

Beyond belief: religion as the “dynamite of the people”

Bruno Latour

Abstract

Religion which was the “opium of the people” has become of late the “dynamite of the people”. To ward off religious wars, it is important to revisit the idea of secularization and by implication postsecularity. This chapter makes an attempt by first criticizing the pretention of social science that a social explanation of religion is possible; I proceed to show how the notion of belief in belief renders inauthentic the articulation of religion; and, finally, I claim that belief in belief contaminates politics as well. I offer a definition of *agnosticism* as the refusal to use belief as an analytical category and to explore instead the plurality of modes of existence as an alternative to violence.

Introduction

In my contribution to the debate on postsecularity I wish to revisit my long fascination with the dichotomy between knowledge and belief based on a keynote lecture I gave in Groningen, The Netherlands in 2014.¹ See illustration 1. I’ll posit the idea that a plurality of templates to measure and understand the world could be conducive to a new public space that would allow respect towards religion as much as politics without mixing the two.

Illustration 1: Nieuwekerk, Groningen, The Netherlands: venue for the keynote lecture



Source: Wikipedia Commons: photo: Edi Weissmann

As Jan Assman (2009a) has suggested in a recent book on “religion and violence”, how much we regret the time when religion was the “opium of the people”. Now, it is rather the “dynamite of the people”! From a drug putting the damned of the world into somnolence instead of doing revolution, religion has become the spear of revolutionary changes, and not always for the better. Religious studies have become an entry into the most misunderstood source of extreme violence and radical politics and this is not true only of Islam, but is everywhere visible, from India to the evangelical church of North America all the way to Russian orthodoxy without forgetting the violent act of destruction of idols and fetishes that keep accompanying so much of the missionary work. While the state of the planet leaves everybody cold, the destruction of someone else’s cult brings vast masses into action immediately. While modernism had long been defined by “secularization”, it seems that we are witnessing rather a reinforcement of modernist violence through new type of what should be called religious wars.

But far from being a “remnant of the past” or an “archaic return to the past”, this metamorphosis of opium into dynamite proves that religion has to be taken as a fully *modernist* attitude. Specialists of religious studies should be ideally capable of probing this odd novelty – and if there is one place where all the tension of religion with modernity is being open to inquiry, it is in Europe with its long history of simultaneously pluralism and most recently the hard testing of the extreme fragility of tolerance. So, what I want to do in this contribution to the volume is to follow the metaphor of the drug but to add to it what biochemists would call the study of its *potentialisation*. It used to be a drug that put people to sleep—opium—and now it makes them active to the point of frenzy: it has been “potentialised”. We have to discover what chemists call the action principle of this drug that explains such metamorphosis. I’ll undertake this task in three parts, trying to find out why is it that this drug has become so strange. One part is, very quickly, about social explanation, the other about belief in belief and the third one about politics. It will show that the three are actually combined together which might explain some of the difficulty we have in understanding this contemporary emergence of religious wars.

The limit of social explanation of religion

So, let me start with the first one. We are not much helped in this search by the sociological principle – most clearly articulated, to take a classic case, by Emile Durkheim—that religion is made of the rites and words put in place to hide and reveal the existence of what he called “society”. Durkheim (1947[1915]), as everybody knows, initiated a long set of studies that try to replace the enigmatic nature of religion by an even more enigmatic set of entities called society or social relations. As any sociologist will tell you, Durkheim claimed that the impersonal force of society was the only reality behind the vast mythical elaboration of religion. But what is not as often underlined is how strange, how active and enigmatic was the so called impersonal force claimed by Durkheim to be the reality behind the enigma. One example: “Society could not *abandon* the categories to the free choice of individual [...]. For this reason, society uses *all its authority* upon its members to *forestall* such dissidences [...] it is frequently *rude* to individuals; it is constantly *doing violence* to our natural appetites” (my emphasis) (cited in Latour 2014). That’s a lot of action for something that is supposed to be impersonal.

It is not too complicated to divine behind the impersonal agent implied by Durkheim (and sociology of religion after him) the very personal agent implied by monotheistic religions. It’s hard not to see in those “social explanations” of religion, the mere replication of the being that Western religions invoke at the origin of their social life. The notion of “society” is the “one God, one people” of tradition. To put it bluntly “society” is the name given to a barely secularized “Yavhé” (Karsenti 2017).

So, secularization has always been an attempt at reinforcing the “one God, one society” argument. The obsession of sociology for explaining the obscure by appealing to what is more obscure is based on the denegation that there is something that makes people act, something whose agency has to be carefully scrutinized on its own term and for which the umbrella term “religion” is terribly inadequate and which is not “society”. In other words, it is not society that is behind religion, on the contrary, society is made in part by connections made by people with highly specific types of beings. This reversal in the direction of explanation is essential if we want to understand and avoid the “one people, one God” argument. Society is what is to be explained not what brings any explanation, especially not when by “society” scholars of a Durkheimian persuasion mean, in effect, the God of Israel and Christianity. Religion, just like science or law, are not what is to be explained by alluding to social ties but are some of the ingredients making the social ties hold. At least this is the general principle of actor-network theory of the social order, a principle especially forgotten when religion is “explained” away by sociologists (Latour 2005). If we consider how religious people define the beings that they encounter, it seems that a better definition would be that there are agents on which they have limited control and whose disappearance will make them die. Let’s call them for this reason beings of salvation and try to get at them without using the sociological notion of belief.

Belief as a category mistake

This brings me to the second problem that renders the potentialisation of opium into dynamite difficult to follow. This time it is not due to the explanation that appeals to society instead of explaining the religious contribution to the solidity of social ties. The problem is due – and often on the part of those who pride themselves in being “religious” – to what makes them act in competition with science. By science I mean at least information to render the idea of a totally utopian space where things, argument, people, goods, could be transported without being transformed. Transportation without transformation has always been my personal nemesis. This is what I call double-click information (Latour 2013b).

My thesis is that it is the spread of double click information that is at the origin of the invention of obscurantism in matters of religion, that is, the idea articulated by opponents as well as by proponents of religion that there is something “occult” in its rituals and practices. The very use of the word “religion” has come to mean what is inexplicable, irrational, what requires an appeal to an extraordinary set of drives (for the analyst) or what requires *supra-natural* entities

for those who are called “believers” who are forced to accept belief as what accounts for their faith. This requires some explanation.

I claim that there is nothing obvious in this link of religion with the strange, the occult, the supernatural, nor, to use the main notion that rocks any understanding of the question, with “belief”. The idea of belief is the result – and an unhappy one – of interrogating a mode of existence by using another mode. I want to try to propose that belief is always the result of an unfortunate crossover between two modes of existence. The use of the notion of belief proves that there has been a conflict during an interchange in the templates we should use to define an entity on its own terms. This is what I call a category mistake (2013a).

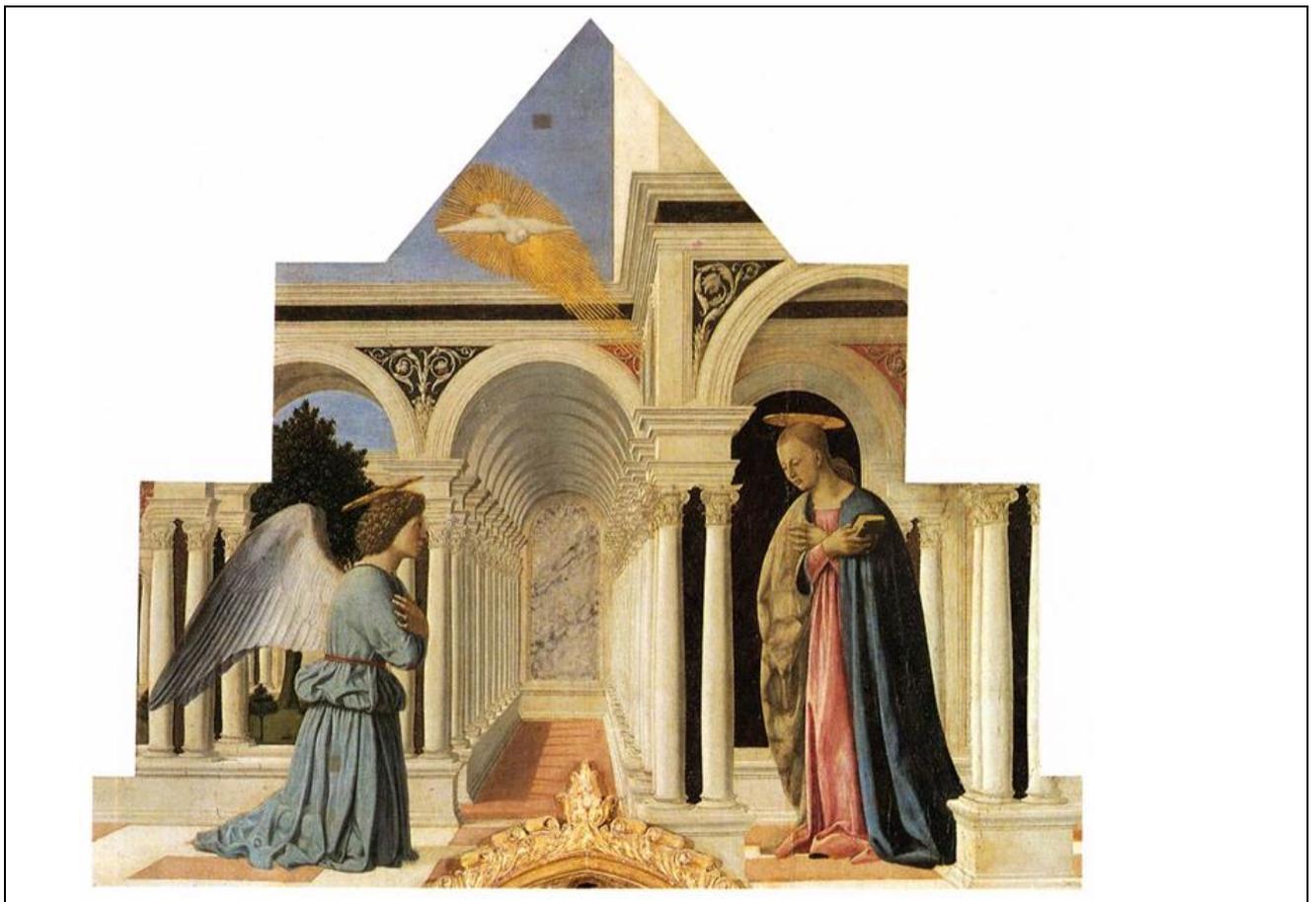
Those category mistakes are banal but very often they don’t have the huge consequences we are witnessing in the potentialization of the opium into explosive. For instance, if, after a judge has rendered her verdict, you, the plaintiff, keep saying “I don't feel appeased by this judgement”, your lawyer will be right to say psychological peace of mind is not what law is about – a verdict has its own logic and nobody hearing it would conclude that law is irrational, occult or obscure. You might keep complaining against the formalism of law but most probably you will not conclude that law is “irrational”. You most probably conclude that law has its own *strange and painful* way of being right. Thus, law seem to resist the accusation of being “just about irrational belief” (Latour 2009).

Ideally, we should be able to say the same thing when registering any crossing between two incompatible templates. Such is the principle of an inquiry into modes of existence: double click is not the universal template for every encounter. Faced with a judgment of law, you simply recognized that as far as psychological appeasement is concerned, legal vectors are found wanting. No more, no less.

So now we can ask ourselves how come that the same thing does not happen when you ask the carriers of religious salvation – Bible, angel, sermon or icons – how come they are not producing accurate information about a certain state of affairs? Why don’t we simply conclude: “well religious vectors are simply not good at transferring facts because they do something else that facts are not asked to do: namely to *transform* those who are addressed by religious beings”. Imagine the Virgin Mary asking Gabriel what information he is carrying. He should obviously reply: “I'm not carrying information, I'm transforming you!”. Information content: zero, transformation content: maximum, that is, the birth of the Son of God! The idea of some occult kind of message would only be produced if by mistake, the answer was: “there is a message (that is, an information), but it is encoded in some mysterious language”. At this point, the transformative (by opposition to the informative) mode would be lost for good.

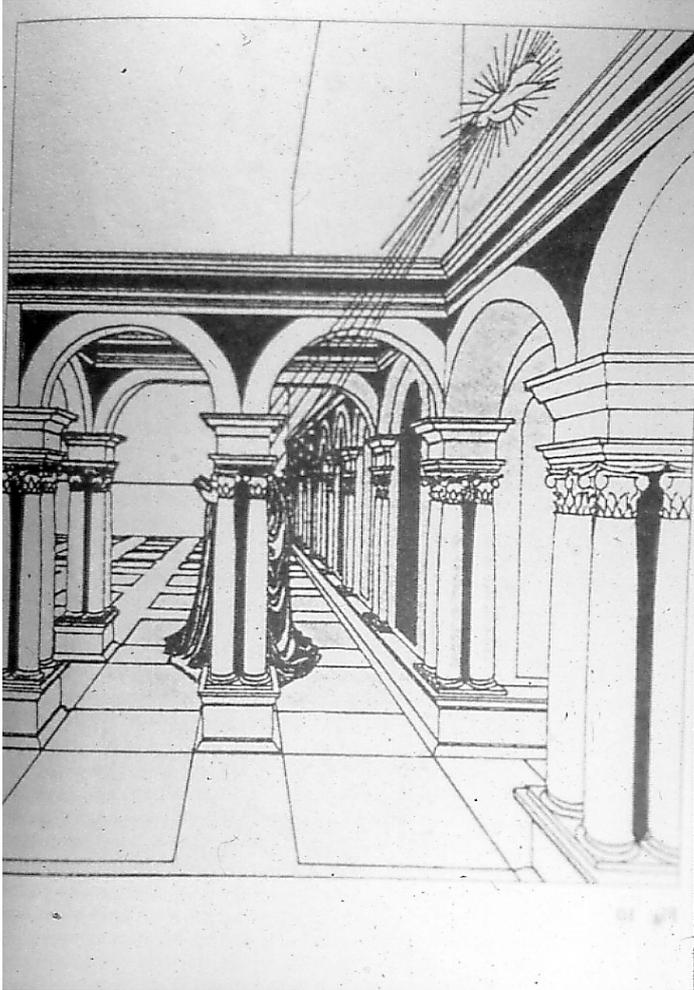
The difference between modes has been well demonstrated by Louis Marin commenting on the famous “Annunciation” by Piero della Francesca (Marin 1989) (see illustration 1). Piero painted an annunciation and he did it very beautifully so that the angel is actually *hidden by the pillar*; there is no way for the Virgin in the newly invented perspective space to see Gabriel! (see illustration 2). Piero della Francesca was amazingly careful in his disposition of objects in space — after all he invented this new optical regime! — and that’s why he made it absolutely clear that the Virgin *should not* see Gabriel in that space to indicate as clearly as possible to the viewer that Gabriel was not a carrier of information but a completely different type of vector. Marin comments that to make sure the difference of the two modes is understood, perspective logic is used to render the protagonists invisible to one another. But it has nothing to do with the obfuscation of a message that could be clarified by painting Gabriel facing Mary straight on.

Illustration 2: *The Annunciation*, Piero della Francesca, 1460



Source: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/piero-della-francesca/the-annunciation>

Illustration 3: Drawing of Piero's Annunciation (Peruggia Polyptych) showing the exact position of the Virgin with regard that of the Angel



Source: Marin (1991: 60)

The notion that religion is about the irrational is thus the result of an embarrassment. Gabriel would be embarrassed at being asked the wrong question, at being interrogated in the wrong key: "What information (meaning exact information) do you bring to me?". Poor Gabriel would not know what to say. But you would agree that it would be worse if we concluded from his unease that he has something to hide, another more esoteric and less rational message. He has nothing to hide, he does something else. He brings a total transformation of Mary.

Belief arises when we have two exit routes left. One is to withdraw into a rather shameful "yes, I believe in strange things but I won't tell anybody" and the other is, on the contrary, to assert that "yes, indeed, there is a world that belief can access just as much as information can access the world of common sense, except it's a supra natural world of beyond to which you have no access". Which means that you are not transformed by the message but left simply hanging eyes looking

up. Belief has eaten up the originality of religion. There is a totally invented competition between the double click messages transporting information about the natural world and double click information transporting information about the supra natural world.

At this point, the poison comes in when belief that started as a misunderstanding on the part of the interrogator is *accepted* by the interrogated as what he or she *has to hold* in order to be respected. This is where the difference between religion and law is most striking. The lawyer will never say “law is exactly as information transfer except it is much more esoteric”. He or she will say: “law’s job is not to carry information not is it to cure psychological miseries. *Dura lex sed lex*”. But in matter of religion, religious people themselves have accepted to submit to the power of double-click when they begin to confess: “Yes, I believe in what *cannot* be explained by normal means but you are right that it is a message”.

What started as absurdity on the part of interrogator, not using the correct template, becomes now what the wrongly understood soul begins to hold *most dearly* to. That sits at the heart of the question because now there is a deep lack of *authenticity* in accepting to be a believer yourself because of the way you have been requested to bear witness for the beings who make you act. The potentialisation of opium into dynamite comes, in my view, from this operation by which the imputation of belief by the outside observer has been *interiorized* by the agent as the only way to understand what makes him or her act. “Yes, you’re right, after all I believe in occult, irrational, supernatural sort of things”. Except this cannot be true. Belief is *not*, and cannot be, the sincere and authentic way in which you are acted by the being activating you. Belief is always a mistake whether it is imputed from the outside or accepted as inside as the only definition of the situation.

Since it is what I call a category mistake, it *deprives* the now entrenched believer of any possibility of re-articulating what makes him or her act. Now the believer is poisoned from the inside by this imputation of believing into something strange that does *not* correspond at all on how he or she is acted upon by the beings coming to make him or her saved. I claim that *this* is the source of the modernist form of fundamentalism – a fully modern extension of the poisonous notion of belief, coming at first from the outside as a category mistake on what it is to be acted upon and then *interiorized* as the only positive way to assert oneself in face of a confrontation by people who don't understand what you are. At this point, violence is the only solution.

I am not suggesting an old, pre-modern, archaic violence. Assman in *The Price of Monotheism* (2009b) is really interesting in this regard. He classifies the different sources of religious violence – rather, a fully modernist violence the intensity of

which, as we see more or less every day in the press, increases with the violence of the others and the slow disappearance of any alternative template to define action by other beings. The result is fanaticism; there is no other way; this reflects the contemporary situation. Formerly religious souls, now convinced that what they have to die for, or to kill for, is made in the name of *their beliefs*. There is a built-in inauthenticity in believing in belief, which means that the meeting with religious beings can no longer be articulated.

Not surprisingly, it is this lack of authenticity that creates the conflagration. Violence ensues immediately. Believers, by which I now designate people who are *forced to believe* (in belief), have to believe in something in a way that would not otherwise require the notion. Ashamed of himself Gabriel now withdraw, convinced that his secret coded message is a fully undecodable esoteric mystery! Believers are deprived of any *reasonable* way of following their own beings. When believers encounter other believers, who are just as deprived of their resource, what happens is necessary violence. There is no other way.

Let me be clear in my argument. I'm not saying that fight among believers is a remnant of a past or a new relapse into archaism. Rather, I am suggesting that it is the incorporation into a vast array of modes of existence of one template – belief – itself due to the competition of another template: information or communication or double-click (often conflated erroneously with science). If asked “what information do you carry?” bearers of religious salvation have to say “none” – to which the interrogator replies “then you are not part of our common world”. To which the carriers may reply “ok, we're out, can you leave us a small place?” – that's the opium phase – but they also may conceivably reply “we will fight to the death for our belief”, and that ushers in the dynamite phase. The opium has become dynamite because no one seems to understand any more what religion was about. Gabriel goes away without delivering its message — which no one understand anymore was *not* a message.

Notice that there is nothing in the original situation that should have connected religion with “strange” or “irrational” or even with belief. In other words, religion could be treated like law. If the judge gives me a verdict that is not satisfactory on psychological ground, it is perfectly possible for the judge accused of not being sensitive to the “peace of mind” of the plaintiff to explain why law has its own logic that gives a quality to the common world but would have been lost if she had accepted to transform law into a solution to psychological trauma. So, both disagree but they now *reasonably* disagree because they accept to use two templates, one for law and another one for trauma, and because the plaintiff has no way to accuse the judge of “believing” irrationally in law. Make the test by yourselves: no one would as a judge: “do you believe in law?” The judge or the

lawyer would say: “yes, of course, this is completely material. Why would you ask me about belief? I'm a lawyer, I pursue the specific type of being I meet.” The law resists the interiorization of the accusation of being an object of mere belief. This is my point. Why do we not do the same for what is called “meeting with carriers of salvation”?

Let me take my favorite example, suppose your lover asks you (a classic question): “do you love me?” and you answer: “I've already told you hundreds of time, yes, I love you!”. The first lover could legitimately ask: “thus, you don't love me anymore”. If the second pushed the button of the tape recorder and said “hear, is this not a proof? Listen, this is what I have said last year, don't you believe now that I love you?” – it would be reasonable to understand that the first lover is right in throwing the tape recorder at the face of a man. How *absurd* to believe in making the original question – “do you love me?” – a matter of *information* double-click.

If you don't *hear* the question as a matter of *transformation* obviously no amount of proof will ever convince the interrogator. The difference with religion in this case, is that the lover, because he or she *loves*, has a robust reticence to any interpretation of the interchange as being about transfer of information. So, by resisting belief he or she keeps open the possibility of *converting* his or her lover to a reasonable – not a rational – change of repertoire. Imagine the scene a few days later: “how could you be so dumb, so insensitive to push the button of your tape recorder”. To which he or she could answer, probably in tears, “yes, I was so stupid”. A different outcome was possible because the authenticity of the shift from information to transformation was actually not erased by the notion of information and thus by belief. A different outcome than violence is possible in this case because values may be rearticulated from the inside.

This is what is completely impossible when the *extraneous* template of belief has been made to be only the definition of how we stick to one's values, because if we have only one template, it's impossible to articulate any statement and the guy will keep saying “I was transmitting information, is this not what you ask? You ask me if I love you, I said yes”. To which the reply should be: “you understood nothing, it's another mode of existence, you have to answer in another tone”. Everything is different, you completely misunderstood but if you have only one template, you cannot even hear the accusation of misunderstanding. You have become inauthentic to yourself. It is for this reason that I think we should modify the meaning of agnosticism and that it should be used to mean a way to *abstain* from using the notion of “belief” when considering anything having to do with religious matters.

When violence moves from religion to politics

Moving to the third part the question now becomes: how come that the meeting with carriers of religious salvation are not met with the same resistance and robust opposition as those who carry legal means or the transformative aspect of love talks? Conversely, how come that the modernist toxic influence of information double-click has not been able to intoxicate those other sources as well? In other words, why is it that we find ourselves again thrown into *religious wars* infinitely crueler and longer lasting than those of the early modern period? Of course, in the same way as the post-Reformation wars were a product of the time – and not at all a remnant of the past – the new religious wars are brand-new and totally modern. We have to turn for this question not to a competition with information double-click but with *politics*, which is the third mode of existence I wish to consider.

I know this is an immense topic. But the principle of method I'm following in the inquiry of mode of existence, could help account for the *potentialization* I'm after. If the conflagration of believers unable to re-articulate the attachment to their gods is so strong, it is not only because of the expansion of information as the only template acceptable everywhere. It is also because it seems to have become impossible to deploy politics as its own *independent template* just as law or love have theirs. The disappearance of politics has its own logic and truth conditions makes of course the assertion of belief the ideal *shortcut* to define what it is to hold values and to stick together in a group that shares some identity.

It is not that religions have been politicized. On the contrary, it is that a religious state of mind – itself, as I showed before, entirely corrupted, if you want, into belief in belief – has been unable to respect this other completely original and strange *sui generis* mode of existence that is called politics. Compared to the certainties requested now by religious believers, politics always appear too uncertain, tentative, even irrational. The great irony of our time, which is a great tragedy, is that it's religious characters — themselves transformed by belief in belief into inauthentic souls — which claim now to pass judgement on politicians for being not rational enough, not certain enough, too *wavering*, too disposed to compromise. And amazingly, contrary to lawyers and lovers, politicians seem to agree; they confess, they apologize and they attempt to be more virtuous, *principled*, rational!

These days it is especially strange to hear, for instance in America, Trump supporters accusing scientists of irrationality because they “believe” in climate change! As if science was a matter of belief. We have come full circle: religious people believing in belief now accuse climate science to be a mere belief and those who believe in it to be irrational, as if they themselves were the last rational

persons left on earth. What a mess! The competition of values which at first pushes the religious souls to believe in belief – that is fundamentalism – is now pushing one step further politics itself into being about belief, values and absolute certainty: this might be called “value politics”.

As I have tried to show recently, what is wrongly called “populism” is the expansion one more time of a religion corrupted by belief in belief and now attacking politics for its lack of “values” (Latour 2018). The idea is that political personnel lacks “values” and “identities” – exactly what religion has lost itself in competing with information. We have lost religion transformed into belief, and now it is the belief in belief as the only key that gets into politics and in turn that make us lose politics. A cascade of catastrophe ensues, that brings us to the present state of “alternative facts” and “post truth” society.

In a sense we are back to the time of Spinoza: the answer should not to support “value politics” but, on the contrary, to value politics for itself. And yet it's not with Spinoza that I wish to conclude this contribution but rather with a lesser known figure, that of Eric Voegelin, whose diagnosis of “gnosticism” – although made in the 1950s – fits exactly the present situation I wish to describe (Voegelin 1952 [1987]).

Gnosticism, in Voegelin's interpretation, is the extension of Christian religion into wanting the full realization of the kingdom of God. Nothing wrong with that, except if it means the kingdom of God *in this world*. I'm referring to what he calls, for this reason, “immanentisation” – the rendering of the heavenly ideal in the here and now. The key point is that modernity is in no way understood as a break away from Christian religion; Voegelin, as is well known is, completely against the notion of secularization. Rather modernity concerns the utopian ideal of realizing the kingdom of God here, now, for good and together. This understanding is almost the same as expecting the kingdom of God but the small difference is that in the traditional, pre-modern case, it is God who does the work; in the new gnostic one, humans take on themselves the task of God. That's what Voegelin calls “immanentisation”.

Secularization, thus, is Christian through and through, but a Christianity deprived of a robust, basic, essential instinct that the Kingdom of God is not of this Earth (hence the word immanentisation of transcendence, not to be confused with immanence which is a healthy and perfectly normal sentiment referring to the spiritual imbrication with the material). Secularization in Voegelin's interpretation, like belief, is a highly poisonous attitude that renders the adept just as unable to respect immanence as to respect transcendence. The psychosocial portrait of a militant drawn by Voegelin from the first Puritan all the

way to the communists of his time – and that could be easily expanded to the Christian or Islamic fundamentalists of today – depends crucially on this inability to respect politics as a *mundane*, immanent, extremely fragile mode of existence.

The history of political theology in the Western world depends on the articulation of three religious dimensions that Voegelin calls unabashedly “truths”. He refers to those as respectively cosmological, anthropological and soteriological (*Ibid.*: 149-50). The first is really civic religion of the early Empires such as the Roman gods; the second relates to the notion of cosmopolitic, basically the philosophical achievement of the Athenian political culture, encompassing the entirety of the psyche and human affairs; soteriology refers to the Christian type of religious ruths. The problem of political theology, according to Voegelin, is that it is never possible to hold the three together in what gets called, very interestingly, the “complication of symbolism”.

The tendency of secularization therefore is not to abandon Christianity. Rather it is to simplify the number of templates necessary to build the order of society. For instance, Augustine will be just as unable to understand the power and legitimacy of cosmological truth – the Roman gods – as Hobbes would to understand the power and legitimacy of soteriological truth. Augustine will build the *City of God* without the indispensable and healthy presence of the *civic gods* while Hobbes will write his *Leviathan* without the balancing power of *salvation* (*Ibid.*: 159). The secularized gnostic will build modernity as the worst possible solution. The result is gods without gods, belief and disbelief mixed up, without any one of them being able to articulate the multiplicity of templates necessary to have a reasonable – not a rational – political theology.

So, for Voegelin, the idea that we live in a time of *pluralism* is just patently absurd. *Dedifferentiation* is exactly what has happened. It has become almost impossible to re-articulate the *multiplicity* of templates, to extract religion from irrationality – and still less from belief in belief – it is even impossible to break down the religious political amalgam around the social values and identities. In the same way as secularization has nothing to do with the abandon of religion – witness Durkheim who is just replacing a personal god by another personal god – what is called pluralism today is the *end* of a plurality of templates and the sad realization that the multiplicity of *clashes* about belief and values is not only *inevitable* but without any other result than violence.

Secular people often pride themselves in the idea that they live in a pluralist society and that this pluralism should be conserved. However, plurality of templates, if you have followed my argument, is the scarcest commodity of all. Social sciences have long attempted to erase entirely the originality of religion by

the three ways I've reviewed in this contribution. They claimed that religion was nothing – or at least, nothing but society; they insisted that it was about belief and largely succeeded in convincing adepts to be also believers; and, finally, they have decided that religion had been distorted, polluted and kidnapped by politics when it is exactly the opposite movement that we are witnessing today. Politics has become impossible to articulate precisely because of an inarticulable definition of religion as belief.

Conclusion

The only solution to the present religious wars indeed is in insisting on plurality but not plurality of knowledge—we rather need more unity of knowledge!—but plurality of *templates* with which to measure the beings that are making us act and are thus holding us – be they law, love, politics, religion or many others. The idea of plurality or multiplicity of templates is how I embrace the notion of postsecularity. Rest assured I am far from comfortable with another term using “post”. But I can accept it when one places it as part of the quest for new ways of conceptualising the multiplicity of modes of existence. What we cannot afford is to have a war of gods just at the time when we have to also deal with the war of the world imposed by the intrusion of this strangest goddess of all, Gaia. In this way, pluralism is still something that lies way ahead of us.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper “Beyond belief: on the forms of knowledge proper to religious beings” was presented *On the Forms of Knowledge Proper to Religious Beings*, keynote lecture, 400th anniversary of Groningen University, EASR meeting, The Netherlands, 12-05-2014.

Further reading

Latour, B. (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

This book is a classic in anthropology of science that questions the modernist dualism of nature and society. Instead of postmodern and anti-modern movements, Latour argues for the hybrid interrelations of natural and social phenomena with discourse.

Latour, B. (2010) *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Latour re-described the Enlightenment of universal scientific truth with the argument that there are no facts inseparable from their fabrication. The argument in this book extends to religious fetishes – objects invested with mythical powers – to show that the objectivity of facts and the power of fetishes (“factishes”) are both truth making.

Latour, B. (2017) *Facing Gaia: eight lectures on the new climatic regime*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Based on a series of lectures on “natural religion”, Latour invokes Lovelock’s “Gaia” to interrogate the Anthropocene in ethical, political, theological and scientific terms. He calls for a new collaboration between scientists, theologians, activists and artists to embrace the challenges of the “new climatic regime”.

Lovelock, J. (2016) *Gaia: a new look at life on earth*, Oxford Landmark Science edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

In this new edition, Jim Lovelock advances the hotly debated idea that the Earth functions as a single living organism to self-regulate and keep itself a place fit for life.

References

Assman, J. (2009a) *Violence et Monothéisme*, Paris: Bayard.

-(2009b) *The Price of Monotheism*, translated by Robert Savage, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Durkheim, E. (1947 [1915]) *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Translated by Joseph Ward Swain. New York: Free Press.

Karsenti, B. (2017) *La Question Juive des Modernes: philosophie de l'émancipation*, Paris: PUF.

Latour, B. (2005) *Reassembling the Social: an introduction to actor-network theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

-(2009) *The Making of Law: an ethnography of the conseil d'état*, translated by Marina Brilman and Alain Pottage, Cambridge: Polity Press.

-(2013a) *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: an anthropology of the moderns*, translated by Catherine Porter, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

-(2013b) *Rejoicing: the torments of religious speech*, translated by Julie Rose, Cambridge: Polity Press.

-(2014) ‘Formes élémentaires de la sociologie: formes avancées de la théologie’, *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, 167 (juillet-septembre): 255-77.

-(2018) *Down to Earth: politics in the new climatic regime*, translated by Cathy Porter, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Marin, L. (1989) *Opacité de la Peinture: essais sur la représentation au Quattrocento*, Paris: Usher.

-(1991) ‘Stating a mysterious figure’. In Bogue, R. (ed.) *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory: an interdisciplinary approach*, vol. II: *mimesis, semiosis and power*, Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 45-68.

Voegelin, E. (1952 [1987]) *The New Science of Politics*, new Foreword by Dante Germino, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.