moral disorientation, Romanians in the period after the First World War tried, not the best they could have, to find orientation and salvation. Many in this period allied themselves with movements that were gravely misdirected. But nevertheless, some of these same people lived martyric lives in prison and died confessing the faith. It is within this context of conflict between traditional Christianity and a post-Christian, laicist culture that the question of Romania's glorification of its recent martyrs must be placed. One must note in addition that Romania is now once again threatened by a thoroughgoing laicism. Romania is being pressured to abandon a public recognition of a privileged God's-eye perspective and to recast its public morality in fully

¹⁴ L. McMurtry, *Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

¹⁵ H. Eiland, M. W. Jennings, Walter Benjamin, *A Critical Life*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014), M. Eksteins, *The Wall Street Journal* CCLXIII.61 (March 15, 2014), C5-C6.

immanent terms so as to set it beyond the glorification of martyrs. The ethos of the European Union is the third wave of secularization to strike since the First World War.

The third wave of secularization now coming from the European Union and the secular West has proven more seductive and vastly more transformative than the previous attempts at secularization. The third wave through its all-encompassing media affirmation of self-regarding acts and peaceable forms of preference satisfaction is meant to make wars and martyrs inconceivable. In particular, the contemporary European ethos, the dominant secular ethos of the age, demands the demoralization of sexual acts, reproduction, and end-of-life decision-making into mere matters of life- and death-style choice, along with the religious cleansing of public discourse.¹⁶ A whole sphere compassing what had been matters of moral concern is now required to be without any valence of guilt or shame. The secular moral agenda requires that the public forum be restructured by an atheistic or at least agnostic methodological postulate through which public discourse is to be framed as if there were no enduring meaning, as if all came from nowhere, were going nowhere, and for no ultimate purpose. Martyrs reject with their blood this contemporary secularizing project.

Given the demands of this third wave of secularization (Camper & Lewis 2012; Gutmann 2003; Zucca 2012), which insists that no reference be made to a non-culturally-reduced transcendence, the presence of martyrs is unacceptable. As Zucca puts it, now “Religious beliefs have been banned from the public sphere and cannot constitute a source of an official truth supported by the state. Instead, the state has embraced conceptions of power and truth that do not depend on religious beliefs”.¹⁷ It is worse yet if the martyrs are of very recent

¹⁶ H. T. Engelhardt, Jr., *Dopo Dio, Morale e bioetica in un mondo laico*, (Turin: Claudiana, 2014).

¹⁷ L. Zucca, *A Secular Europe*, (Oxford, UK: University Press, 2012), p. 22.

history and from one's own country, because they indicate that martyrdom for true belief is still a possibility here and now. The glorification of martyrs is thus a scandal at least thrice over. First, in the case of Romania the glorification of recent martyrs identifies men and women who died at the hands of a brutal international socialism whose history has not been fully repudiated. Such a repudiation would require recognizing the evil of regimes after God. However, such a public recognition runs against the cultural grain of the contemporary European Union, which albeit gentler and softer, is still a regime after God. Second, against the commitments in secular justice of the dominant secular culture to suppress a recognition of the Transcendent, the Church, in publicly glorifying martyrs who in many cases before their martyrdom held quite problematic political and other views, proclaims the scandalous mercy of God, whose mercy violates secular human demands for justice. The Church proclaims that justice through Christ has been enveloped in mercy. As Tertullian stated, the martyr "obtain[s] from God complete forgiveness, by giving in exchange his blood ... [so that the martyr] secures the remission of all offences."¹⁸ The blood of Orthodox martyrs washes away all sins. This blanket forgiveness recalls the answer that Moses receives from God when he dares to ask to see God's glory. God then declares His glory: "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Exod., 33.19). Last and most importantly for this paper, such martyrs bring the contemporary dominant secular culture, along with its commitment to living within the horizon of the finite and the immanent, into question in that these martyrs gave their lives for a Personal Ground of Truth beyond the horizon of the finite and the immanent.

¹⁸ A. Roberts, J. Donaldson (eds.), *Tertullian, Apology L*, vol. 3, in: *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), p. 55.

3 The Martyrs break through the Horizon of the Finite and the Immanent

Martyrs point to a Truth that transcends secular norms, thus bringing the entire secular culture and society into question. They testify with their blood to the existence of a Truth that the secular culture cannot recognize, a Truth that undermines the plausibility of the secular culture. This is true of secular societies generally, but martyrs are particularly disruptive in the now-dominant secular culture that seeks to demoralize morality and to articulate a vision of human flourishing anchored in a vision of immanent self-satisfaction and pleasure.¹⁹ One is to make love, not war and martyrs. This secular project demands an ethics of discourse and public action that can motivate others who have placed themselves within a narrative of immanence and who have eschewed appeals to considerations that can lead to violence, including the violence of those who kill the martyrs. Martyrs underscore the possibility of radically disturbing and even undermining the secular political order, which depends on ignoring any pre-empting claims of the Transcendent that would return what have become “mere” life-style choices to being moral choices (e.g., by making sexual acts outside of the marriage of a man and a woman not just a life-style choice but a sin). The contemporary secular culture with its turn to immanence is committed to erasing the possibility of martyrs.

In terms of the dominant culture, martyrs affirm a comprehensive doctrine that the later Rawls would term “mad”²⁰ and Rorty “crazy” in violating the liberal-democratic norms embraced by his like-minded fellows (Rorty 1991, pp.

¹⁹ H. T. Engelhardt, Jr., *Dopo Dio, Morale e bioetica in un mondo laico*, (Turin: Claudiana, 2014).

²⁰ J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 17.

187–188).²¹ The contemporary secular culture must reject as well the early Christian martyrs. Within the now-dominant secular culture, the Christian martyrs of the first three centuries in refusing to affirm religious diversity and difference can only be judged as sharing in the “madness” and the “craziness” that must be imputed by such contemporary thinkers as John Rawls and Richard Rorty not just to the recent martyrs of Romania, but even to the martyrs of early Rome. One should recall that many of the Roman emperors acted ecumenically in their willingness to accept the Christians, if only the Christians would regard Christ as one among the numerous gods tolerated by Rome and integrated peaceably within its master culture. This ecumenical commitment of the Roman empire involved a policy of tolerating, if not indeed accepting, the gods and beliefs of the peoples it conquered, as long as those people accepted the moral, political, and spiritual authority of the empire and the emperor, the symbol of the rule of law. Tolerating the gods of others and recognizing the emperor were integral to the syncretical religious project of the Pax Romana. The focus was on a multi-cultural, polytheistic vision of religious and moral diversity and difference. Christianity rejected as well what was for the Graeco-Roman empire its important and diverse fabric of local cults (Parke 1977; Beard et al. 1988).

In contrast, the Roman pagans required only that the unity of the Roman religious culture be affirmed and the belief of others not be denigrated. This unity, symbolized in the worship of the emperor and in the respect of the gods of others, was exactly what the Christians would not concede. Given Rome’s background understanding, Severus Alexander (ruled A.D. 222–235), who persecuted the Christians, nevertheless in an ecumenical spirit prayed privately to Abraham, Jesus, Orpheus, and Apollonius of Tyana.

²¹ R. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 187-188.

In the early morning hours he would worship in the sanctuary of his Lares, in which he kept statues of the deified emperors – of whom, however, only the best had been selected – and also of certain holy souls, among them Apollonius, and, according to a contemporary writer, Christ, Abraham, Orpheus, and others of this same character and, besides, the portraits of his ancestors.²²

The Roman paleo-pagan culture was in this sense inclusive as well as accepting of religious, not to mention moral diversity and difference. The Christians of the first centuries rejected this ecumenism with their blood. They were willing to respect and love others, but not their religions.

Christianity in contrast to pagan Rome’s syncretism showed appropriate monotheistic intolerance in the sense of a theological recognition of the evil involved in not worshipping and obeying the one true God. The Christians were clear that compromising the truth of Christ was unacceptable and non-negotiable. They responded to pagan Roman authorities and to its culture, as did St. Ignatius of Antioch, who told Trajan, “Thou art in error when thou callest the daemons of the nations gods. For there is but one God, Who made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that are in them; and one Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, whose kingdom may I enjoy”²³. The dominant culture of ancient Rome asked the Christians to join in an ecumenism that affirmed religious diversity and difference. The Christians refused. In the European Union, St. Ignatius’ provocative characterization of the gods of others as demons would come close to hate-speech. In the now-dominant

²² Aelius Lampridius, Severus Alexander XXIX, in: *The Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, 2nd, David Magie (trans.), (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 235.

²³ A. Roberts, J. Donaldson (eds.), *The martyrdom of Ignatius VI*, vol. 1, in: *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), p. 129.

secular culture, the exclusivist faith of the Christian martyrs requires that they be marginalized from the public space.

4 Letting a well-fed Dog sleep in the Sun: The Secular Agenda of Tolerance

Contrary to the martyrs, the contemporary post-Christian culture demands a robust turn to immanence. Francis Fukuyama had a developed appreciation of this willful blindness to the demands of God when he took Alexander Kojève's (1902–1968) interpretation of a Hegelian theme, which was focused on the embrace of immanence, and made it into a popular book: *The End of History and the Last Man*.²⁴ Fukuyama, in his reflections on the late 20th century, appreciated that a secular moral vision, indeed a post-moral vision, was emerging, becoming salient, and was reconstituting the dominant culture as a whole. The new post-Christian culture was built around a web of immanently directed all-encompassing satisfactions, such that martyrdom in this culture framed after God, in particular after Christianity, would make no sense. In such a life-world of only tangible goals, to die for God and/or for moral principles would appear bizarre. Over against any recognition of God, all one's energies are to be anchored in a focus on peaceable self-satisfaction. As an exemplar of the emerging secular life-world, one might think of the realization of the good life as found in such prosperous European Union countries with well-functioning safety nets and mutual democratic affirmation such as Germany. In such a reassuring and spiritually numbing setting, one can seem to make do with the here and now so as to avoid confronting the

²⁴ F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, (New York: Free Press, 1992).

Transcendent. Fukuyama had the insight to appreciate that a decisive turn in the dominant culture had occurred, and that this turn offered a promise of perpetual peace through an anesthetization of transcendent concerns through the pursuit of immanent satisfaction and an active deafness to God's presence. The emerging secular, posts-Christian culture is a culture after martyrs. It involves a profound rejection of any religious and moral vision, or more precisely it requires an immanent reduction of religion and the demoralization of morality. The consequences are profound. As Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), an atheist²⁵, recognized, without God and immortality (Critique of Practical Reason, AK V.132–134) moral rationality is intractably plural, and the moral point of view does not necessarily trump prudence and individual self-interest. As Elizabeth Anscombe (1919–2001) also appreciated, without God as the point of unity and as the enforcer of morality, morality becomes something like law would be if there were no police, courts, or prisons.²⁶ The result is that moral choices are demoralized in the sense that there is no universal secular canonical perspective from which to judge particular choices to be good or bad, right or wrong, virtuous or vicious. Choices such as with whom to have sex (i.e., without marriage, adulterously, with a member of the same sex, with an animal, etc.), whether to have an abortion, whether to use donor gametes and third-party-assisted reproduction, as well as physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia, become life-style and death-style choices. Morality as a whole becomes a macro life-style choice.²⁷ Without God, there are no necessary sanctions for acting immorally. For this culture of immanence, which is articulated “after God”, martyrs are deeply disruptive

²⁵ M. Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography*, (Cambridge:University Press,2001), pp. 391-392.

²⁶ G. E. M. Anscombe, *Philosophy* 33/1 (January 1958): (1-19).

²⁷ H. T. Engelhardt, Jr., *Dopo Dio, Morale e bioetica in un mondo laico*, (Turin: Claudiana, 2014).

because they recognize a reality along with non-negotiable norms that brings this entire secular, post-moral, cultural life-world into question.

In the summer of 1989 before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Fukuyama perceptively appreciated that both the Eastern Bloc and Western Europe had disengaged from their anchors in being and/or philosophical rationality. Both sides were on their way to becoming post-metaphysical, in particular post-communist (i.e., post-dialectical materialist) and post-Christian societies of fully immanentized consumerism and self-indulgence. The emerging culture had embraced a gentle materialism of self-satisfaction. The Cold War was thus de facto already over even before the Berlin Wall fell on 9 November 1989. As Fukuyama's teacher Allan Bloom (1930–1992) put it in a commentary on Fukuyama's provocative 1989 article, "The world has been demystified".²⁸ The emerging culture was after God and after metaphysics. Fukuyama argued that, and hoped that, history as a bloody ideological struggle had come to an end because of its substantive turn to immanence, consumerism, and animal satisfactions. He looked to the end of history when humans would first and foremost pursue their self-satisfaction within a social framework that provided a wide range of desire satisfactions, a sufficient welfare net, and mutual recognition.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, as Fukuyama argued, ushered in an age characterized by an immanent vision and a focus on self-indulgence nurtured by post-Christian, financially successful, social democracies. Fukuyama was willing to put matters frankly, indeed bluntly. As he stated in 1992, reflecting on the world-historical event of the collapse of international socialism and the triumph of the now explicitly decadent West: The end of history would mean the end of wars and bloody revolutions. Agreeing on ends, men would have no large causes

²⁸ F. Fukuyama, *The National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989), (3–18).

for which to fight. They would satisfy their needs through economic activity, but they would no longer have to risk their lives in battle. They would, in other words, become animals again, as they were before the bloody battle that began history. A dog is content to sleep in the sun all day provided he is fed, because he is not dissatisfied with what he is. He does not worry that other dogs are doing better than him [sic], or that his career as a dog has stagnated or that dogs are being oppressed in a distant part of the world.²⁹

The point is that, as Fukuyama argued, because humans no longer have ideals or moral principles for which they are willing to fight and die, they can instead focus simply on the pursuit of their own self-satisfaction, so that the bloody sequence of human struggles that had constituted history can come to an end. Peace will have been achieved because all would have been placed themselves within a narrative of self-absorption contained within the horizon of the finite and the immanent.

Fukuyama emphasized that this required not just eschewing the Transcendent, but eschewing anything that would validate the killing of humans, including by implication the killing of martyrs. The human was to be reconstrued, following Alexander Kojève (1902–1968), in terms of the merely animal. Kojève influenced Allan Bloom, who influenced Francis Fukuyama to read Hegel so that Fukuyama could look forward to the beginning of “Man’s return to animality”.³⁰ This self-absorption in immanence required the death of any human ideals that could validate wars and martyrs. This brought with it a deflation of any claims made on behalf of humanity and the truly human. To recall a point made by Gianni Vattimo, “God is

²⁹ F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, (New York: Free Press, 1992), p. 311.

³⁰ A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, A. Bloom (ed.), J. H. Nichols, Jr. (trans.), (New York: Basic Books, 1969), p. 161.

dead, but man isn't doing so well himself".³¹ Man as a guiding norm for humanism had shattered into an intractable pluralism of diverse immanent narratives about how one should live as a human. There is no one canonical vision of the humanissimus vir. There is no canonical human project. Or as Rorty puts it, "To say, with Nietzsche, that God is dead, is to say that we serve no higher purposes. ... There are no problems which bind the generations together into a single natural kind called "humanity".³² There is nothing for which to die.

As a substitute for traditional Christian culture, Fukuyama offered a culture of absorption in the pursuit of self-satisfaction so as to avoid the danger of "waking up the sleeping dog". This committed somnolence requires a new meaning for toleration, one that demands not just peaceably allowing, but indeed also affirming, religious as well as moral diversity. One is to affirm moral and religious differences to the point at which truth in such matters can no longer be acknowledged. Hence, the danger of martyrs who die for religious truth, for they bring into question the secular project of dialogue and tolerance. They challenge what Rawls terms "reasonable pluralism". As martyrs for the true God and right belief, they stand so against the affirmation of diversity and difference that they recognize "reasonable pluralism" to be a "disaster".³³ They acknowledge religious and moral diversity as theological and moral error. The death of the martyrs opens up the possibility of religiously and morally motivated violence, including the death of martyrs. Martyrdom reminds us that there is that for which it is worth dying. This realization is dangerous, for it will wake up the sleeping dog.

³¹ G. Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, J. R. Snyder (trans.), (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 30.

³² R. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 20.

³³ J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 24.

5 Weak thought and the End of Martyrdom

The contemporary post-Christian, secular vision of morality and of the human condition, locked within the horizon of the finite and the immanent, not only rejects but also opposes the claims of right worship and right belief. This narrative of self-satisfaction is thoroughly centered within a vision of toleration that relocates religious “truth” as well as life-style choices within free-standing narratives anchored within the horizon of the finite and the immanent, with no claim on ultimate meaning but only on the transitory satisfaction of preferences. The result is that, as Richard Rorty admitted, the crucial move in this reinterpretation is to think of the moral self, the embodiment of rationality, not as one of Rawls’s original choosers, somebody who can distinguish herself from her talents and interests and views about the good, but as a network of beliefs, desires, and emotions with nothing behind it – no substrate behind the attributes.³⁴

The consequence is that peaceable religious diversity and difference become cardinal goods for the secular culture, as Hegel recognized, because no one religion can claim hegemony and truth. As Hegel appreciates, the final result of the Reformation is a deflation of religion into a myriad of sects.³⁵ Religious diversity is no longer recognizable as theological error. This attitude of toleration “after martyrs” is what Gianni Vattimo affirms in his category of weak thought.³⁶ As Santiago Zabala states regarding Vattimo’s weak thought: “The history of human emancipation as a progressive dissolution of violence

³⁴ R. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 199.

³⁵ B. S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 270.

³⁶ G. Vattimo, *Rivista di estetica* 12 (1982): (36–43), G. Vattimo, R. Girard, *Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith*, P. Antonello (ed.), W. McCuaig (trans.), (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

and dogmas is the widest definition we can give of weak thought".³⁷ Weak thought, the fabric of the now-emerging dominant secular culture with its commitment to erase anything worth dying for, must oppose traditional Christianity, because traditional Christianity sets centrally the death of Christ and the martyrs as witnesses to Truth.

The martyrs bring the reign of immanence into question and underscore the importance of the tutelage of the Church. In opposition, as Zabala puts it, "Thought must abandon all objective, universal, and apodictic foundational claims in order to prevent Christianity, allied with metaphysics in the search for first principles, from making room for violence".³⁸ Vattimo's hermeneutics, which are the hermeneutics of the now-dominant culture, is therefore the "hermeneutics of the nihilistic or 'weak' variety"³⁹, which seeks to undermine and radically recast all serious religious belief. Vattimo underscores this hermeneutic of nihilism in his deflationary discourse: "I say ... 'thanks to God I am an atheist' and I have become an atheist thanks to Jesus' existence".⁴⁰ Fukuyama's insight is that, in order for the dominant secular culture to maintain its hegemony, it must affirm a vision of the human as animal. It must oppose any notion of right worship and right belief. It must oppose the glorification of martyrs.

As has been argued by many defenders of the contemporary dominant secular moral vision, one must purge the public space of views contrary to such a "weak" position because they

³⁷ S. Zabala, *Introduction: Gianni Vattimo and weak philosophy, in Weakening Philosophy*, S. Zabala (ed.), (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), p. 18.

³⁸ S. Zabala, A religion without theists or atheists, in R. Rorty and G. Vattimo, *The Future of Religion*, S. Zabala (ed.), (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), (1-27), p. 13.

³⁹ G. Vattimo, *Nihilism and Emancipation*, S. Zabala (ed.), W. McCuaig (trans.), (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 152.

⁴⁰ R. Rorty, G. Vattimo, *The Future of Religion*, S. Zabala (ed.), (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 63.

threaten the hegemony of the secular cultural political agenda.⁴¹ As Richard Rorty clearly appreciated, in that there is no canonical secular morality “after God”, secular morality is reduced to politics. With no canonical secular vision of the right, the good, and the virtuous, secular morality becomes that which one can establish, a particular political agenda, a point that Rorty underscores in his shift from epistemology to politics.⁴² Again, the importance of Rorty is his candid acknowledgement of the radical character of the contemporary secular culture. The secular dominant culture has been brought to the recognition that it is simply a freestanding narrative unanchored in God, being, or a canonical rationality. Public morality becomes a political agenda. In this context, as a matter of political policy and agenda, reference to right worship and right belief must be silenced. One therefore denounces the toleration of the intolerant who oppose the demoralization of morality and the marginalization of claims on behalf of the importance of right worship and right belief.

There is, after all, the important political consideration from the point of view of the secular culture that straightforward public argument regarding the moral rectitude of the dominant secular culture may wake up the sleeping dog. Argument and discourse about God and surely about the recognition of martyrs must therefore be gently removed from the public space. For this reason, toleration may not return its original meaning as the eschewal of force against those with whom one disagrees, but it must instead mean the non-negotiable acceptance of all peaceable views with which one disagrees without further public discussion. Public debate about the legitimacy of such peaceable acts as heresy, sex outside of heterosexual marriage, abortion, etc., should as far as possible

⁴¹ R. P. Wolff, B. Moore, Jr., H. Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

⁴² R. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 66.

be avoided, for these are now officially established life-style choices.⁴³ Such debates must be excluded as far as possible from the public space, in that such debates would threaten to re-moralize the public space. Such debates would threaten a return of what have become within the secular culture life- and death-style choices to being recognized as moral choices. Hence, there can be no tolerance for the intolerant, and martyrs are in this sense intolerant: they declare the wrongness of religious as well as moral diversity and difference.⁴⁴ Given the secular moral and cultural project, the glorification of the Romanian martyrs who died under the communists constitutes in terms of the now-established secular culture a threat to the secular vision of the public peace, which is validated by the weak thought of the contemporary secular cultural hegemony.

6 In the Ruins of Christendom

In the ruins of Christendom, a fully post-Christian civilization emerges. The martyrs over the last century remind us that humans are not called to sleep as dogs in the immanence of an ethos of self-absorption that characterizes liberal, social-democratic states. Humans are called by a particular personal God Who lives and requires our personal acknowledgement, even to the point of martyrdom. This truth of the martyrs shatters the now-dominant secular culture's hope to achieve a perpetual peace through affirming peaceable religious as well as moral diversity and difference as a cardinal cultural richness, not as something that the martyrs testify is fundamentally misguided. Against this secular aspiration, martyrs are radically

⁴³ M. J. Cherry, *Christian Bioethics* 17/1 (April 2011), (25–46).

⁴⁴ R. P. Wolff, B. Moore, Jr., H. Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

counter-cultural. Contemporary martyrs provide relics for the altars of the twenty-first century.

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