

# Post-Secular Return of Religion: A Religion of Being-for-the-Other

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## Introduction

Secularism in conventional understanding involves a strict separation of the state from religious institutions. It ensures that religious groups do not impede affairs of the state. Equally it also makes sure that the state does not interfere in religious affairs. In this respect post-modernity offers a paradigm shift in the hermeneutical understanding of the conception of 'secular' and 'religion'. This would entail **Post-Secular Return of Religion: A Religion of Being-for-the-Other** which will be the crux of my argument. I draw cues from **Charles Taylor, and Gianni Vattimo**. (1) I claim that the basis of the post-secular return of religion is the 'death of God' (2) Thus, I argue for the hermeneutic recovery of the divine after the death of the metaphysical God. (3) It would be wrong to identify this hermeneutical recovery of God with a dimension of an individual belief system, something contained and conceded by it. **Finally, (4) God is not seen as a being outside the universe, but within, being a potential promise present in language, culture, and in human lives, maturing the creature's createdness. It enables 'the self' to realize its own being and of the other and thus to-be-for-the-other. Being-for-the-other is inevitable because the hermeneutic rediscovery of religion and sacred is (should be) primarily aimed at human flourishing and peaceful coexistence of the whole of creation, man and beast alike. This post-secular return of religion as 'being-for-the-other' visualises a pluralistic community which rejuvenates social discourse, practices of economic development, and new ecological policies within democratic countries. The paper will explain these implications in detail.**

## Hermeneutic of 'the death of God' and Return of 'the Sacred'

A dialectical contrast between Vattimo and Taylor's 'secularism', and the unique contribution of their 'hermeneutics' to continental thought aid the conclusive understanding of "the Post-Secular Return of Religion." Secularism which is predictably considered as the prerequisite "of public democratic life, the requisite integument of international relations,"

“the mere absence or negation of obsolescing “religion”, and as “the characterization of modernity,”<sup>1</sup> is now contested. “Secularism and secularisation, are no longer regarded unquestionably as the vaunted pillars of modern democratic society, or modernity itself.”<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding the unstable role of secularism, secular humanists continue to insist that in spite of post-secular claims, ‘it’ remains ‘the only’ sure predicament for negotiating sectarian conflict and as means for sustaining a democratic state. Significantly, ‘the hermeneutic of secularism’ of Vattimo and Taylor has wider implication and relevance to contemporary philosophy and the Western thought. Tellingly, the possibility of the ‘post secular return of religion’ for Taylor is a ‘historical project’ and for Vattimo, it is ‘a salvific action of God.’

The whole meaning of secularism is elucidated (for the purpose of this research) after ‘the death of God’ (Nietzschean Vattimo) and the Reform movements (Taylor) (hence the deconstruction and overcoming of traditional metaphysics and epistemology). Moving on, can ‘God’ *return* from ‘the death of God’ in the ‘post-secular age’ where the role of secularism is unstable? What follows ‘after the death of God’ is ‘post-Christian’ rather than ‘anti-Christian. It would seem that secularisation (‘weak thought-death of god’ and ‘openness’ in immanent frame) becomes the norm of all theological discourse and leads to the ‘return of religion’. **Consequently**, the basis of the post-secular return of religion is the ‘death of God’. Aside, the “death of God [itself] has always been accompanied by various modes of resurrection.”<sup>3</sup> This can be seen primarily in metaphysics where “theological prejudices” is imbedded “in its entirety, even when it professes to be atheistic.”<sup>4</sup> This means that when metaphysics poses as the supreme authority that pronounces “there is no God,” it simply re-enacts the role of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Rectenwald and Rochelle Almeida, “Introduction” in *Global Secularisms in a Post-Secular Age*, eds., Michael Rectenwald, Rochelle Almeida, and George Levine, Berlin: CPI Books GmbH, Leck, 2015, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Rectenwald and Rochelle Almeida, p. 3. Michael Rectenwald and Rochelle Almeida give examples of the unstable role of secularism that lead to post-secular age. They are ‘the continued popularity of church going in the United States, the emergence of New Age spirituality in Western Europe, the growth of fundamentalist movements and religious political parties in the Muslim world, the evangelical revival sweeping through Latin America, and the upsurge of ethno-religious conflict in international affairs, “religious resurgence” or de-secularisation of Peter Berger, and the reassigning of new for role for religion in politics and public life by Habermas, and the adoption of the term “post-secularism” to describe the relations between the secular and the religious in the current era, etc. (Michael Rectenwald and Rochelle Almeida, p. 2).

<sup>3</sup> John D. Smith, *Dialogue between Faith and Reason: The Death and Return of God in Modern German Thought*, London: Cornell University Press, 2011, p. 9. Smith explains it with examples in heavenly geometry, and infinitesimal calculus, in morality, in a dialecticized spirit, in the necessity of ritualized practice, in capitalism, or in variously defined spheres of “otherness”.” (John H. Smith, p. 9).

<sup>4</sup> John D Caputo quotes Derrida in his review of *Difficult Atheism*, John D. Caputo, Syracuse University and Villanova University, <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/31269-difficult-atheism-post-theological-thinking-in-alain-badiou-jean-luc-nancy-and-quentin-meillassoux/>, accessed on 22/05/2016.

Christopher Watkin in *Difficult Atheism*, observes that atheism is ‘difficult’<sup>5</sup> and proposes ‘imitative’ and ‘residual’ atheisms that re-enact the role of God within ‘the death of God.’<sup>6</sup> Imitative atheism is parasitic over the very framework it negates. It “replaces ‘God’ with a supposedly atheistic place-holder such as ‘Man’ or ‘Reason’, explicitly rejecting but implicitly imitating the theological categories of thinking...”<sup>7</sup> It is ‘residual’ because “it calls upon us to make do with the resulting debris or “residue” of lost foundations (the “death of God”), to live with finitude and imperfection, giving up on a satisfying transcendence and putting up with an unsatisfying immanence.”<sup>8</sup> This is further authenticated by John H. Smith who claims that “the ‘death of God’ is in a crucial sense inscribed into Christian identification of God with *logos*.”<sup>9</sup> This brings forth by definition and identification of theology and critical reflection of God. Smith explains,

[T]hat “death,” [...] does not come to Him from “outside” Christian tradition but from within. It occurs through the different ways in which that *logos* comes to be identified over time, the different discursive spheres that bring their own “logics” to bear on understanding (the Christian) God. Because that *logos* is not *one* – that is, it takes the form, among others, of philology, natural science, ethics, Idealist philosophy, anthropology, ideology, existentialism, and ontology – the long process of God’s death also contains a constant returning to religion and of religion, as different thinkers again and again take on the task, ironically, not of killing but of understanding God with *logos*.<sup>10</sup>

Here a Christian God is injected into the heart of the Western concept of *logos*, and thus the exercise of reason associated with philosophy can never be practised in isolation from theology. Since, the *logos* is with God, or at least, in communion with God, philosophy will return again and again to the question of God and religion will also return again and again. The *logos* in God has focussed over the centuries on His death and the God in *logos* has led time and again to His return.<sup>11</sup> Along with these, “the dissolution of the main philosophical theories that claimed to have done away with religion: positivist scientism, and Hegelian-later

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<sup>5</sup> “Atheism,” Watkin argues, is “difficult,” a difficulty Nietzsche proposed to meet when he said “God is dead,” where “God” meant not just the Deity but the whole system of “values,” of “truth” and the “good,” from Plato to the present, every attempt to establish a centre, a foundation of knowledge and morals, including modern physics, which is also an “interpretation. <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/31269-difficult-atheism-post-theological-thinking-in-alain-badiou-jean-luc-nancy-and-quentin-meillassoux/>, accessed on 22/05/2016.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Watkin, *Difficult Atheism: Post-Theological Thinking in Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Watkin, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Watkin, p. 133.

<sup>9</sup> John D. Smith, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> John D. Smith, p. 2

<sup>11</sup> John D. Smith, pp. 2-3.

Marxist – historicism”<sup>12</sup> account for much of the “religious turn” in recent continental thought. Hence, ‘the trace’ of ‘the sacred’ (God) is inclined and engraved in the very negation of ‘the sacred.’ Therefore, the possibility arises of a new trend around the globe; a trend of ‘recovery’ and ‘return’ of religion in a post-secular setting. Thus, I argue for the hermeneutic recovery of the divine after the death of the metaphysical God.

The hermeneutical recovery of the divine, and the return of religion today leaves one with no good philosophical reason to be an atheist, or to dismiss religion as an evil. One of the attributes of the returned religion in post-secularity is a position which is beyond ‘theism’ and ‘atheism’ but ‘*anatheism*.’<sup>13</sup> Both Taylor and Vattimo concur in their philosophical exchange with Richard Kearney, not to disagree with ‘*anatheism*.’ For a greater clarity about the features of ‘the returned religion’ leading from ‘religion’ and ‘secularity,’ I will unveil some of those trends developing in contemporary philosophy that define and attempt a hermeneutic effort to recover religion and God after ‘the death of God.’ Along with Vattimo and Taylor; Rowan Williams, John Milbank, Richard Kearney, and John H. Smith unreservedly argue for the post-secular and post-Christian call to re-engage with religion.

### **Gianni Vattimo, Charles Taylor, and Others**

For Vattimo, ‘religious experience is an experience of leave taking’ and if ‘it’ is ‘a leave taking’ (a departure) ‘it’ is most likely to ‘return’ to where and to when ‘leave was taken.’<sup>14</sup> Thus, religion comes to be experienced as a return. “In religion, something that we had thought irrevocably forgotten is made present again, a dominant trace is reawakened, a wound reopened, the repressed returns and what we took to be an *Überwindung* is no more than a *Verwindung*, a long convalescence that has once again come to terms with the indelible trace of its sickness.”<sup>15</sup> It is a return to its origin, which is forgotten and is made present, an important point rediscovered, a wound reopened to heal, a crushed and alienated being

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<sup>12</sup> Gianni Vattimo, *After Onto-theology: Philosophy between Science and Religion* in *Religion after Metaphysics*, Ed. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2003, p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> ‘*Anatheism*’ is used as a ““return to God after God”: a critical hermeneutic retrieval of sacred things that have passed but still bear a radical reminder, an unrealized potentiality or promise to be more fully realised in the future. In this way, *anatheism* may be understood as “after-faith,” which is more than a simple “after-thought” or “after-effect.” (Richard Kearney, *Reimagining the Sacred: Richard Kearney Debates God*, Eds., Richard Kearney and Jens Zimmermann, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, p. 7).

<sup>14</sup> Gianni Vattimo and Jaques Derrida. *Religion*. Ed. Cambridge: Polity Press. 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Vattimo and Derrida, *Religion*, p. 79.

returns that was not totally rejected and set aside but only underwent a period of convalescence. Vattimo understands this 'return' as the essential aspect of religious experience itself. The 'death of God' and thus 'overcoming metaphysics' is in fact only a 'leave taking' which helps to come to terms with the indelible trace of Christianity's weakness and helps towards renewed reflection leading to the original message of Christianity.

In Taylor's three distinctive and coexisting interpretive modes of secularism, it is understood as a term according in which a new relationship with religion is occurring. This affirmation of religion is more clearly stated in *secularity*<sup>3</sup>. Through this distinctive explanation of secularity, Taylor clearly explains that the historical and hermeneutic recovery of religion for human flourishing (exclusive humanism), opens the possibility for a peaceful coexistence of religious and secular citizens (transcendent humanism). This can also be termed as new Christian humanism 'open' to the transcendent, a possibility to 'believe again.' Taylor also observes that "[the] return to religion is not actuated by a strong group or political identity or by a need to defend or recover a civilizational order against threatened dissolution, [but]... a profound dissatisfaction of a life encased entirely in the immanent order. The sense is that this life is empty, flat, devoid of higher purpose."<sup>16</sup> It is always a personal search encoded in the language of authenticity. One tries to find one's own path or 'oneself.' It does not mean that it has to be self-enclosed, "that it cannot end up with a strong sense of the transcendent, or of devotion to something beyond."<sup>17</sup> "[This] new framework has a strongly individualistic component, but this will not necessarily mean that the content will be individuating. Many people will find themselves joining extremely powerful religious communities, because that's where many people's sense of the spiritual will lead them."<sup>18</sup>

Rowan Williams envisions a transformational non-dogmatic faith that has the aptitude to encapsulate with the social, imaginative world. If that faith is chaotic or weak, it produces a cultural loss of courage, which affects the true spirit of faith itself and this can lead to the

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<sup>16</sup> Charles Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays*, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011, p. 255.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays*, p. 255.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays*, p. 256.

violence of fanaticism.<sup>19</sup> The principal aim of non-dogmatic religion is that it discovers the notion of human rights.

[It] does not just “enforce my own claims, but about the demands of dignity in all persons; a notion of freedom that sees it as freedom for the other, not from them; a vision of democracy that is about the constant search for ways of ensuring that even the most marginal and deprived has a voice; a search for the convergent morality in public life, not a separation between minimal public order and private moral preferences; and a climate of artistic creation that evokes something of the richness of the human subject when it is opened up to the holy.”<sup>20</sup>

It would be wrong to identify God with a dimension of an individual belief system, something contained and conceded by it. This can be analytically conceptualized by means of ‘God’ as something that grows inside every individual. Even when one does not wish, God ripens. The “individual life has a task that can be defined only as that of allowing God to ‘ripen’ in increasingly visible ways.”<sup>21</sup> Williams gives God a place that He/She chooses to be. However, God is not seen as a commodity waiting for an advantage to guarantee its place. He explains; “[t]he religious life, on this account would be taking on the task of ensuring a habitation for God, a God who does not guarantee for himself a place in the created world, a place alongside other agents, and so is visible only when a human life gives place, offers hospitality to God, so that this place, this identity, becomes testimony.”<sup>22</sup>

John Milbank’s ‘radical orthodoxy’<sup>23</sup> proposes the possibility of a skeptical demolition of modern, secular social theory by demonstrating that all of the most important governing assumptions of such theory are bound up with the modification or the rejection of orthodox Christian positions. He tries to free Christian theology from the shackles of secular reason by stepping outside the parameters imposed by modern thought, and re-discover the roots of an alternative conceptual structure that better conforms to the Christian narrative. Thus, he pictures a metanarrative, a transcendent factor, ‘even when it comes as the constant element in an immanent process’ to ‘pass critically beyond Nietzschean suspicion’ which arguably is

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<sup>19</sup> Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, London: Continuum Trade, 2012, p. 73.

<sup>20</sup> Rowan Williams, p. 74.

<sup>21</sup> Rowan Williams, p. 316.

<sup>22</sup> Rowan Williams, pp. 318-319.

<sup>23</sup> “[I]n the face of the secular demise of truth, [radical orthodoxy] seeks to reconfigure theological truth. The latter may indeed hover close to nihilism, since it, also, refuses a reduction of the indeterminate. Yet what finally distances it from nihilism is its proposal of the rational possibility, and the faithfully perceived actuality, of an indeterminacy that is not impersonal chaos but infinite interpersonal harmonious order, in which time participates...Radical Orthodoxy wishes to reach further in recovering and extending a fully Christianised ontology and practical philosophy consonant with authentic Christian doctrine.” (John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, *Radical Orthodoxy*, Eds. London and New York: Routledge, 1999, pp. 1-2.)

the final and truly non-metaphysical mode of secular reason.<sup>24</sup> There are two causal reasons for doing this: “the faith of humanism has become a substitute for a transcendent faith now only half-subscribed to, and secondly there is a perceived need to discover precisely how to fulfil Christian precepts about charity and freedom in contemporary society in an uncontroversial manner, involving cooperation with the majority of non-Christian fellow citizens.”<sup>25</sup> Milbank attempts to recover an authentic and reasonable union of theology and philosophy, so that human beings can rediscover a vital, mysterious, and fructifying theological relationship to both God and the world. It is a reversion of the decline of Christianity in public life by restoring the intellectual legitimacy of Christian theology over secularism.

Richard Kearney makes an *anatheist* attempt to re-imagine the sacred. ‘*Ana*’ means ‘up in space or time,’ ‘back again,’ ‘anew,’ and ‘after.’<sup>26</sup> It is “a retrieval of past experience that moves forward, proffering new life to memory, giving a future to the past.”<sup>27</sup> This ‘*aftering*’ “refers to any poetic movement of returning to God *after* God – God *again*, after the loss of God...the return of the lost one – in the case of religion, the lost God – may well be the return of a *more real* presence.”<sup>28</sup> The prefix *ana* portrays the idea of retrieving, revisiting, reiterating, and repeating. Kearney explains it as “a critical hermeneutic retrieval of sacred things that have passed but still bear a radical reminder, an unrealized potentiality or promise to be more fully realized in the future.”<sup>29</sup> It is giving a future to the past in which the future was a potentiality or a promise. It “is the possibility of opening oneself, once again, to the original and enduring, promise of a sacred stranger, an absolute other who comes as gift, call, summons, as invitation to hospitality and justice...*Anatheism* is a radical opening to someone or something that was lost and forgotten...”<sup>30</sup>

The post-secular attempt to re-engage with religion and the sacred, first of all, calls for a radical re-living of religiosity of non-religious religion, either spiritual or religious. The hermeneutic effort to re-imagine the sacred has wide ramifications in the post-secular and post-modern world. The ‘God’ who returns is stripped of the metaphysical qualities, claims,

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<sup>24</sup> John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory; Beyond Secular Reason*, Second Ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Kearney, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Kearney, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Kearney, pp. 6-7.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Kearney, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Kearney, p. 9.

objectivity, and dogmatism, and has wrapped himself weak and fragile. For Vattimo, “it is a reversal of a Platonic programme: the philosopher now summons humans back to their historicity rather than to what is eternal.”<sup>31</sup> God is not seen as a being outside the universe, but within, being a potential promise present in language, culture, and in human lives, maturing the creature’s createdness. Secondly, it enables ‘the self’ to realize its own being and of the other and thus to-be-for-the-other. **Being-for-the-other** is inevitable because the hermeneutic rediscovery of religion and sacred is (should be) primarily aimed at human flourishing and peaceful coexistence of the whole of creation, man and beast alike. It is non-hierarchical recovery of the divinity of all creatures.

### **Religion of Being for the Other**

In pre-modernity, the principal thought patterns were circumscribed around the metaphysical trinity: man, world, and God. During seventeenth and eighteenth century reformation and the emergence of what is called modernity, the third element underwent an alteration: man and world acquired precedence. The consequence of these changes results in post-modernity; man, world and ‘the Other’ become the central topic of Western thought or philosophy. In studying Taylor, Guido Vanheeswijck, observes that we have experienced and inherited three juxtaposed spiritual positions: “capacious theism (Man, World, God), exclusive humanism (Man and World), and Post-modern (Man, World, the Other).”<sup>32</sup> That there is a continuity in this configuration as in each stage the emphasis changes from one to another. As a result of configuration and secularisation, ‘God,’ in post-modernity, is returned distinctively as ‘the Other,’ still searching for an answer to the relation between transcendence and immanence. The traces of the return of the ‘Other’ can be found in Descartes’ *malin génie* (the malicious),<sup>33</sup> in Nietzsche’s Dionysos,<sup>34</sup> in Heidegger’s philosophy of ‘Being,’<sup>35</sup> and, in

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<sup>31</sup> Gianni Vattimo and Richard Rorty, *The Future of Religion*, Ed., Santiago Zabala, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Guido Vanheeswijck, “The End of Secularisation,” in *Rethinking Secularisation: Philosophy and the Prophecy of a Secular Age*, eds., Herbert De Vriese and Gary Gabor, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, p. 18, Charles Taylor in *A Catholic Modernity* (pp. 13-37), and later in *A Secular Age* (pp. 610-614), elaborates these distinctions between the world, man and God, through his historical analysis of the emergence of secularity<sup>3</sup> where ‘God’ returns as one of the possible options.

<sup>33</sup> Guido Vanheeswijck, p. 19. Vanheeswijck says that “the return of a distinctively clandestine ‘Other’ already begins with Descartes’ concept of the *malin gene*, the malicious, always deceiving demon, of which Descartes not only tries to wipe out its late medieval traces, but from whose malicious nature he also tries, albeit in vain, to escape by replacing the genius with the idea of a good and completely perfect God by the end of *Meditations*” (p.19).



Bataille's *heterology*.<sup>36</sup> Post-Heideggerian thinkers like Levinas, Gianni Vattimo, Jean-Luc Marion, Luc Ferry, Marcel Gauchet, Rene Girard, and Charles Taylor, try “against the backdrop of Heidegger’s critique of the onto-theological structure of our religious language, to find new formulations”<sup>37</sup> to speak about ‘the Other,’ transcendence after ‘God.’ However, the pertinent dichotomy remains as to whether this return of ‘the Other’ is ‘wholly’ with an emphasis on transcendence or immanence. In the post-secular and post-modern return of the ‘non-religious religion, Vattimo’s Nietzschean death of god and metaphysical violence or his ‘weak thought’ rejects the ‘Wholly Other.’<sup>38</sup> He rejects the ‘Other’ with a capital ‘O.’ However, Taylor does not deny the ‘possibility’ of the ‘Other,’ in the fully transcendent Other.

### **Vattimo’s Other**

Vattimo’s historical approach to hermeneutics as nihilistic has no interest in the possibility of ‘vertical transcendence, and therefore, rejects the metaphysical absolutism of ‘Being’ and the ‘Other.’ The ‘Other’ is a wholly Other, “is incomprehensible, contradicts human reason, and thwarts our plans and ambitions.”<sup>39</sup> Vattimo’s weak interpretation envisions a “‘horizontal transcendence’ of the linguistically-constituted epochs into which we are thrown,”<sup>40</sup> therefore, entertaining the weak ‘being’ and the ‘other.’ Vattimo and Taylor’s hermeneutical deconstruction of secularism, that is, their *Verwindung* of metaphysics and epistemology, opens the possibility for an irreducible plurality of interpretations centering on metaphysical

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<sup>34</sup> Guido Vanheeswijck, p. 21. “Following Nietzsche, current French philosophy has given a central role to the Dionysian as well and in this way put forward a specific interpretation of the transcendent” (p. 21).

<sup>35</sup> Guido Vanheeswijck, p. 20. Heidegger’s philosophy of Being, and his analysis of Western metaphysics as a form of ‘calculating thinking’ rises against the backdrop of the nominalistic otherness of God, transformed by Heidegger into the abyss of Being. Heidegger’s interpretation is the reinforcement of a nominalistic interpretation of God, which stresses its incomprehensibility, its abysmal character, couched in an idiosyncratic and sometimes as incomprehensible terminology as the Other to which it refers, Pp. 20-21.

<sup>36</sup> Guido Vanheeswijck, p. 21. Bataille in *Tears of Eros* considers Dionysos as the god of transgression and celebration, ecstasy and madness, eroticism and dissipation. “He calls his philosophy a *heterology*, a kind of ‘theology’ without god, in which there is made room for the Other. The Other is the sacred, appearing in a sacrifice which is sheer dissipation or wastefulness” (p. 21).

<sup>37</sup> Guido Vanheeswijck, p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> The concept of “the Wholly Other,” is associated with early 20<sup>th</sup> century Dialectical Theology. Barth and Otto use this as the descriptor of their theology.

<sup>39</sup> Frederick Depoortere, *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy: Gianni Vattimo, Rene Girard, and Slavoj Žižek*, New York: T & T Clark, 2008, p. 14.

<sup>40</sup> Matthew E. Harris, *Essays on Gianni Vattimo: Religion, Ethics and the History of Ideas*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, p. 87.

traces. According to Matthew E. Harris, the vocation of the philosopher today is to seek out ‘the other’ (with a lower case ‘o’) in order to further weaken these metaphysical traces,<sup>41</sup> and also to recover them in a secular form. It means that although Vattimo rejects a wholly ‘Other’ god, he accepts ‘Other’ through the hermeneutic of *Verwindung*. Phenomenologically, it is always an invitation to greater involvement with the other; an incarnation of the ‘Other’ in each one of us. Conversely, he uses the terms ‘Being’ and ‘Other’ in such a manner, now altered and healed through his weak/kenotic interpretation as ‘being’ and ‘other.’ He explains, “[I]f we consider the meaning of creation and redemption to be kenosis, as I believe we must in the light of the gospel, we will probably have to concede that the continuity of God and the world established by classical metaphysics is more authentically ‘kenotic’ than the transcendence attributed to God in naming him ‘the wholly Other.’<sup>42</sup> It takes incarnation seriously. Incarnation brings in the message of weakness, humiliation and friendship ‘for the other.’<sup>43</sup> In incarnation, God ‘is akin to finitude and nature: there is a fundamental continuity between God and world, between God and humanity.’<sup>44</sup> Though Vattimo, rejects the ‘Other,’ incarnation opens the possibility to encounter the ‘Other’ in the ‘other.’<sup>45</sup> It is the individual self’s freedom to be ‘closed’ or ‘open’ to conversion and fullness within the ‘immanent frame.’ It is a drawing out of oneself, what is already there, a possibility to open further. It is a historical destiny (Heidegger) of the individual self. Since Vattimo considers language as metaphorical, the death of god liberates metaphor, and thus language.<sup>46</sup> This not only liberates language but also opens up the possibility for an encounter with God-beyond-God, made possible through incarnation.<sup>47</sup>

Significantly, it is self-evident from Vattimo and Taylor’s hermeneutic that the ‘Other’ as a ‘horizontal transcendence’ is realized through *Verwindung* of all ‘strong’ claims. It is appreciated in *kenotic* charity and *agape*. It is experiencing the ‘sacred’ or the ‘transcendent’ in the ‘other’ in ‘dialogue’ and loving ‘friendship.’ Thus, the post-secular religion ‘re-

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<sup>41</sup> Matthew E. Harris, p. 87.

<sup>42</sup> Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*, Trans., Luca D’ Isanto and David Webb, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999, p. 83., and Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, Trans., Luca D’ Isanto, New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, p. 38.

<sup>43</sup> Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*, p. 95.

<sup>44</sup> Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, p. 27.

<sup>45</sup> I differentiate between ‘the Other’ and ‘the other.’ “The Other” stands for the conventionally understood transcendental God or absolute, and ‘the other’ means the immanent, the created, the other individual that is not me, the particular situation etc.

<sup>46</sup> Gianni Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation: The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*, Trans., D. Webb, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997, p. 54.

<sup>47</sup> Matthew E. Harris, pp. 92-93.

discovered' is a religion of 'being-for-the-(O)ther. The 'Other' in the 're-discovered' religion is not Levinas and Derrida's 'God's absolute transcendence, but the (O)ther, the capital 'O' owes its 'capital' to *Verwindung* and incarnation, leading to *kenotic* charity and *agape* realized in the 'other.' What is important is not the technique of 'hermeneutics' rather 'the meaning', expression and 'sense' of its relation to humans as self-interpreting animals. Meaning gives an ontological and teleological purpose to an individual's life achieved through a dialogical relationship with the 'other' which presupposes a renewed religious, ethical, and moral outlook. Tellingly, the hermeneutical deconstruction of secularisation of Vattimo and Taylor, gives 'meaning' to the 'Other,' and 'other' in post-modernity.

### **Taylor's Other**

According to Taylor, to acknowledge the transcendent means to change one's identity. He explains it with help of *anatta* in Buddhism. *Annatta* means 'a change from 'self' to 'no self.' It is a radical de-centering of the self in relation to God and the other. It is centering one's will to the 'other' through the 'Other.'<sup>48</sup> As for Levinas, "the self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world, within the ontology of sameness."<sup>49</sup> Rowan Williams observes that the specific reality of the human self is not totally rejected, "but it is dethroned or decentered. To discover who I am, I need to discover the relation in which I stand to an active, prior Other, to a transcendent creator: I do not first sort out who I am and then seek for resources to sustain that identity."<sup>50</sup> The dethroning and decentering of oneself happens through a dialectical relationship with the other. It is because, for Taylor, "one of the crucial features of the human condition that has been rendered almost invisible by the overwhelmingly monological bent of mainstream modern philosophy is his

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<sup>48</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity: Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture with Responses*, Ed., James L. Heft, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 21.

<sup>49</sup> From excerpt from a longer dialogue, Levinas presents a brief exposition of his theory of the Other. Reprinted from "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," in *Face to Face with Levinas*, edited by Richard A. Cohen (New York: State University of New York Press), <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/responsibility-in-the-face-of-the-other/3/#>, accessed on 22/06/2016.

<sup>50</sup> Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, 91.

dialogical nature”<sup>51</sup> Taylor also stresses the unique role language plays in recognizing the ‘significant other.’<sup>52</sup>

On the contrary, for Vattimo, it means turning inward to oneself. When “you turn inward you must also try to listen to others like you.”<sup>53</sup> Who are ‘others like you?’ Matthew E. Harris clarifies the elusiveness and states that “[I]t is likely that Vattimo considers those “like you” only as those people interested in listening to the sending of Being as “weakening,” that “like you” means only those people who realize both they and their beliefs are contingent and historically situated; in other words, that one should only listen to other people who have put friendship before objective truth.”<sup>54</sup> It is freeing one from the addiction to power, present presence, present Being, but listening to the forgotten, to the loser, and to the history of the forgotten.<sup>55</sup> For Vattimo, **not listening to the other is a sin**. Listening to the other is thinking back, an *andenken*, paying attention to what was lost.<sup>56</sup> It is an attitude of revolutionary nihilism: “Now that God is dead we can love one another!”<sup>57</sup> It leads to the acceptance and return of the repressed and the embrace of the ‘other.’<sup>58</sup> It orients towards a “humanity concerned with the desire for the ‘Other’ in every ‘other,’ looking through and with the history of all, – Jews, Christians, Muslims, Confucians, Shintoists, and others – without ignoring their hostilities, reducing their differences, or submitting to their institutions.”<sup>59</sup>

## The Plural Others

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<sup>51</sup> Charles Taylor, K. Anthony Appiah, Jürgen Habermas, Steven C. Rockefeller, Michael Walzer, Susan Wolf, *Multiculturalism*, Ed., Amy Guttmann, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University, 1994, p. 32.

<sup>52</sup> “We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human language of expression....Language is taken in a broader sense here, covering not only the words we speak, but also other modes of expression whereby we define ourselves, including the “languages” of art, of gesture, of love, and the like (of religion and religious language as well)...we learn these modes of expression through exchange with others...the significant other.” (Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism*, 32).

<sup>53</sup> Gianni Vattimo, and John D. Caputo, *After the Death of God*, Ed., Jeffrey W. Robbins and Forward by Gabriel Vahanian, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 42.

<sup>54</sup> Matthew E. Harris, p. 96.

<sup>55</sup> Richard Kearney, *Reimagining the Sacred*, Dialogue with Vattimo, p. 138.

<sup>56</sup> Vattimo her gives the example of Pope (supposedly) having a conversation with Dalai Lama. “Even the pope, when he meets the Dalai Lama, must listen to his other, mustn’t he? He does not behave as if the Dalai Lama’s soul is lost. *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus!* No. Even the pope nowadays is an atheist – at least he appears so in dialogue with others, in welcoming strangers...an atheist hospitality...” (*Reimagining the Sacred*, p. 141).

<sup>57</sup> Richard Kearney, *Reimagining the Sacred*, Dialogue with Vattimo, p. 138.

<sup>58</sup> Carlson, Thomas A, “Post-metaphysical Theology” in *Cambridge Companion to Post-modern Theology*, Ed., Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 16.

<sup>59</sup> Richard Kearney quotes Julia Kristeva from *Teresa, My Love*, in *Reimagining the Sacred*, p. 94.

Significantly, if re-discovered religion in post-secularity is a religion of ‘being-for-the-(O)ther, it is concerned with desire for the ‘Other’ in “every” ‘other.’ “Every” other here leads to a pluralistic conception of the present situation. “Every other” has a broad implication of including all other believers, political ideologies, cultural and linguistic diversities. It relativizes single and absolute truth claims of any sort. From the religious perspective Rowan Williams describes pluralism as “the conviction that no particular religious tradition has the full or final truth: each perceives a valid but incomplete part of it.”<sup>60</sup> Pluralism implies that no faith can or should make claims for itself as the only route to perfection or salvation. Pluralism means religious inclusivism, religious tolerance, religious dialogue, and religious diversity. It indicates also that no country, political party, culture, and language, has absolute claim to superiority or supremacy over the other. Pluralism envisions a society, having different lifestyles, philosophies and options. Williams gives the example of India, declaring itself a secular state, with independence making a clear option for a certain kind of public and political neutrality, “acknowledging that to be a citizen of India could not be something that depended on any particular communal identity, and that the state could not intervene in religious disagreements except in so far as they become socially disruptive.”<sup>61</sup> Nicholas Davey notes that “the commitments to the very truths which individuate my community from another actually impels me ironically towards engagement with the foreign community.”<sup>62</sup> For Davey, it is a hermeneutic inter-dependence because one does not have final command or authority over the meanings that shape one’s horizon, and adds that “I have to grant the logical possibility that the other can perhaps reveal something of the truths that remain hidden to me.”<sup>63</sup> Hence, pluralistic hermeneutics can bridge the dichotomies growing around the planet where my truth claims do open a space for the ‘other,’ to reveal much more clearly the truth that is partially hidden within me because the ‘other’ is not alienated from me.

For Taylor, pluralism is the most significant characteristic of ‘the secular age. Secular age “is a pluralist world, in which many forms of belief and unbelief jostle, and hence fragile each other.”<sup>64</sup> Being the most important feature of ‘the secular age, pluralism should be the

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<sup>60</sup> Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 126.

<sup>61</sup> Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 127.

<sup>62</sup> Nicholas Davey, “Towards a Community of the Plural: Philosophical Pluralism, Hermeneutics and Practice,” in *Phenomenological Perspectives on Plurality*, (Studies in Contemporary Phenomenology) ed., Gert-Jan van der Heiden, Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2014, pp. 88-102.

<sup>63</sup> Nicholas Davey, “Towards a Community of the Plural: Philosophical Pluralism, Hermeneutics and Practice,” pp. 88-102.

<sup>64</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Harvard: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 531.

uncontested starting point of contemporary liberal, political and religious theory. Political and religious pluralism will survive and will be the signature thrust of post-modernity, if they are seen as the outgrowth of the historic tensions about sovereignty, absolutism, and integrity of local communities sharply focused on Christian theology.<sup>65</sup> If every society in the West is sharply focused on Christian theology, the political philosophy of every society should embrace the religious variety and practice cultural hospitality. Williams continues his observation stating that true religion upholds human rights, that is, not enforcing one's own religious claims but about the demands of dignity in all persons. It is all about freedom for the other, and not freedom from the other. It is "a vision of democracy that is about the constant search for ways of ensuring that even the most marginal and deprived has a voice; a search for the convergent morality in public life, not a separation between minimal public order and private moral preferences; and a climate of artistic creation that evokes something of the richness of the human subject when it is opened up to the holy."<sup>66</sup>

Pluralism, conversely, is about recognizing the 'other' with his/her richness and depravity. It is a political, religious, cultural, and linguistic liberalism that attributes catholicity to the returned nonreligious religion. The word *katholou* can have two related meanings: universality and wholeness. Taylor says that it is universality through wholeness.<sup>67</sup> It is not about striving to make over other beliefs, nations, and cultures fitting to ours. For Taylor (and Vattimo), the event of incarnation, 'the weaving of God's life into human lives that is different, plural, and irreducible to each other,' brings redemption, that results in reconciliation and oneness. "This is the oneness of diverse beings who come to see that they cannot attain wholeness alone, that their complementarity is essential, rather than of beings who come to accept that they are ultimately identical. Or perhaps we might put it: both complementarity and identity will be part of our ultimate oneness."<sup>68</sup> It is overcoming the 'historical temptation' and not neglecting complementarity. The historical temptation was to go for 'sameness,' making many people as possible into one particular religion. In this process catholicity has failed. The failure of Catholicity is "because it fails wholeness; unity bought at the price of suppressing something of the diversity in the humanity that God

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<sup>65</sup> Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 80.

<sup>66</sup> Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 74.

<sup>67</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity: Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture with Responses*, Ed., James L. Heft, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 14.

<sup>68</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity*, p. 14.

created; unity of the part masquerading as the whole.”<sup>69</sup> Each religion, polity, and culture striving for universality through wholeness is truly ‘Catholic,’ post-modern and post-secular. It aims at a ‘unity-across-difference, as against unity-through-identity.’<sup>70</sup> Tellingly, the characteristic feature of the returned religion will be that the ‘other’ will hold a significant role in unveiling what is hidden within ourselves. Accordingly, “I come to appreciate that his or her way of responding differently to a subject matter of his or her own very different way of thinking about an existential concern is capable of revealing something about their own horizon such that I come to think about an aspect of myself and my commitments differently.”<sup>71</sup> Davey observes that through dialogic hermeneutic, “a meaning can be better expressed, a value more comprehensively embodied.”<sup>72</sup> Appreciating his or her own difference, and learning to learn from him or her that I understand myself better and change or adapt my convictions accordingly, is the ethics of alterity possible only through love/*caritas*, and not in the stringent claims of truth. *Caritas*, in this sense is the divine call to the hermeneutic of friendship which is one of the features of the rediscovered and returned religion. Since *caritas* is the result of secularisation, narratives of secularisation can be further individually constructed in dialogue with the ‘other,’ By ‘other,’ here I mean, with regard to art, literature, aesthetics, language, society as a whole, and in the context of a given culture, religion, environmental equilibrium, and climate change, etc.

Relationship with the ‘me’ and the ‘other’ is sustained only through affirming a relationship with the world (the environment). The planet’s history is not exhausted by the history of one particular culture and technology; but is sustained and preserved by each human being. Here, I provide a more comprehensive meaning to “being-for-the-other;” unfolding the prospect to relate ‘the other’ to the nature and environment. The alterity in post-modernity giving priority to the hermeneutic of pluralism embraces the horizontal transcendence. In this hermeneutic of pluralism, the whole of nature is to be looked at as ‘the other.’ “We cannot as humans oblige the environment to follow our agenda in all things, and the human force is incapable of changing”<sup>73</sup> any of the natural turns of the world. As ‘the other’ human person is distinct, one’s genuine religiosity leads to respect, protect and sustain him/her; so too with ‘the environment’ and the material world. It regards that we do not consider relationships

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<sup>69</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity*, p. 14.

<sup>70</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity*, p. 14.

<sup>71</sup> Nicholas Davey, “Towards a Community of the Plural: Philosophical Pluralism, Hermeneutics and Practice,” pp. 88-102.

<sup>72</sup> Nicholas Davey, “Towards a Community of the Plural: Philosophical Pluralism, Hermeneutics and Practice,” pp. 88-102.

<sup>73</sup> Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 185.

centered on us, or our agendas, but of “liberating persons and environments from possession and the exploitation that comes from it.”<sup>74</sup> ‘Liberating’ is to be free of ‘claims and possessions’ and ‘to stand back’ allowing nature to take its course. It does not entail a passivity but rather in taking the responsibility to preserve and direct the powers of the nature. A truer religious “fulfilment is bound up with the work of conserving and focusing those powers (in nature), and the exercise of this work...(should) draw out potential treasures in the powers of nature and so realise the convergent process of humanity and nature discovering in collaboration what they can become.”<sup>75</sup> This preservation shall be a shared responsibility of deliberate protection of the environment from exploitative and aggressive behaviour, and to limit the damage and “to secure a space for the natural order to exist unharmed.”<sup>76</sup> One’s responsibility to preserve and sustain the natural order should feed into responses to the wider economic and social malaises as well. This response and responsibility of protecting the future of the non-human world, is both a bond for the ‘Other,’ and appropriately honours the special dignity given to the ‘other.’ According to Williams, “living in a way that honours rather than threatens the planet is a living out...what we are as human beings (in the image of God).”<sup>77</sup> Living in a way that honours the other is a constant reorientation from one’s part towards upholding the justice regarding what is growth, wealth, and the climate change. It is an invitation to have a renewed approach to ecology, and climate change, that challenges to change one’s present pattern of life towards a transformation of individual and social goals. Each pattern of growth either individual or collective must be oriented towards a pluralistic approach to the whole of creation leading to the ‘Other,’ (vertical transcendence) through *caritas*; leading to the ‘other’ (horizontal transcendence).

## Conclusion

Resultantly, the presence of this new religious consciousness and thus the hermeneutic of the ‘re-imagining of the human’ is centred on the mutual non-exclusivity of formal religion and secularism. The non-exclusive nature of the re-imagined religion **involves a transition from opposition to complementarity**: a non-position between the secular and religious, religion

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<sup>74</sup> Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 186.

<sup>75</sup> Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, pp. 187-188.

<sup>76</sup> Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 188.

<sup>77</sup> Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 203.



and state, and the sacred and the profane. This complementarity is the hermeneutic of plurality where ‘the other’ and his/her opinion is respected in dialogue. A **‘weak thought’** weakens and a ‘plural-generous’ hermeneutic strengthens rationality and religious dogmatism in a post-metaphysical way, gives space to each element. **‘Giving space to the other’ is committing oneself to truth.** One can never make one’s own entirety. The continuous search and commitment to truth is a tolerant approach. Here the truth of the secular and religious complement each other. This enables one to be a truer seeker of truth. The re-imagined human person (the other) becomes an occasion of truth’s emergence. It is not a truth sought in a particular transcendentalism of a religion, but **a truth of tolerance and complementarity.** The non-exclusivity and complementarity of religious and ‘social life’ (a tolerant secular and religious society) is positive. This is because of its dialogical nature, and how it engages with others, with an ontic and disengaged epistemic perfection. Here one grows into an awareness of oneself. Hermeneutical philosophy in reference to this dialogical social tendency, limits or de-universalizes the claim to truth (either secular or religious). This hermeneutical view gives rise to a **pluralistic account of social life.**

Rowan Williams appeals to a cultural pluralism to oppose secular efforts to exclude religion from “the public square.” Nicholas Davey calls this non-exclusive society of complementarities, **“a community of the plural.”** In this community of the plural, the inevitable outcome is not brutal confrontation, but social, religious, and political engagement. Such a pattern of social, political and ethical life, with much decentralized and co-operative activity, is inherently in tune with the reality of the Church’s life. Church or religious groups shall not continue to be perceived as ‘unreliable ally’ for any political system. In this ethical vision, a public civility and respect for diverse religious beliefs are guaranteed. However, according to Rowan Williams, a pluralistic society (a society where co-existence of religious groups, secular groups, and democratic state are envisioned), cannot be without difficulty and challenge. **“Argument is essential to a functioning democratic state, and religion should be involved in this, not constantly demanding the right not to be offended.”**<sup>78</sup> This ethic recommends a strong common culture of ordinary courtesy and respect. There must be nevertheless a deep awareness of how criticism of religious practice may be the expression of the powerful and their prejudices. It also requires a strong theological grounding: the religious believe that they exist because of something other than human power and initiative.

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<sup>78</sup> Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 4.

This ought to mean that they are less anxious about their survival or success. They are also less prone to violence or coercion to secure their position.

The hermeneutical consequences of this pluralist community is not humiliating or disempowering for religious believers. Apprehension of truth can be liberating. This delivers one from aspiring to mythic goals of absolute human control over human destiny. Rowan Williams argues that this bears very obviously on environmental challenges. People of faith should be urged to articulate more clearly the religious imperatives around responsibilities for the environment. One should look toward the environment and its equilibrium with the thought of 'sacramental' quality. It is the same concern that ought to inform one's response to economic crisis. It is, once again, a mythology of control and guaranteed security

In conclusion, I argue that to arrive at a belief in God (the beyond) is infinitely more likely to be an outcome of whatever prompts one to let go of the fictions. These fictions may include both mythic and transcendent control, namely, the notions that one 'owns', one's body (genetic engineering), one's world and earth (economy and ecology), one's future (ethics and religion) and the such. **Letting-go opens up the possibility of taking responsibility for meaningful action** that announces the presence of a fundamental giving on which the world subsists. This includes **a hermeneutic of non-exclusivity and complementarity** as against exclusivism and opposition between religions and the secular state. It also **entails taking responsibility for the other**, for a right ethical code, global economic policy providing equal distribution of the natural resources, environmental laws to protect mother earth, and democratic governance where state and religion do not require to bargain for either's rights.

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