To Be a Saint and a Sultan in a Post-Secular Society: Translating a Thirteenth Century Religious Discourse in order to Rescue the Modern World

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Introduction

The meeting between St. Francis of Assisi and the Ayyūbid Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil eight hundred years ago issues a challenge for inter-religious discourse within the contemporary post-secular society. It forces us to ask: Can religious communities transcend their historical antagonisms and enter into a friendly communion predicated on their shared concerns? This question is increasingly important in the twenty-first century, as even Pope Francis has indicated that the world has entered into a Third World War: a piecemeal war between the secular – and sometimes Christian – West, and Muslim fundamentalists. Coupled with these inter-religious tensions, the Critical Theorist Jürgen Habermas reminds us of the West's *sonderweg* (deviant path towards total secularization), which has added an additional layer of tension between Muslims and Christian Westerners within the multicultural and democratic societies of Europe. These antagonisms, strengthened by the recent waves of Muslim immigrants to Europe from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, as well as northern Africa, have resulted in the resurrection of authoritarian populism in many European states, which is determined to remove the "threat" of Islam from what's left of Christendom. Like in the time of Francis of Assisi and al-Malik al-Kāmil, tensions between the West and their new Muslim neighbors is palpable, and scholars, theologians, philosophers, and politicians are scrambling to find solutions before another great "cleansing" happens.

I will argue in this article for the effectiveness of the inter-religious discourse model of St. Francis and Sultan al-Kāmil, while attempting to expand its relevancy to the conditions of the twenty-first century. I will argue that neither an *abstract negation* of modernity in favor of religious fundamentalism, nor a retreat into an anti-modern "traditionalism," can answer the problems facing both Muslims and Christians in the present age, just as such recalcitrant positions could not have ended the Fifth Crusade in Damietta, Egypt. Rather, I forward that a *determinate negation* of modernity, within the context of a robust discourse between religious communities,

struggling together to preserve the essentials of their faith, while opening up to those who can no longer believe in traditional religion, is the only way to 1) lessen the tensions between the faith communities, and 2) give meaningful answers to the challenge of modernity. If such a project is feasible, then amidst the constricting conditions of the post-secular society, individuals may witness that the *imitatio Christi*, so embodied by Francis, and the interreligious *ʿaṣabiyya* (solidarity) rooted in Prophet Muhammad's *Sunna*, can still serve as the basis of peacemaking, even within an increasingly secular society.

A Troubling Condition

Eight hundred years after the meeting of St. Francis and Sultan al-Kāmil, Muslims and Westerners are once again engaged in hostilities. This time, however, it is not a Christian crusading army that has invaded the *dār al-Islām*, rather it is the presence of Muslim refugees and immigrants in an increasingly-secular and politically unstable West that has caused concern. According to Alain de Benoist, the founder of the *Nouvelle Droite* (New Right), Western and Central Europe are struggling through an identity crisis, which was brought about by the "five converging processes" of modernity. They are "individualization," through the destruction of traditional "communal life"; "massification," via the standardization of behavior and lifestyle; "desacralization," by the replacement of religion with scientism; "rationalization," through the domination of instrumental reason, the free market, and technological efficiency; and "universalization," which is the "planetary extension of a model of society postulated implicitly as the only rational possibility and thus as superior."[1] Although he sees the "seeds" of these five processes already in Christianity, he views the fruits of these processes as being wholly destructive to European identity. Having been untethered from the *nomoi* of the forefathers, the modern European man is set adrift both morally and culturally, and longs to restore the order of a forgotten past.[2]

Demographic change in parts of Europe has also contributed to the destabilization of the European sense-of-self. The secular democracies of Europe no longer define their nationhood by their "pre-political foundations," i.e. genetic kindship bonds, shared history, shared language, shared religion, or the mythical connections between *blut und boden* (blood and soil). The modern *demos* and the historical *ethnos* are severed, and thus the *volksgemeinschaft* (people's community) is a relic of the pre-modern past.[3] Rather, following the lead of the Bourgeois revolutions in the United States and France, most European countries grant citizenship to individuals outside of the pre-political foundations via *jus matrimonii* (law of marriage), *jus soli* (law of soil – "birth right"), and other forms of naturalization. The European "nation-state" has become a

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[1] A. de Benoist and C. Champetier, *Manifesto for a European Renaissance* (London: Arktos Media Ltd., 2012), 11.
[2] de Benoist and Champetier, *Manifesto*, 12-16. *Nomoi* refers to an established system of rules and norms that are enforced by sovereign institutions.
[3] J. Habermas, "Pre-Political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State," in J. Habermas and J. Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion,* trans. B. McNeil, C.R.V. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 21-52.

willensgemeinschaft – "willed community."[4] Thus, what makes an individual, who is outside of the historical ethnicity, a "citizen" within the modern constitutional state, is not that they were born with certain pre-ordained qualifications, but rather that they willfully ascribe to certain constitutional values, principles, and ideals, and that the commitment to those constitutional principles is recognized by the state. As such, the modern Western and Central European nations are products of "the will," not merely the product of ethnic *geworfenheit* (thrownness).[5]

This liberal form of citizenship, wherein anyone outside of the traditional ethnic-nation can claim full rights of the citizen by an act of the state, has become increasingly problematic, as it further undermines the identity of the traditional ethnic-nation. Multiculturalism, for its critics, is a zero-sum game; the more the foreign culture of the immigrants and refugees expand and saturate civil society, the less the society appears to be a product of the traditional ethnic-nation itself. In such a situation, native peoples often feel resentful against the "new-comers" and alienated from their own countries. It is no longer the country they grew up in, and they long for the days of their past homogeneity.

This increasing *cultural* alienation occurs within the context of a broader form of alienation: economics. According to Pope Francis, neo-liberal capitalism, as it is applied both in the Third World and in the First World, creates an economy of indifference, an exclusionary economy, an economy of marginalization, and an economy of waste: both human and non-human.[6] Political, economic, and cultural elites are increasingly alienated from the masses, yet their decisions have tremendous ramifications on the daily *lebenswelt* (lifeworld) of those masses, who seem to toil endlessly while watching the ruling few appropriate the wealth of the nation and diminish the opportunities for workers to advance. In addition to the ethnic and religious minorities who are already citizens of Europe, the needs of capitalism quietly dictate the number of new refugees and immigrants a given state will allow in. Given Europe's negative birthrate and expansive welfare state, the need for a productive workforce guarantees, to the horror of many, that young workers from abroad will be absorbed into the already tight job market, and in doing so will undermine the standard of living for native workers, as was alleged when the German Chancellor Angela Merkel pledged to admit one million refugees. Nevertheless, once in Europe, such refugees and immigrants come face-to-face with an angry precariat, ready to defend what little they still have in this world from the perceived threat of the new-comers.

The increase in terrorist attacks in Europe since September 11, 2001, have been both *phobogenic* (fear-inducing) and *misogenic* (hate-inducing) in European societies. While most citizens understand that such attacks are symptoms of social-political and economic issues, and are not rooted in religion per se, the conflation of Islam with terrorism, coupled with the growing

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[4] J. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 494.

[5] "Ethnic *geworfenheit*" is a variation of a Heideggerian idea designating the ontological reality of our finding ourselves in existence with certain attributes: race, gender, religious community, ethnic community, and era in which we live. Such attributes are not the result of the individual's will, rather they are the result of birth, which we did not choose. Thus, these attributes contribute to the reality that we "find ourselves in."

[6] Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium, Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 105/12 (2013), 1019-1137: 1042-1051 (#53-75, esp. #53-60).

presence and influence of Muslims in the public sphere, only serves to heighten the feeling of being "under siege" by a foreign "invader." Each terrorist attack is a social *erlebnis:* an event so traumatic – so outside of the everyday lifeworld – that it permanently remains a vivid memory, and as such determines how the traumatized society views those whom it associates with the traumatic event, i.e., Muslims. Through the political weaponization of the *erlebnis*, the irrational ideology of Islamophobia increasingly appears rational, and those espousing Islamophobic views appear messianic.

Taking all of these factors into consideration, it is clear that many of the European masses feel as if they are no longer in control of themselves and their countries, but rather are controlled by impersonal forces that care little about their individual fortunes and the dying traditional culture of the society. This neo-liberal economic situation, coupled with the rapid cultural change stemming from mass immigration and pseudo-integration, lays the foundations for its own demise: the rise of authoritarian populism, demagoguery, and new forms of "palingenetic ultra-nationalism," as the alienated masses look to any strong force that can put an end to the seemingly anomic situation.[7] Whether it is the *Front National* (National Front) and Marine Le Pen in France, Geert Wilders in The Netherlands, *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) or *Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident* (PEGIDA) in Germany, The English League in Britain, *Lega Nord* (Northern League) and Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini in Italy, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in Hungary, or the Law and Justice Party (PiS) in Poland, authoritarian populism promises the masses to rid the nation of corrupt liberal politicians, a "rigged economy," corrupt cultural elites, and the unwanted perpetual other: the Muslims. In fact, violent attacks against Muslims and other racial minorities throughout the West, including North America, have increased sharply since the resurgence of nationalism. The "Westernality" of such racial and religious minorities is being challenged by this reactionary retreat into white supremacy and other forms of nationalist "retrotopian" and "Archeofuturist" thought.[8] This rapid retreat from the post-World War II liberal consensus has been dubbed "The Great Regression," and to many, it is the greatest threat to multicultural democracies in the world today.[9]

A Dialectical Discourse within a Troubled Post-Secular Society

Against the backdrop of these social fractures, Jürgen Habermas posits a discourse method that is meant to identify, arrest, and diminish the intractable stalemate that exists between Muslims and their secular neighbors in Europe. This dialectical discourse theory is especially important as it addresses the problem of *religious-secular* discourse, as opposed to *interreligious* discourse. The key elements of this discourse method can be seen analogously in the encounter between St. Francis and al-Malik al-Kāmil, despite the fact that these two men engaged in *interreligious* discourse. In order to understand Habermas's dialectical method, we need to first understand what Habermas means when he describes our present condition in the West as

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[7] R. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 1-55.

[8] Z. Bauman, *Retrotopia* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2017); G. Faye, *Archeofuturism,* trans. S. Knipe (London: Arktos Media Ltd., 2010).

[9] H. Geiselberger (ed.), *The Great Regression* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2018).

being "post-secular," as not to get the impression that we are "after secularity," as the phrase would seem to suggest.

In his essay, "What is Meant by a 'Post-Secular Society?': A Discussion on Islam in Europe," Habermas reminds his readers that despite that fact that societies around the world are becoming increasingly secular – not just the West – this doesn't mean that religion is soon to be *abstractly negated* and discarded to the dustbin of history.[10] In fact, Habermas sees that the twenty-first century has given birth to a resurgence in religion, as transnational forms of religion, especially Islam and Catholicism, have been countervailing forces against the global trend towards secularity. Even within the nations of Europe, Habermas sees religion as having a robust and therefore undeniable presence within the public sphere, which secular citizens of the democratic nations have to account for.[11] Because of their continued presence, "religious communities can still claim a 'seat' even in the life of societies where secularization is far advanced."[12] The realization of religion's continual presence and relevancy to the lives of countless citizens of the democratic state, calls for a *change in consciousness* from secular citizens. "Europe," Habermas states, "has to adjust itself to the continued existence of religious communities in an increasingly secularized environment."[13] This adjustment must prevail, not only through cognitive acceptance, but also through democratic praxis: mutual-perspective-taking by way of discourse and dialogue, which is predicated on recognition and respect of the other.[14] Yet, Habermas is aware that there is a major stumbling block to the idea of an inter-subjective discourse between religious and secular communities: the problem of language.

Unlike Francis and al-Kāmil, secular citizens and religious citizens, especially ultra-traditionalist Muslims, do not share a "common language" through which their dialogue can easily penetrate the understanding of the other. On the face of it, this statement seems absurd; secular German citizens can speak German to German Muslims, just as Italian-speaking Muslims can speak Italian to their fellow Catholic or atheist citizens. What is the problem? For Habermas, the problem is not in the *exterior language* (German, Italian, English, French, etc.) through which semantic and semiotic material is transferred, but rather the *intellectual substance* (the signified) that the exterior language (the signifier) represents. Religious communities are the guardians of exclusive vocabulary: religious concepts, ideals, principles, and values, which are "closed semantic universes," and non-members of the religious community, especially secular ones, can hardly accept these as being the objective basis of facts and knowledge. This is precisely because such religious ideas do not source their legitimation in autonomous reason, like secular philosophy and science, but rather are anchored in the particularities of sacred scripture, sacred tradition, sacred authority, sacred individuals, and sacred myths. This

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[10] J. Habermas, *Europe: A Faltering Project,* trans. C. Cronan (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009), 62-63.
[11] The election of the Jorge Bergoglio to the papacy in 2013, and the "Francis Effect" that followed, demonstrates that religion is not entirely exhausted in the modern world. See J. Gehring, *The Francis Effect: A Radical Pope's Challenge to the American Catholic Church* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2015).
[12] Habermas, *Europe*, 63.
[13] Habermas, *Europe*, 63.
[14] Habermas, *Europe*, 69.

is true for religious traditions, especially those that share the same theological roots, such as the Abrahamic roots of Christianity and Islam.

Although Francis and al-Kāmil spoke two different exterior languages, Italian and Arabic, they nevertheless shared a *common pre-suppositional vocabulary*, or "common language" (to use Habermas's phrase), which is saturated with a theocentric worldview – a worldview they each recognized in the other. They both believed in God; they both believed God created the heavens and the earth and all things within them; they both believed in God's angels; they both believed in the day of judgement; they both believed in sacred scripture; they both believed in the prophets; they both believed that God was present in the affairs of humankind, etc. These shared presuppositions allowed these two men, both deeply committed to the *particularity* of their faiths, to enter into a robust discourse that was brotherly, even though they may not have always agreed on the particularities of their respective faiths.

This shared "common language," for Habermas, is missing within the discourse between secular citizens and their religious counterparts. To secular citizens, who hold atheistic – or minimal to non-theistic – worldviews such confessional utterances about God, prophets, scriptures, day of judgment, etc., strike them as a *gestalt der geistes*, the residue of an "intellectual formation" of a long-past age, which bear little to no importance in a modern democratic society.[15] Ontologically and epistemologically, they are worlds apart, and unable to speak to each other from within their own pre-suppositional closed semantic universes.

Translation Proviso

To this problem, Habermas offers his notion of "translation," as a means to determinately negate, or sublate (*aufhaben*), certain religious semantics into secular philosophical language, so that it may enter into a democratic dialogue with those who do not have access to the "closed semantic universe" of any particular religion.[16]

Habermas understands that scientific-minded secular citizens do not share the same metaphysical presuppositions as religious citizens, which is an abiding factor in their ability to enter into a discourse on matters concerning the secular democratic state. As constitutional

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[15] Habermas, *Europe*, 73.

[16] *Aufhaben,* or "determinate negation," is the essence of dialectical logic according to G.W.F. Hegel. He describes such "determinate negation" as the following: "All that is necessary to achieve scientific progress – and it is essential to strive to gain this quite simple insight – is the recognition of the logical principle that the negative is just as much positive, or that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into abstract nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its particular content, in other words, that such a negation is not all and every negation but the negation of a specific subject matter which resolves itself, and consequently is a specific negation, and therefore the result essentially contains that from which it results; which strictly speaking is a tautology, for otherwise it would be an immediacy, not a result. Because the result, the negations, is a specific negation it has a content. It is a fresh Notion but higher and richer than its predecessor; for it is richer by the negation or opposite of the latter, therefore contains it, but also something more, and is the unity of itself and its opposite. It is in this way that the system of Notions as such has to be formed – and has to complete itself in a purely continuous course in which nothing extraneous is introduced." See *Hegel's Science of Logic,* trans. A.V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1993), 54, 106-107.

democracies are charged with protecting the "common good" for all their citizens, and are therefore equally representative of all citizens, including the religious, how the faith-based utterances of religious citizens are included into the democratic will-formation within a *secular* state is a problem. To enter explicitly religious arguments into a democratic deliberation within the public sphere is not an issue, as the public sphere open to all positions, including religious views. However, following the separation of church and state – the product of the Bourgeois Enlightenment and its revolutions in France and the United States – the secular governing process of constitutional democracies do have the obligation to maintain a strict distance from enacting legislation that is explicitly religious. All legislation enacted by the representatives of the *demos*, in all its complexities, must be the result of democratic deliberation via autonomous reason, and cannot show any preference towards any particular community, be it religious or otherwise.[17]

The ban on explicitly religious legislation was historically the result of the confessional wars of Europe, between Catholics and various Protestant denominations.[18] However, the problem is even more poignant when the religious community that wishes to enter into the deliberative process is seen as being "outside," or at best on the margins, of the historical community, as it is with Islam, which is generally not accepted as a "European religion" despite its long presence in Europe. Because of the systematic distortion of Islam, both by fundamentalists and their Islamophobic opponents, the difficulty of entering Islamic ideas, notions, and principles into public discourse within civil society is already daunting; it is even more challenging to maneuver those principles into the deliberative process within government without (1) provoking suspicion amongst those who are still leery of their Muslim neighbor's intentions, and (2) violating the explicit ban on religious legislation.

Habermas's "translation proviso" attempts to find a way for the Muslim community to enter into the "unlimited discourse community," so as to (1) foster "inclusion of the other," i.e., the inclusion of the otherwise marginalized Muslim citizens within the will-formation of the state, thus strengthening the cohesion of the multicultural society, and (2) so that Muslims may introduce important semantic and semiotic materials, especially from the *moral-practical* realm of their

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[17] There are of course variations in how individual nation-states interpret secularity as it relates to the role of the state and religion. France's *laïcité* designates the state to be the guardian of the people against undue exposure to religion, especially in public institutions, i.e. public schools, government, etc. Religion must remain a private matter. Sometime the interpretation of *laïcité* goes beyond its original intent. For example, in the summer of 2016, many municipal authorities on the French Riviera banned the "burkini," a *shari'a* compliant bathing suit for women, claiming it was an affront to France's secularity. The ban was later overturned by French courts for violating basic freedoms of French citizens. Nevertheless, the French state, in the name of upholding secularity as a basic defining characteristic of the French Republic, intervenes in civil society against religion when it feels such secularity is threatened. In the United States, secularity takes on a more neutral position in relation to religion. the First Amendment to the Constitution consists of two clauses: The Establishment Clause and the Prohibition Clause. The first prohibits the American government (local, state, and federal) from "establishing" religious preferences, which has come to be interpreted as any *support* for a particular religion, while the second clause prohibits the government from intervening in religious matters or impeding its practice ("prohibiting the free exercise thereof"). Taken together, these two clauses force the state into a neutral position vis-à-vis religion.

[18] Habermas, *Europe*, 66.

religion, which may prove to be invaluable to a Western society that has exhausted its own religious resources through dysgenic individualization, massification, desacralization, domination of instrumental reason (and technological efficiency), and the universalization of the neo-liberal worldview and economic system. In other words, Habermas thinks that Islam may have moral-practical resources that can be "translated" into secular language and introduced into the democratic discourse community, which could, in some way, help rescue the West from its own demise.[19] He writes, "especially regarding vulnerable domains of social life, religious traditions have the power to provide convincing articulations of moral sensitivities and solidaristic intuitions," which are "scarce resources for generating meanings and shaping identities" within the post-secular societies of Europe.[20]

Fraternal Twins: Religion and Philosophy

Even though he has declared himself religiously "unmusical," Habermas is still aware that philosophy has a long history of borrowing religious concepts and refashioning them into abstract philosophical, and sometimes political, thought. He writes,

> The occidental [Western] development has been shaped by the fact that philosophy continuously appropriates semantic contents from the Judeo-Christian tradition; and it is an open question whether this centuries-long learning process can be continued or even remains unfinished.[21]

Although religion and philosophy have a long history of antagonism, the Lutheran and dialectical philosopher G.W.F. Hegel believed that religion and philosophy were two separate languages by which humanity got its thinking done on important existential issues. Much of Hegel's own philosophy can be read as sublated theology, especially as it relates to the problem of theodicy.[22] Karl Marx, as it is well known, has been accused of secularizing the prophetic critique of religious concepts, including Christianity's critique of money (mammon), which was in essence a critique of idolatry and greed. Frederick Engels, Marx's revolutionary companion, invoked the sixteenth century Thomas Müntzer as a pre-Marxist Christian social revolutionary, ready to lead the peasants in an uprising against the ruling class who blocked a truly "Christian"

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[19] Habermas breaks religion down to three components: the *cognitive-instrumental*, which primarily is theology; *aesthetic-expressive*, which deals with religious arts, rituals, etc., and *moral-practice*, which deals extensively with moral and ethical thought. Habermas is particularity interested in translating the third element, as the first two generally escape translation for reasons beyond the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, as I'll argue later, there are some purely *cognitive-instrumental* elements within theology, such as the *imago Dei*, that do have practical export in secular language. See J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society,* vol. 1, trans. T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

[20] Habermas, *Europe*, 76-77.

[21] J. Habermas, "The Political: The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology," in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere,* eds. E. Mendieta and J. Vanantwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 27.

[22] See P. C. Hodgson, *Hegel & Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

egalitarian society. Even the neo-Marxist/neo-Freudian Frankfurt School acknowledged their translation of the *bilderverbot* (image ban) of the second commandment of the Decalogue as being "co-determinative" of their social-political philosophy.[23] Knowing this, Habermas believes that even today, despite the ever-growing secularity in the West, religious principles, values, and ideals, especially from what he calls the "moral-practical" realm, can be extracted from the theologically saturated language of the sacred authorities (God, prophets, clerics, scriptures, church, tradition, etc.), and re-articulated within the idiom of secular philosophy so that such "scarce resources" may enter into the liberal-deliberative society. In the process of transferring meaning material from one idiom to another, what Habermas calls "translation," or the "mode [of] non-destructive secularization," the explicit theological language (signifier A) would be negated, and replaced by an explicitly philosophical language (signifier B), while maintaining the semantic substance of the concepts (the signified) intact.[24] This determinate negation of religious language allows for two important things: first, religious communities, especially Muslims, can enter their "translated" utterances into the deliberative democratic process. Active engagement in the deliberative democratic process by no means guarantees that such material would gain democratic consensus and become legislation, but it does allow the Muslim community to *fully* participate in the national will-formation. Second, in their translated form, it becomes possible to find legitimation for values, principles, and ideas, rooted in Islam, via *autonomous reason*. Since autonomous reason is not the captive of the "closed semantic universe" of religion, all members of the universal discourse community, including both the secular and the religious, can deliberate over such ideas, since it is now expressed within neutral, non-confessional language. This translation process thus, according to Habermas, has the potential to provide a universally accessible "common language," which was also necessary for Francis and al-Kāmil to engage in a meaningful discourse, and is now required for members of the multicultural democracies to engage in meaningful will-formation, without restricting the "polyphonic diversity of public voices."[25] Such is true for Habermas even for Western relations with non-Western cultures, as he writes, "if [the West] presents this complex image of itself to other cultures in a credible way, intercultural relations my find a language other than that of the military and the market" through which they can engage in a discourse.[26]

Translated Religious Material: Three Examples

An example of such a translation can be made with the Islamic concept of *zakāt*. The theological oneness of God (*tawḥīd*) manifests itself in the oneness of his creation *Banī Ādam* (people of Adam: humanity). As such, the practice of *zakāt,* giving alms to the poor, is a fundamental tenet of Islam, as (1) it takes care of God's most beloved creation: mankind, and (2) it purifies the wealth of those who give to that endeavor. This religiously mandated practice can be translated into support for the democratic welfare state, which is a secular equivalent of the *zakāt*, as

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[23] L. Löwenthal, *An Unmastered Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 112.
[24] J. Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 114.
[25] Habermas, "The Political," 26.
[26] Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 114.

it too attempts to take care of those who are in need of healthcare, materially impoverished, or incapable of earning a livable income, and does so from the giving of the peoples, in this case via taxes (which are obligatory like *zakāt*). Although it has precedent in Christianity, the legitimation for the welfare state of the European nations makes no *explicit* mention of Christianity as a motivational factor. Nevertheless, the welfare state is rooted in social solidarity, the secular image of *caritas* (charity) in Christianity, as it would be for *'aṣabiyya* (solidarity) in Islam. Through a secular translation, what was a religiously legitimated doctrine/pillar, loses its religious legitimation, but gains democratic legitimation via deliberative consensus, whilst serving the same ends: the welfare of the people.

The three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, all share a belief in the idea that "God created man in his own image," *Gottesebenbildlichkeit* (in the likeness of God). This idea, when translated into secular language, can serve as the basis for universal human rights, as mutual-recognition of the "divinity" in all peoples is formulated into mutual-recognition of the others' universal right to life, self-determination, dignity, and respect. Neither the divine image in each individual, nor the individual's human rights, can be removed. They can be ignored, abused, and disregarded in practice, but by fact of being human, they cannot be revoked. As such, both are inalienable. Again, while the theologically saturated language of the *imago Dei* (image of God) is removed from the formulation, the practical intent, and the universal application, of the religious idea remains enshrined in language governed by autonomous reason, and thus is capable of garnishing consent through the universal discourse community. Or, as Habermas says in his discussion with then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI), such a translation of the *imago Dei* goes "beyond the borders of one particular religious fellowship and makes the substance of biblical concepts accessible to the general public that also includes those who have other faiths and those who have none."[27]

A third example of a religious idea that can be translated into secular language can be found in the Qur'ān, *Surah al-Ḥujurāt* (49:13) wherein it states, "O mankind! Truly we created you from a male and a female, and We made you peoples and tribes that you come to know one another. Surely the most noble of you before God are the most reverent of you. Truly God is Knowing, Aware."[28] Again, akin to Judaism and Christianity, Islam maintains a monogenesis story pertaining to the origins of humankind. With this myth of origin, all members of humanity are the sons and daughters of primordial parents: Adam and Eve, and therefore, despite humanity's diversity, are all one *'ā'ila* (extended family).[29] Yet, this *āya* of the Qur'ān goes beyond a simple restating of the biblical monogenesis story; it explicitly renders God as the author of humanity's complex diversity, its "peoples and tribes."[30] As such, all of humanity's genetic diversity, as it originates

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[27] Habermas and Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization,* 45.

[28] S. H. Nasr (ed.), *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 1262.

[29] The Arabic word *ahl* could also be used here. However, since *ahl* is often translated in English as "people," I prefer the word *'ā'ila* as it is referring definitively to familial bonds, whereas *ahl* can be indeterminate in regards to familial bonds.

[30] The qur'ānic phrase "peoples and tribes" has been rendered "nations and tribes" by other translators, such as Al-Hajj Ta'lim 'Ali (T.B. Irving) and Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, which, in light of the growing nationalism in Europe, may be a more suitable translation in order to convey the Qur'ān's intended message.

with the Divine, is the product of the Divine will – the absolute authority. Furthermore, this *āya* not only accounts for the reality of ethnic and racial differences, but gives those differences an intended purpose: they exist so that people may "come to know one another." This seems to suggest something beyond simple "recognition" of another as being outside of one's own people and tribe. Difference appears as an invitation to discourse; not a reason to fear or hate. Translated into secular language, such a socially interreligious and sacred idea can contribute to anti-racism movements, as Muslims can find common cause with their fellow activists not only because such Muslims in the West are generally racial minorities, but also because Islam itself comports with such anti-racist worldviews and attitudes. Certainly anti-racism legislation cannot be justified upon the authority of the Qur'ān in secular societies, but such qur'ānic sentiments could find a home within secular legislation, as its essence remains embedded within such secular legislation.

Religious concepts like the preceding three are especially important in an age where instrumental reason not only dominates our market economy, but has also penetrated into the family and state, thus cutting the citizen off from intellectual and intuitive resources that would give rise to feelings of *caritas* and *ʿaṣabiyya*. Habermas reminds his readers that,

> practical reason fails to fulfill its own vocation when it no longer has sufficient strength to awaken, and to keep awake, in the minds of secular subjects, an awareness of the violations of solidarity throughout the world, an awareness of what is missing, of what cries out to heaven.[31]

This sense that something is horribly wrong in the modern world, that humanity, especially in the West, has come to accept the culture of exclusion, waste, and human debasement as being normative, is the primary drive for Habermas to turn to religion as an "inexhaustible force" (*das unabgegoltene*) for human compassion, connectivity, and mercy, without giving up on the Enlightenment and modernity itself.[32]

A Shared Burden

So far, we have argued that in order for the religious-secular discourse to occur, the labor of translation must be done entirely by the religious side. This leaves us with what Habermas calls an "asymmetrical burden," as it appears that secular citizens need not approach their religious neighbors, but the devout must come to the secular. Habermas finds this imbalance unjust, as secular and religious citizens are equally burdened with shared citizenship while living in a multicultural and multi-confessional (and non-confessional) "inclusive civil society."[33] It is also ineffective, especially since many on the secular side of the discourse, devalue, denigrate, and detest religion and religious values, and believe that there is no place for religious thought in

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[31] J. Habermas et al., *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011), 19.
[32] Habermas and Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization,* 19-52.
[33] Habermas, *Europe*, 75-76.

contemporary secular society. Such secular citizens are constitutionally unprepared to consider ideas rooted in religious traditions. This *modus vivendi* must be overcome.

As to avoid dogmatic secularism, most associated with the restrictive role of religion in the public sphere advanced by John Rawls, Habermas argues that there must be a *complimentary learning process,* wherein both sides of the discourse equally share burdens associated with living within a polyphonic civil society and state.[34] On one side, religious communities must (1) "appropriate the secular legitimation of constitutional principles under the premises of their own faith,… not merely conform to constitutional order in a superficial way,"[35] (2) they must abandon all "fundamentalist" belief attitudes, which are "mindset[s] that stubbornly insists on the political imposition of its own convictions and reasons, even when they are far from being generally acceptable,"[36] and (3) citizens with religious commitments "who regard themselves as loyal members of a constitutional democracy" must also "accept the translation proviso as the price to be paid for the neutrality of the state authority towards competing worldview."[37] In addition to these, Habermas proposes that the "public use of reason," as it relates to religious communities, "demands a reflexive consciousness," that (1) "relates itself to completing religions in a reasonable way, (2) "leaves decisions concerning mundane knowledge to the institutionalized sciences," and (3) "makes the egalitarian premises of the morality of human rights compatible with its own articles of faith."[38] Although these burdens seem to be heavy loads for first or second generation Muslims living in the post-secular West, Habermas nevertheless insists, against the dogmatic secularists and Enlightenment fundamentalists, that Muslims cannot be integrated into the West without Islam.[39] Therefore, the only reasonable solution is for Muslims to find within their own religious resources the ability to adopt and embrace as their own the aforementioned burdens.

On the other side, Habermas insists on a fundamental change in mentality for secular citizens. He argues that secular citizens can no longer insist that the burden of adjusting oneself to the reality of a multicultural and polyphonic civil society and state is exclusively the task of the religious; the secular citizen too has a learning process to go through. In terms of the "duty of reciprocal accountability," which all citizens have in regards to other citizens, Habermas argues that secular citizens (1) are "obliged not to [reflexively] dismiss religious contributions to political opinion and will formation as mere noise, or even nonsense," but must consider the religious arguments put forward by religious communities, albeit in secular form, as potentially having important export for the post-secular society.[40] "Secular reason," Habermas states, "may not set itself up as the judge concerning truths of faith."[41] It may not "treat religious expressions as

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[34] See J. Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," *University of Chicago Law Review* 64 (Summer 1997): 765-807; see also Habermas's discussion of Rawls's "proviso," in Habermas, "The Political," 15-33.
[35] Habermas, *Europe*, 75.
[36] J. Habermas, *The Divided West* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006), 10.
[37] Habermas, "The Political," 26.
[38] Habermas, "The Political," 26.
[39] Habermas, *Europe,* 71.
[40] Habermas, "The Political," 26.
[41] Habermas et al., *An Awareness*, 16.

simply irrational."[42] Such religions, regardless of their seemingly "antiquated" status, are bearers of "truth content," which may prove to be rejuvenating in a world determined by secular modernity, i.e., individualism, massification, desacralization, domination of instrumental reason, and the universalization of neo-liberal forms of being-in-the-world. Such religious truth content may prove to maintain "suppressed or untapped moral intuitions" longed for by many living within an existentially flattened and nihilistic lifeworld.[43] Habermas knows that spiritual longing – in direct response to the "disenchantment" (*entzauberung*) and necrophilic commodification of the lifeworld – is real and growing as the secular world gains ground globally over traditional and religious ways of life. As such, the translation of religion into post-metaphysical language, which is publically accessible to all citizens, may be the only authentic way for the secular society to escape its own existential crisis without falsely "returning" to a religion it no longer believes in (but can't help to yearn for). If this is the case, then a translated Islam, with its spiritual, moral, and theological values, principles, and ideals, still intact amongst the Muslims, may have a lot more to give to Europe than what first meets the eye; it could help the West recover its own "missing" and/or repressed religious resources, and give them new life in a post-metaphysical language.

A Challenge to the Habermasian Project: The Return of the Repressed

The Argentinian pontiff, Pope Francis, has been on the frontlines of the struggle for a more inclusive, more humane, and more charitable society. Since being elected the successor of St. Peter, he has witnessed thousands of Muslim refugees and immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa die in the Mediterranean as they fled to Europe for security and a better life. At the same time that he has been the most vocal advocate for the care of such refugees, he has witnessed the rise of its backlash: the turn towards nationalist populism, determined to close the borders of Europe to those in need. In a 2018 speech in Rome, Pope Francis said, "We are living in times in which feelings that many thought had passed are taking new life and spreading. [There is an upsurge in] feelings of suspicion, fear, contempt and even hatred towards individuals or groups judged for their ethnic, national or religious identity and, as such considered not sufficiently worthy of being fully part of society's life."[44] Seeing how such feelings were being manipulated by nationalist demagogues in Europe and North America, Pope Francis urged his listeners to reject such opportunistic appeals, and "cultivate and promote respect for the intrinsic dignity of every human person."[45] "One day [the demagogues] will have to respond

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[42] Habermas et al., *An Awareness*, 22.

[43] Habermas, "The Political," 27.

[44] Pope Francis, "Address to Participants at the World Conference on 'Xenophobia, Racism and Populist Nationalism in the Context of Global Migration" (20 September 2018), accessed 23 December 2018, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/september/documents/papa-francesco_20180920_conferenza-razzismo.html.

[45] Pope Francis, "Address to Participants."

to God for the choices they made."[46] The Pope, who knows first-hand the destructiveness of authoritarian politics from his home in Argentina, worries that the West is backsliding into a form of nationalist populism that leads to fascism.[47]

In his book *Retrotopia,* the Polish philosopher Zygmunt Bauman agrees with much of Pope Francis's fear of modern populist politics. Bauman claims that the West has forsaken its Enlightenment belief in perpetual progress – the belief that a future ideal state could bring about universal happiness, prosperity, and peace. Under the weight of modernity, including the five "converging processes" that Alain de Benoist identified, many in the West have transformed the dream of a future utopian state for a past-oriented "retrotopia": an attempt to restore an idealized *status quo ante* ("the way things used to be") as a way of overcoming the crisis of modernity.[48] This cultural and political U-turn, prompted by what Bauman calls "liquid fear" – the ever pervasive and indeterminate fear of total collapse of the precariat's lifeworld – acts against the liberal ideal of a multicultural society rooted in non-pre-political foundations, as it yearns for the safety, stability, and orderliness of the world before the disenchanted and disordered modernity.[49] It was this modern society that brought economic uncertainty, rapid cultural change, diminishing life-expectancies for each successive generation, metaphysical nihilism, and the ever-present threat of nuclear annihilation. The *nomoi* of the fathers has been replaced by a seemingly *anomic* world, wherein at any moment an unforeseen force can destroy the little safety, security, and prosperity that the precariat has, all without warning.

Retrotopia, according to Bauman, is increasingly viewed as the cure for such anomie. Rooted in "restorative nostalgia," a deep and abiding longing for a creatively reconstructed vision of the past, Retrotopian political movements, including the New Right in Europe and the Alt-Right in the United States, engage in a future-oriented remembrance through a contemporary "iteration" of the past, wherein those elements that are perceived to be responsible for the breakdown of the traditional (and therefore stable) and ethnically determined society, are removed through the force of law, or when necessary, through the force of arms.[50] Although these movements emphasize Europe as a single and distinct civilization, they do not advocate greater connectedness within the European states akin to the European Union or the United Nations, as this too is indicative of the "globalism" and multiculturalist worldview. Rather, the politics of retrotopia are decidedly populist and nationalist – emphasizing the distinctive culture and sovereignty of each

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[46] Pope Francis, "Address to Participants."

[47] Pope Francis's comments, for which the Vatican has not yet released an official English translation, came in response to an elderly Italian woman who teaches Italian to migrants and refugees in Florence. Pope Francis, "Dialogo del Santo Padre Francesco con giovani e anziani" [Dialogue of the Holy Father with the Youth and the Elderly] (23 October 2018), accessed 23 December 2018, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speec hes/2018/october/documents/papa-francesco_20181023_giovani-anziani.html.

[48] Bauman, *Retrotopia,* 9.

[49] Z. Bauman, *Liquid Fear* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006). The term "precariat" refers to the middle and working classes who live perpetually in a state of "precarity" – a condition without predictability or security, which affects both their material and psychological welfare. As a "condition," or *perpetual erlebnis*, the instability, both real and perceived, of the precariat determines how they view the world and the forces, including politics and culture, within it.

[50] Bauman, *Retrotopia,* 9.

nation, thus ensuring their "right to differ" and maintain their cultural, religious, and ethnic homogeneity.[51] As a foundational principle, retrotopian politics seek to negate the Enlightenment's negation of pre-political foundations as the basis of citizenship. In its place will be a form of citizenship wherein the *ethnos* and the *demos* are made identical: the return of the *ethno-state*.

In times of relative stability, such dreams of "ethnically homogeneous sovereign home-lands" remain on the margins of Western society, not to be mentioned with any seriousness within mainstream politics.[52] But we are not in one of those times. The "change of conscious-ness" that Habermas sees as the basis for a friendly and fruitful discourse of citizens, especially among the religious and the secular, Muslim and non-Muslim Europeans, immigrants and natives, is wholly rejected by the retrotopian nationalist movements.[53] Habermas's transformation in the way we understand the reality of an interconnected, multicultural, "globalist," modernity is anti-thetical to the very cure for the sick modernity that the retrotopians want to implement. In view of their ethnocentric goals, Habermas's translation proviso proves only to further assimilate and integrate the "unwanted other" into the West, and thus perpetuate the very causes of the West's decline: its rejection of its own pre-modern heritage and its dystopic embrace of multiculturalism.

Even if the retrotopians secretly know that their aspirational ethno-state will never be real-ized, the ideological function of the concept of retrotopia, as a sub-species of utopian thought, is to be the persistent grand inquisitor of the multicultural and multi-confessional society. Like St. Thomas More's *Utopia,* "retrotopia" functions as the *sum-of-all-oughts*, an "ideal type" that serves to critique the liberal ideological consensus, constantly undermining that consensus in the name of a nostalgic alternative. As such, it is a strong and growing force against Habermas's project of inter-subjective discourse among Muslim and non-Muslims in Europe, as it is not a future-oriented solution for a better future state *for all*, but rather a past-oriented solution geared towards producing a state *without the Muslims*, who are, in their view, the very symbol of this dys-genic modernity. Whereas Habermas, Pope Francis, and other citizens of good will, are prepared to co-exist as a multi-confessional and multi-ethic people (*E Pluribus Unum*), and in order to do that are prepared to engage in the difficult task of finding a common language, retrotopians are prepared to make sure that that common language never comes to fruition. The only common language that can exist is a "homogenous language": a purified singular national language that encompasses the defining contours of the nation's past, not their modern diverse present and future.

Conclusion

If Habermas's proposal has any chance of bearing fruit in the democratic post-secular soci-ety, then Muslims and non-Muslims, who are "open to the other," and are prepared to invest themselves in a more reconciled-future-society, must *together* resist the retreat into retroto-pian nationalism and the inevitable re-barbarization of Europe. Muslims, Christians, and the

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[51] G. Johnson, *The White Nationalist Manifesto* (San Francisco: Counter-Currents Publishing Ltd., 2018), 48-57.
[52] Johnson, *The White Nationalist Manifesto*, 48.
[53] Habermas, *Europe,* 63.

non-religious, including immigrants and refugees, must be able to engage in a robust dialogue, discourse, and debate, through which they are able to translate their deeply held convictions, rooted in *caritas*, *ʿaṣabiyya*, and anamnestic solidarity, into a countervailing force, for in the name of purity, and in the name of the ethno-state, and under the pressure of continual immigration, the retrotopians are prepared to reduce the polyphonic nature of modern Europe to a mono-phonic drone. However, this countervailing force cannot be just about inter-community discourse on religious and ethical issues, but most also enter the political-economic arena, wherein it can contribute to the alleviation of the economics that create the precariat conditions. Finding solutions together, through the democratic process via a post-metaphysical language, may be the most effective way of depriving the nationalist demagogues of their rhetorical sources: the real *unbehagen* (uneasiness/insecurity) of the precariat.

Like St. Francis of Assisi and Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil, it may be the case that there are but a few voices prepared to cross the interreligious bridge, embrace the other as brothers and sisters, and talk in a friendly and peace-finding way. It may be the case, like Francis and al-Kāmil, that those voices may see themselves within the face of the other, know the other as themselves, but are unable to arrest the call for an onslaught. The unlikely friendship between the saint and the sultan provides a powerful exemplar for contemporary bridge-building in an age of danger and strife. The secular philosopher Jürgen Habermas has delivered a method through which different communities, speaking in different idioms, predicated on different worldviews, can find common language, and thus common ground. Taken together, especially considering the current polity of nationalist retrotopia, every attempt must be made to follow their examples. The last time such discourse avoidance was made into a civilizational norm, the West descended into an inferno of palingenetic ultra-nationalism, which led to World War II, genocide, and the very unstable conditions that Europe now suffers from.