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In my first lecture I presented something of my reading of the signs of the times. I didn't name our cultural and historical situation. In announcing that secularism as an ideology is outmoded and we are witnessing the return of the mythological imagination and the epics (both related intrinsically to religion), I did not then say that we are now in a post-secular age. The reason for that is that I do not see that the suffix "post" does any clarifying work. The German social theorist, Jurgen Habermas, has more recently defined "post-secular society" as one in which "religion maintains a public influence and relevance, whilst secularistic certainty that religion will disappear worldwide in the course of modernisation is losing ground."¹ But there are at least three difficulties with this characterization. With respect to my previous analysis, this observation is far too sociological. I draw attention to the way society is being informed emotionally and imaginatively by the culture of re-enchantment. Second, secularism is made inseparable from modernity and modernization. And, as any number of contemporary historians has shown, this is not the case. Industrialization, the rise of discreet professions, even the impact of death of God thinking by intellectual elites have very little impact upon religious believing. Besides, there is now much talk about, and endorsement of, the notion of "multiple modernities": modernization occurring at different times, according to different cultural logics, in different places. There is no universal and homogenous "modernization process" and no homogenous secularization process either. Third, Habermas equates secularity with certainty, which is also deeply problematic. Yes, secularization was associated with the rise of critical reasoning and scientific understanding, but there was never any pure form of reasoning—as the philosopher Immanuel Kant who explored and critiqued the notion of pure reason was quick to recognize when theology just kept coming back into his philosophical thinking; and scientific enquiry is an ever-open project of discovery. The pursuit of certain ideas died with Romanticism and scientific models

1 Jurgen Habermas, "Notes on a Post Secular Society," *signandsight.com* (June 18, 2008), <http://www.signandsight.com/features/1714.html>

that seem mathematically certain (like those produced by Newtonian physics) are continually being rendered more complex.

So, however we label where we are, in the first lecture I tried to show that we, as Christians or practitioners of religious pieties more generally, are not where we were any longer: we are not the victims of a default and normative secular condition with secularization, and our erasure as religious believers, as its destiny. This ideology is coming to a close and what is dominating cultural space are notions like emergence, complexity, viral networks and re-enchantment. To state that the church need no longer internalize a sense of its marginality before a secular hegemony is a negative point. The positive lies in exploring the kind of theology that might issue from and in response to “re-enchantment,” the mythological imagination, all the talk about “transcendence” and “spirituality,” the soft Buddhism of wellbeing, the increasing emphasis upon believing rather than knowing, the greater acceptance of the multiple levels of the lived experience and emotional knowledge, that goes along with a huge scientific interest in Near Death Experiences and the imaginative depiction of the afterlife.

So in the light of lecture one, the dominant signs fostering a new *Zeitgeist*, I want to ask about the church and its mission. I pointed out in the first lecture my conviction that in the light of the secular age and the way it came to view the world and its progress, the church had internalized its increasing irrelevance, even to the point of accepting its victimhood. The church became embattled. But, increasingly to my mind (and I’m not alone, the sociologist of religion Linda Woodhead would agree with me), only two institutions employ the language of secularism today. The first institution is the church and the second institution is the government, or rather certain offices within the government. The church uses it because it sees it as the enemy and has reified its presence. The government uses it as a shorthand to talk about something entirely different but complex and delusory: state neutrality with respect to the toleration of the diversity of ethnicities, religious beliefs, gender-identifications, ages, races and abilities that now make up their national constituencies. What is delusory about the government’s use of the term is that there is no neutrality—in state procedures or elsewhere. Governments function through people; today often people who are sent once or twice a year to have “diversity awareness” training. The continual need for training and the heightened awareness of biases that operate subtly, unconsciously, betrays that these people like all people have and hold and live out interests. None of us can be neutral. State neutrality is an aspirational benchmark, like human rights.

We can see what is mistaken about the governmental use of secularism from investigating what is often called “procedural secularism.” I will take this slowly because in this category mistake there lie certain dangers for the church and for religious believers more generally.

“Procedural secularism” (Rowan Williams’s term) or even “a healthy secularism” (Pope Benedict XVI’s term) is a framework for the equal treatment of persons with respect to employment, the law and civil society. It is founded upon modern values of tolerance and human rights. It was slow to emerge culturally—certainly while Britain still viewed itself as a predominantly white, Christian nation. It began to emerge only as a response to the increasing number of migrations into the UK from the 1960s onwards and identity politics (women’s movements, the gay movement, etc.) emerging at a similar time. Procedural secularism had little force as a deterrence against discrimination until the discrimination itself became increasingly violent. In the light of public protests, legislation was introduced that made acts of discrimination on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, race or religion a criminal offence and punishable. The first Race Relations Act in Britain was passed in 1965, followed by another in 1968 and another in 1976 that was amended in 2000. These dealt with discrimination in the public realm, while in 1975 the Sex Discrimination Act dealt with matters related to the equality of men and women. Several other acts or amendments to acts followed that impacted upon employment regulations. In none of these Acts countering discrimination was religion mentioned, so the extent to which they created a framework for procedural secularism was more a matter of excluding religion from legislation. The first regulations that included discrimination as a criminal offence on religious grounds only appeared in Britain in the Human Rights Act of 1998, then the Employment Equality Regulations of 2003, the Racial and Religious Hatred Act of 2006 and finally the Equality Acts of 2006/07 and 2010.

What might we infer from the development of this procedural secularism in the UK? First, it develops alongside a growing recognition from the opening of the twenty-first century that “religion should be seen as a public as well as private category.” And this is a “shift in perspective with hugely important implications.”² Secondly, it was *ad hoc*, piecemeal and responsive. It was not part of a secularizing programme. It was not the product of any secularizing forces. It was rather a pragmatic and developing

2 Grace Davie, *The Sociology and Religion. A Critical Agenda* (Sage: London, 2013), 115

attempt to come to terms with and govern a recognized and growing multiculturalism. It was a judicial development neither for nor against religion. It only included religion, as religion became more visible within the public realm, and even then it arrived late on the scene (in the main not until after 9/11). For the first time in the history of the census, from 2001 onwards the British Census also contained a question about religion. Procedural secularism crept upon us in order to construct an equality (understood as a neutrality) that enabled maximal inclusiveness and enfranchisement within the democratic polity. It was a state means of attempting to ensure *that* inclusiveness and enfranchisement while multiculturalism was viewed as a good thing. It provided a legal framework for fostering a common civic culture. It had nothing to do with secularization or secularity as such.

Of course some may recall that on February 11, 2011 the Prime Minister, David Cameron, put an end to what had been a continually evolving state policy in Britain for around 30 years, by claiming that multiculturalism as a social and political project had failed. Rather than ensuring a common civic culture, as a state-sponsored policy it had in fact fermented extremism and radicalization. If the UK now is about to follow a number of other EU countries who have declared multiculturalism a botched social and cultural experiment (Holland, France, Germany, for example) then there is only one recourse to establishing that common civic culture and that is assimilationism. In France *laïcité*, as we have seen was and is the tool for such assimilationism: if you want to publicly self-identify as a Muslim or a Sikh or a Jew or a Christian then you are publicly proclaiming yourself as outside the state and no longer French. Such a policy and the laws that enshrine it, employs the language of secularism as it employs the language of a separation of religion from the state, the private from the public. As any number of French critics have demonstrated, *laïcité* eventually becomes a vehicle for secularism as a state ideology. But, and this is the point I am making, such state-backed procedures have nothing to do with any secularizing process as such. We are treating category errors such that the true state of our secularity or non-secularity is wrapped in mists about state policies shifting from multiculturalism to assimilationism. Both policies make religion in the public sphere highly visible in ways that put an end to any secularization theory and view the Enlightenment aspiration towards the neutral and objective governing of a secular civil society abstract and ideological.

So let us start to develop a different kind of Christian theology for the different times in which we live; times out of which we have to make sense

of our lived-experience—social as well as cultural. But, a word of caution: whatever we develop has to be a turning within the unfolding traditions of Christian enquiry—Christian faith as it seeks understanding. The reason *nouvelle théologie* was the language of the theological enemies in response to the work of de Lubac, Congar and Daniélou was because it was understood as “new” and a radical departure from the tradition. Hence the language with which this twentieth century French school of Catholic theology claimed for themselves was *Ressourcement*—a return to or recovery of the foundational theological texts of the Christian traditions, patristic texts. The times we live in are not the times of the early church fathers and mothers; they are not the times of the mediaeval scholastics; nor are they the times of the Reformers. Nevertheless, where we are today issues from where we were. There are no radical breaks within the Christian tradition: there is only one Spirit moving in complex ways in and through the church to enact a single divine providence. There have been attempts to create such breaks—the “death of God” atheologies of the 60s and 70s, the post-Christianities of the 80s and 90s—but ecclesialogically they are all bankrupt. They are theologies hatched in the academy and most of those who embrace them leave the church rather than commit themselves more deeply to its mission. It is the mission of the church I want to foreground, a mission written deep into our understandings of the Spirit and the operations of the triune God within the world created by God. If theology does not feed into the mission of the church, if theology does not seek to be obedient to the Spirit within the church and the church as the body of Christ, I am left doubtful as to how Christian it is.

So: back to trying to develop a different kind of Christian theology that speaks to where we are today. I suggest the theologies we need now should be visceral, viscous and viral. And I will explain shortly the character of the theology I am wishing to develop, a theology that those three terms encapsulate. First, I want to look at the genealogy of the Christian faith as presented by the Catholic social and political philosopher, Charles Taylor. What I want to pull out of his massive, sprawling, hybrid narrative—*A Secular Age*—is a single, though fundamental, thread: the movement from what he conceives to be a Christian theology embedded in an enchanted world to the liquidization of the specificities of faith into a plethora of religious beliefs brought about by the “great disembedding” and the “disenchantment” that followed from it.³ While applauding some the enormous advantages

3 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

(mainly to the western or westernized world) that modernity has fostered—end of the legitimization of slavery, better health care and education for a wider section of the population—on the whole Taylor’s narrative is one of decline and fall. I am not sure about his evaluation of the historical shifts he charts, but the shifts themselves ring true—as also does *his* account of where we are today.

Taylor’s chapter, “The Great Disembedding,” outlines three cultural and historical movements each impacting upon the enchanted world. We have to understand these movements to see more clearly what is at stake and what the opportunities might be in a newly “re-enchanted” world. The enchanted world is a world where meanings are not just in the mind but they are out there in the world. It is a world of “porous” selves open to a flow of moral forces with cosmic resonance, spirits and dominions; where disbelief is difficult because we are immersed in the mystery of creation. To disenchant such a worldview is to “reject the sacramental; all the elements of ‘magic’ in the old religion.”⁴ The disembedding comes with that commitment to disenchantment, a commitment that began within the church, within Judaism’s and Christianity’s response to paganism that hardened into a programme of Reform. The Reformation itself was only a furtherance of a reform process already underway in the rise of a disciplinary society that transformed the “porous self” into a buffered self (a belief in the virtues of the free and autonomous agent). The outcome of this was a “new vision of moral order” in which hierarchy is flattened and there is an increasing acceptance of values belonging to what Taylor calls the “immanent frame.”⁵

Taylor’s 850 page thesis detailing the complex cultural, social and historical shifts that brought to us the secular age is difficult to summarize, as many of his critics and supporters have articulated. I want to jump over the narrative of subtraction and loss that he composes to come to his understanding of where this has left religion today. This theme he takes up in Chapter 14. For an important aspect of his work is that religion does not disappear within the secular age. It does undergo a privatization, but he recognizes that that privatization is increasingly being challenged as “religious longing, the longing for and response to a more-than-immanent transformative perspective ... remains a strong independent source of motivation in modernity ... we are just at the beginning of a new age of religious searching” in his conclusion.⁶ With this religious longing, the desire for

4 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 79

5 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 159

6 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 530–35

eternity, there occurs a supernova of belief and the production of a variety of positions that he calls “excarnation” (as distinct from and antithetical to incarnation).

Now we might begin to see where I wish theology to go today. It needs to be at the forefront of a counter-cultural resistance to excarnation and the Gnosticisms it furnishes. A Christian theology that aspires to being visceral, viscous and viral is fundamentally an incarnational theology. But let me make two further points that Taylor alludes to rather than explores, though they are fundamental characteristics of contemporary cultural life (as far as a British person can see). First, there is a nostalgia for the enchanted world. The nostalgia finds a number of expressions from New Age religion’s frank espousal of the pagan, or neo-pagan sympathies to immersion in mythological worlds and the return of epic as a literary genre. George R.R. Martin’s massive and multi-volume *Song of Fire and Ice*—the basis for *A Game of Thrones*—is roughly set within a quasi-medieval setting and increasingly the human worlds of Winterfell and King’s Landing are exposed to the mythologies of the past that resurrect themselves in the form of dragons, sorcerers, werewolves, whitewalkers and blood magic. They compose a fascinating narrative on how the new gods—clean, methodical and highly institutionalized—have to re-encounter the old gods and the deeper magics (both black and white). The books could be read as the return of the sacred, or a nostalgic longing for a lost spirituality. The nostalgia for enchantment can also be found in any number of interactive games, online and on the Xbox, and Christian theologies, such as those Taylor dialogues with, who accept a decline of the sacramental and speak theologically of the need to recover what has been lost. John Milbank has recently made the startling claim in the face of criticisms that his theology is nostalgic that “we remain caught within a ‘certain Middle Ages.’”⁷ Some have critiqued the Gnosticisms of the new re-enchantment, its escapism from the materialities of culture and embodiment. I will not go into that critique today.

The second characteristic of contemporary cultural life Taylor draws attention to but does not really dwell on is the re-evaluation of religious experience. People today want to experience and experience themselves experiencing. They want immediate affect whether that be through speaking in tongues and prophesying or extreme sports. In part, this has arisen intellectually from developments in cognitive and neuroscience, which have been speaking about emotional knowledge, investigating forms of

7 John Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People* (Oxford Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 40

embodied cognition or the fundamental role which affect plays in all thinking and reasoning. In part, the new evaluation of emotional engagement in religion is just an empirical fact: those sections of traditional religions that are rapidly recruiting and expanding are the ones with high emotional content: like Pentecostalism and the Charismatics in Christianity, the new Messianic movements in Judaism and the Jihadi elements within Islam. Experience is now seen as not private and subjective and to be handled with some scepticism. Experience now is understood to be social, relational and responsive to the cultural and natural environments in which we are placed. Theologically, what was once the province of liberal theologies and criticised as “expressivist” in Lindbeck’s Yale School typology is now coming under the theological eyes of those interested in pneumatology. If there is one Christian doctrine that is in fashion at the moment—given the post-World War II interest in Christology and the late twentieth and early twenty-first century attention to the Trinity—then it is pneumatology. Studies in Spirit theology abound, with attention to the language of experience and affect in Luther and Melancthon, the coming of age of Pentecostal theological studies, the examination of apocalypse and eschatology in ecotheology, the passions in political theology and the uptake of the language of wellbeing, health and healing in soteriologies. New attention is being paid to, and new examinations are being conducted into theologies of experience and embodiment, and theologies of desire.

Given these two characteristics of contemporary culture—re-enchantment and experience—then theology today must be imaginative, embodied, culturally engaged, concerned with personal and communal practices, participative, and embracing a world suffused with values. In order to produce such theologies, theology has to be transgressive of the older disciplinary boundaries that aspired to pure doctrine and propositional, unambivalent truths, in order to police certain orthodoxies—what might be termed the functionalization of doctrine. Hence my call for theologies that are visceral (embedded materially, culturally, historically, politically), viscous (that is, thick but porous accounts of the way theological discourse maps on to, relates to and resists other discourses) and viral (that is, communicative in ways that get into the life-blood of cultures and effect transformation). This is not simply a matter of method—theology engaging with capitalism or epigenetics or affect theory or contemporary film and cultural notions and performances of transcendence—it is also a matter of style: imaginative writing that is not afraid to find a voice and communicate.

In other words, taking Taylor's schema, theology has to become embedded again. And to do this it will have to find new genres, and expand the boundaries of traditional ways of doing systematic theology and teaching the faith, in order to express and conduct its pursuit of that faith seeking understanding. Communication is vital. The theology of the Word, as Christ to the world communicated through the Spirit, is what the gospel and proclamation is all about. So 'vital' is literally life-giving; it is the energies released, the freedoms made possible, when the Word goes viral. What does that mean? Well beyond genre and method there have to be new theological styles as theologians learn to write and speak as if their lives depended upon it. Most people, and theologians are included here, think they can write if they are literate. They can use verbs correctly, structure sentences that are grammatical. But this is only writing at the level of scripting a scientific report or describing an object for a catalogue. Information is transmitted. But writing and, more generally, communication that is viral is much more than this. It aspires to be what I would like to call a prophetic poetry that calls forth and deepens faith, participation, and communion when it concerns the gospel. No great early church father (we know so little of the writings of church mothers) was afraid of rhetoric. They were schooled in rhetoric; rhetoric disciplined by liturgy and doxology—a right-orientated rhetoric in the service of God's beauty and glory. It was rhetoric honed by listening and reaching out for, discerning that spoken to them by the Spirit. Theologians need to find their "voice"—not simply write; because the work of theology is a pedagogy—a deep learning that involves material, corporeal and emotional practices that form and inform the heart, the spirit of being human, the soul. Theology becomes, again, a form of prayer, a form of liturgical practice—rather than an academic and cerebral exercise in the delivery of dogma. It goes beyond just the intellectual and academic performance of clever, critical or even constructive analysis. It aims at something higher—the glorification of the Father. It aims at a *visio dei*—which cannot be separated from a way of living towards that *telos*.

Pedagogy will be at the forefront of theologies that are visceral, viscous and viral. But it is a pedagogy that does not simply teach the faith as if that faith were a set of propositions and it will not be a style of teaching that aims at transparency and eviscerates the mystery of God. An embedded theology will nurture the right respect for what is hidden, what the theologian Donald MacKinnon once called a "healthy agnosticism" and is traditionally understood as apophysis. This will be theology as *theoria*; a theology of beholding and contemplation; a reflective theology. It will recognize

that its work of articulating faith as it seeks out understanding is involved in formation—itself not separated from sanctification. It will not fight shy of human experience, even experience of the divine. While alert to the layers of projection, self-delusion, and all the pathologies associated with sinful human creatures, our experience (personal and collective—and it is difficult to disassociate the personal from the collective) of God is vital to why we believe and why we continue to believe. There is no faith and therefore no faith seeking understanding without levels of affective interest in God and being engaged by God. God desires us—that is the nature of God's love. This is not a dispassionate desiring; the cool gaze of a sovereign power. The grace that redeems is an operative and dynamic grace—engaged in our materiality, its cultural expressions, its physicality. This is God *for us*, God *with us*—the very pulse of incarnation. In a time of re-enchantment, or the realization of the enchanted world, then an embedded theology will be imaginative, creative, experimental, participative and energizing. Not as a gimmick. Not as a way of entertaining people into the Kingdom of God. But rather as an expression of Godself—as a reflection of the God we worship and pronounce as good and just and true and beautiful and liberating and alive.

But let me issue an important clarification here. Theology which is true to the gospel, true to redemption in and through Christ, true to the utter turn in the history of the human race and the nonhuman created order inaugurated by the incarnation, the crucifixion and the resurrection—such a theology will always be prophetic. What do I mean by that? Much of the contemporary turn to enchantment and the return of the mythic and epic imagination is gnostic in its orientation. Yes it emphasizes the interactive and participative, in fact aims at full immersion in affect. Take any one of the big blockbuster movies with plots turning on fast-paced narrative and special effects, rather than character development. See what Peter Jackson is doing with Tolkien, for example. The close, almost claustrophobic scenes in the Hobbit hole at the beginning of *An Unexpected Journey* open out into vast, panoramic computer-generated interiors of the Dwarf kingdom or the Orc stronghold or mountain scenes where the stone giants fight. There is some characterization based on Tolkien, and some dialogue also based on Tolkien's story, but the lavish detail and the epic imagination that really absorb and surprise (with delight) the filmgoer's experience is carefully crafted through special effects. We are drawn into angles and views of extraordinary power with epic music. One of the largest cinema chains in the UK, the Odeon, has as its logo: "Leave reality at home." The worlds of contemporary enchantment are explicitly escapist and they are

financially driven. This is not cinema as a prophetic discourse. To be prophetic, values and views of the world have to be questioned, even overturned. To my mind a film like *Gravity* works much better here because the visual effects, the characterization and the narrative call into question so much human self-importance and technological mastery.

The theologies that are embedded, interdisciplinary, visionary and participative should not capitulate to contemporary enchantment but imaginatively engage it. They have to be involved in what one of my old teachers, Nicholas Lash, called the “eastering of the ordinary.” We have to present the world as it is, but in a way that refashions it according to the way we, as Christians, believe God sees things. Refashion, that is, in a way that is persuasive and educative—leading people to understand the world which faith both proclaims and continues to seek. It is certainly not a matter of leaving reality at home, but much more a matter of opening up home and belonging to a richer and more profound understanding of the way the sacred interpenetrates and makes possible the secular. In other words, we need theologies of the secular; not secularized theologies but theologies recognizing the sacramental in and as the secular (the mundane order). These will be theologies that are embedded because they are returning the secular to a right and proper relation to the sacred. They will be theologies of experience, and the experiences they reflect upon, critically examine and fashion rhetorically, liturgically and ecclesially will not be medieval fantasies of life in Christendom. They must react against the nostalgia Taylor recognizes as concomitant with contemporary religious life and enchantment. They will be rooted in the tradition but tradition presses forward to what is being revealed to us today in different ways. The truth in Christ remains the same, but the role of the Spirit is to lead us into all truth. And all truth is an eschatological reality. It is the leading, the being led, the being taken up into the very process of revelation in and through history and divine providence that these theologies must strive to articulate.

An embedded theology is what I wish to write, I try to write, as I begin to prepare my own engaged systematic theology, the volume of which should be published in 2015. God willing. But I may not have the ability. That doesn’t mean this way of doing theology cannot be written or composed or filmed or danced. We are also, as theologians, people who prepare the way (like John the Baptist), look to a future fulfilment and accept our limitations, even our failures. There are others with greater gifts that can give such theologies a voice. Let me get personal here—recognizing that the personal is shaped by and shapes the communal; so though I speak I may

be voicing what others also understand and experience. And this is where I shall end. There is a beauty I feel, a worship I want to offer, a knowledge I half-have. If that beauty, worship and knowledge is true then others will share it. When I voice it they will catch the voice as if it were a virus. Maybe these others will write about it too in ways that will impress its mystery on those to whom it is communicated. Others may give this voice better articulation that I can. Others may succeed better than I. Two final pictures: St. Cyril of Jerusalem in his own liturgical and sacramental theology, his own catechetical pedagogy, could draw so much from the language and rites of the pagan cults. He was loud and clear about his rejection and criticisms of paganism, but he is not at all embarrassed about taking over much of the theatrical and rhetorical power of the Eleusinian mystery cults. His was an embedded theology for his time (the mid to late fourth century) and his own place (Jerusalem and the Eastern Roman province). The second is the installation by the video artist Bill Viola—not as far as I know a Christian. But watch on Youtube “Emergence.”⁸

8 Bill Viola, “Emergence,” Youtube video, 2:04, uploaded on April 2, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTPf6mHKYD0>



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