

## SECULARISATION AS AN INTERNATIONAL CRISIS IN LEGITIMACY

### Abstract

Scholars of International Politics have recently come to grips with the global resurgence of religion. Since the inception of the field of International Politics, the secularisation thesis had been taken for granted and religion dismissed as unimportant. But in line with the current transformation affecting societies worldwide as well as with the re-consideration of the secularisation thesis by Sociologists, new resources must be developed within IR to better understand current events. While theories and concepts have been developed within Sociology and the Political Sciences, no such tools are available in International Politics. Thus, this article provides a tentative theory of secularisation drawing on resources endogenous to the field. Drawing on recent advances in the broadly Constructivist tradition, this article re-interprets secularisation as a protracted international crisis of legitimacy.

**Keywords:** legitimacy, secularisation, religion, International Politics, Middle Ages.

### Introduction

The late 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a worldwide resurgence of the religious factor with profound consequences for the conduct of international politics and scholarly understanding in political science.<sup>2</sup> The great discrepancy between this revival and the then predicted decline of religion led many to question traditional accounts of the secularisation process.<sup>3</sup> Expectations of the withering away of religion began to be challenged and the secularisation thesis came to be decried and denounced as an ideological and doctrinal project with little scien-

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2 Vlas Natalia, Is Religion Inherently Violent? Religion as a Threat and Promise for the Global Security, *Politics and Religion*, Vol.4, No.2, 2010, pp.297-314. Jevtic Mirosljub, Political Science and Religion, *Politics and Religion*, Vol.1, No.1, 2007, pp.59-69

3 Ranitovic Ana, God is Back: how the global revival of faith is changing the world, *Politics and Religion*, Vol.4, No.1, 2010, pp.136-138.

tific moorings, i.e., a religion.<sup>4</sup> In this context, sociologists attempted to confront the secularisation theory to the historical record so as to rescue some of its insights. These efforts ultimately resulted in the redefinition of the process. From an unavoidable evolutionary trend, the meaning of secularisation slowly evolved towards a shift in forms of legitimacy and authority. In turn, these theoretical developments in the Social Sciences are opening the door to the development of a theory of secularisation from within field of International Relations (IR). Indeed, IR has recently witnessed a growing interest in notions of legitimacy and many scholars have managed to theorise long-term changes in legitimacy at the international level; thus paving the way for the study of the changes in legitimacy that characterised the secularisation process.

In such a context, the task of this paper is to develop a theoretical approach to the secularisation process based on theoretical resources endogenous to IR. In particular, I want to draw on cutting-edge advances in the broadly Constructivist tradition to develop a perspective on secularisation as a protracted international crisis of legitimacy. In the first part of the article, I consider the debate surrounding the secularisation thesis and the development of neo-secularisation. I argue that in recent approaches to the subject, secularisation has come to be reconceived as a shift in legitimacy and authority away from the Church to more secular institutions. In turn, this redefinition of secularisation as a shift in legitimacy calls forth the development of a special type of theorising that focuses on long term changes in political order. Therefore, in the second part of the article, I move on to recent debates in the field of IR and to the development of such theoretical approaches. Drawing on the work of Christian Reus-Smit and Daniel Philpott, I sketch an approach to secularisation using resources already present in the field. Finally, in the last part of the article, I substantiate the theoretical framework by tracing the normative transformation that facilitated the shift in legitimacy at the heart of the secularisation of Europe. Based on Walter Ullmann's study of principles of law and government, I explain how the authority of the Church became challenged and secular rulers gained legitimacy. The result was the onset of the secularisation of Europe from the Middle Ages onwards.

### **Neo-secularisation and Legitimacy**

The variety of approaches to secularisation developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is daunting and an exhaustive outline is simply unfeasible. Karel Dobbelaere comprehensively classified the different accounts of secularisation in three distinct categories according to three levels of analysis. First, there is a macro or

4 Hadden Jeffrey, *Desacralizing Secularization Theory*, In: *Secularization and Fundamentalism Reconsidered*, Hadden J and Shupe A D (eds), Paragon House, New York, 1989, pp.3-26. Swatos W H, *Losing Faith in The "Religion" Of Secularization: Worldwide Religious Resurgence and the Definition of Religion*, In: *Religious Politics in Global and Comparative Perspective*, Swatos W H (ed.), Greenwood Press, London, 1989, pp.147-154.

societal process of secularisation (i.e., institutional differentiation, rationalisation, disenchantment, subjectivisation, the 'Great Disembedding,' etc.). Second there is a meso or organisational process of secularisation (i.e., relativisation, this-worldliness, privatisation, etc.). And finally, there is a micro or individual process of secularisation (i.e., individualisation, bricolage, unchurched, unbelief, etc.).<sup>5</sup> While most theories deal with all three dimensions of secularisation, sociologists generally agree that the macro process is primary and that there is no necessary causal relationship between the different levels.<sup>6</sup> According to Oliver Tschannen, the three fundamental pillars of secularisation are rationalisation, differentiation, and disenchantment/ this-worldliness.<sup>7</sup> A similar approach is taken by David Martin in *The Religious and the Secular*.

In face of the global resurgence of religion, numerous social scientists began to voice their concern as to the viability and reliability of the secularisation thesis. Based on the mounting number of 'anomalies' and evidence disproving the predicted decline of religion, many scholars came to argue that the term 'secularisation' should be dropped altogether or "erased from the sociological dictionary."<sup>8</sup> Rodney Stark concluded that "[a]fter nearly three centuries of utterly failed prophecies and misrepresentations of both present and past, it [was finally] time to carry the secularization doctrine to the graveyard of failed theories."<sup>9</sup> However, suggestions to drop the concept remained unheeded since unsatisfactory and ultimately unproductive.<sup>10</sup>

In opposition to the challenge mounted by the detractors of the thesis, a group of sociologists attempted to rescue some of its invaluable insights. Jose Casanova, David Yamane, and Mark Chaves refused "to throw out the baby with the bathwater."<sup>11</sup> Instead, they took on board the strong criticisms but retained the core of the thesis. As Casanova puts it:

In any case, the old theory of secularization can no longer be maintained. There are only two options left: either, as seems the present inclination of most sociologists of religion, to discard the theory altogether once it is revealed to be an unscientific, mytho-

5 Dobbelaere Karel, *Secularization: An Analysis at Three Levels*, Peter Lang, Oxford, 2002, p.166.

6 Dobbelaere Karel, Secularization: A Multi-Dimensional Concept, *Current Sociology*, Vol.29, No. 2, 1981, pp.1-216. Chaves Mark, Secularization as Declining Religious Authority, *Social Forces*, Vol.72, No.3, 1994, p.753.

7 Tschannen Oliver, *Les Théories De La Sécularisation*, Droz, Geneva, 1992. Tschannen Oliver, The Secularization Paradigm: A Systematization, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol.30, No. 4, 1991, pp.395-415.

8 Stark Rodney, Secularization R.I.P., *Sociology of Religion*, Vol.60, No.3, 1999, pp.249-273. Martin David, *The Religious and the Secular: Studies in Secularization*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1969, p.22.

9 Stark Rodney, Secularization R.I.P., *Sociology of Religion*, Vol.60, No.3, 1999, p.270.

10 Demerath N. J., Secularization Disproved or Displaced? In *Secularization and Social Integration: Papers in Honor of Karel Dobbelaere*, Laermans R, Wilson B and Billiet J (eds), Leuven University Press, Louvain, 1998, pp.7-10. Shiner Larry, The Concept of Secularization in Empirical Research, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol.6, No.2, 1967, pp.219.

11 Chaves Mark, Secularization as Declining Religious Authority, *Social Forces*, Vol.72, No.3, 1994, p.750.

logical account of the modern world, or to revise the theory in such a way that it can answer both its critics and the questions which reality itself has posed.<sup>12</sup>

In a similar vein, Steve Bruce noted that “[i]f we can abandon simplistic evolutionary perspectives and keep our minds focused on the complexity of the historical record, we need not...reject secularization as a social myth.”<sup>13</sup> In the end, one of the most important results to come out of this reconsideration was the emergence of neo-secularisation.

The main exponents of the neo-secularisation thesis are Chaves and Yamane and their starting point is Bryan Wilson’s definition of secularisation as being “the process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance.”<sup>14</sup> Neo-secularisation’s central move is to shift the locus of the secularisation process from the decline of religion in all spheres of life to the sole decline of the scope of religious authority. This shift in focus leads Chaves to define secularisation as being “*the declining influence of social structures whose legitimation rests on reference to the supernatural.*”<sup>15</sup> In opposition to the earlier theories that predicted the disappearance of religion, the neo-secularisation thesis “maintains no more than that religion ceases to be significant in the working of the social system” because it “has lost its presidency over institutions.”<sup>16</sup>

In this context, secularisation no longer corresponded to the belief in the withering away of religion and instead came to refer to a process of transfer of property, power, activities, and both manifest and latent functions, from institutions with a supernaturalist frame of reference to (often new) institutions operating according to empirical, rational, pragmatic criteria. In particular, the secularization model has been taken as referring to the shift in the location of decision making in human groups from elites claiming special access to supernatural ordinances to elites legitimating their authority by reference to other bases of power.<sup>17</sup>

Ultimately, the secularisation process was redefined as a long-term and Europe-wide shift in authority and legitimacy that resulted in a transfer of power and resources from the Church to the state. This re-appraisal of secularisation as a shift in legitimacy demands a specific type of theorising. As Chaves argues, it calls

12 Casanova Jose, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, University of Chicago Press, London, 1994, p.19.

13 Bruce Steve, *A House Divided: Protestantism, Schism and Secularization*, Routledge, London, 1990, p.9.

14 Wilson Bryan, *Religion in the Secular Society: A Sociological Comment*, Watts, London, 1966, p.xiv.

15 Chaves Mark, Secularization as Declining Religious Authority, *Social Forces*, Vol.72, No.3, 1994, p.756.

16 Wilson Bryan, Secularization: The Inherited Model, In: *The Sacred in a Secular Age*, Hammond P E (ed.), University of California Press, London, 1985, p.15. Wilson Bryan, Religion in Sociological Perspective, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1982, p.150.

17 Wilson Bryan, Secularization: The Inherited Model, In: *The Sacred in a Secular Age*, Hammond P E (ed.), University of California Press, London, 1985, pp.11-12.

for the replacement of 'secularisation theory' by a general theory that could explain why different authority structures seem to be dominant at different times and in different places.<sup>18</sup> In other words, what is needed is a macro theory of political change that could explain the medieval shift away from supernaturalist forms of legitimacy.

### Legitimacy in International Relations

In *Economy and Society*, Max Weber argues that at "the basis of every authority, and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey, is a *belief*, a belief by virtue of which persons exercising authority are lent prestige."<sup>19</sup> In other words, the German social scientist argues that submission and obedience to authority are based on people's belief in the legitimate nature of the normative system and absolute principles upheld by their society. And over time, behaviours rooted in socially accepted canons of values become institutionalised into an enduring and stable structure of legitimacy or what Weber called a 'legitimate order.'<sup>20</sup> These legitimate orders correspond to "[1] socially structured systems which contain [2] bodies of normative propositions that [3] to some degree are subjectively accepted by members of a social group as binding for their own sake without regard for purely utilitarian calculations."<sup>21</sup> They do so without relying on force or self-interest for their normative nature makes non-compliance abhorrent to people's sense of duty.<sup>22</sup> In turn, it could well be that the institutionalisation of more secular principles into legitimate orders is connected to the shift in structures of legitimacy at the heart of the secularisation process.

In recent years, IR scholars, and more particularly Constructivists, have begun to study the existence of structures of authority and legitimacy at the international level along with the role that such structures play in the formation of the international order. For example, Daniel Philpott describes 'constitutions of international society,'<sup>23</sup> Christian Reus-Smit maps out 'fundamental institutions,'<sup>24</sup>

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18 Chaves Mark, Secularization as Declining Religious Authority, *Social Forces*, Vol.72, No.3, 1994, pp.770-771.

19 Weber Max, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, University of California Press, London, 1968, p.263.

20 Kalberg S., Max Weber's Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Processes in History, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol.85, No.5, 1980, pp.1160-1161.

21 Trubek D. M., Max Weber on Law and the Rise of Capitalism, In: *Max Weber 1, Critical Assessments*, Hamilton P (ed.), Routledge, London, 1991, p.131.

22 Weber Max, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Free Press, Glencoe, 1947, p.113.

23 Philpot Daniel, *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations*, Princeton University Press, Oxford, 2001, p.12.

24 Reus-Smit Christian, *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1999, p.14.

and Mlada Bukovansky develops the idea of 'political cultures.'<sup>25</sup> Broadly speaking, these structures of legitimacy correspond to sets of implicit and explicit norms and rules shared by the major actors of a system and which define the holders of authority and outline expected modes of coexistence.

In *The Moral Purpose of the State*, Christian Reus-Smit deals with what he calls 'fundamental institutions,' those "elementary rules of practice that states formulate to solve the coordination and collaboration problems associated with coexistence under anarchy."<sup>26</sup> Through his attempt to develop a theory of the origins of these fundamental institutions, Reus-Smit comes to consider the role played by the "deep constitutive metavalues that comprise the normative foundations of international society."<sup>27</sup> These 'constitutional structures,' as he calls them, correspond to "coherent ensembles of intersubjective beliefs, principles, and norms, that perform two functions in ordering international societies," they define rightful membership and rightful conduct for the units of the system.<sup>28</sup> Like Weber's legitimate orders, these deeper constitutional structures are very important since "changes in the metavalues that comprise those structures [are] a primary determinant of systems change."<sup>29</sup>

At the heart of these constitutional structures lays a hegemonic belief system about the 'moral purpose of the state' which embodies and defines the ultimate notion of the 'good' served by the political arrangements. It is 'hegemonic' in the sense that it constitutes the established and prevailing form of justification sanctioned by a society.<sup>30</sup> Besides this moral purpose of the state, constitutional structures incorporate an 'organising principle of sovereignty' and a 'norm of procedural justice.' These two elements are founded on the moral purpose of the state and are largely dependent on it. While the first component plays the most important role, the three of them form a coherent set of values and norms that legitimises institutional practices and international interaction and cooperation.

The major strength of Reus-Smit's analytical framework is that, by looking at the norms and inter-subjective beliefs that shape fundamental institutions,

25 Bukovansky Mlada, *Legitimacy and Power Politics: The American and French Revolutions in International Political Culture*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2002, p.2.

26 Reus-Smit Christian, *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1999, p.14.

27 Reus-Smit Christian, *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1999, p.6.

28 Reus-Smit Christian, *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1999, p.30.

29 Reus-Smit Christian, *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1999, p.164.

30 Reus-Smit Christian, *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1999, p.31.

it deals directly with the absolute principles at the heart of legitimate authority. In turn, this allows for a better understanding of the interconnections between changing absolute principles of legitimacy and the generation of the matching fundamental institutions in which all political authority is held subject to the new principles. While Reus-Smit does not directly deal with secularisation, we can see that his theoretical framework encompasses the shift in power and legitimacy at the heart of the process. Effectively, by developing a model that helps us to understand evolving patterns of moral inclusion and exclusion, Reus-Smit leads us to consider how the shift in location of decision-making and the decline in religious authority resulted from changes in constitutional structures and the moral purpose of the state at the international level. However, Reus-Smit's framework is ultimately geared towards the study of normative change through a state-centric lens. To this extent, he misses the complexity of the 17<sup>th</sup> century transfer of authority and legitimacy away from the transnational Church to the absolutist state.

So far in this article, I have outlined a breakthrough in sociologists' approach to secularisation as well as the development of a theoretical framework from within the field of IR to study changes in forms of legitimacy over centuries. Interestingly enough, it seems that IR scholars could play a greater role in the study of the secularisation process that took place in Europe. Indeed, they have developed adequate conceptual and theoretical resources to study the process as a shift in the meta-values or moral purpose that legitimise political authority that ultimately enabled the shift in power and functions from the Church to secular rulers. Based on this insight, it is possible to trace this normative shift that led to a major epochal transformation.

### **Secularisation: the Medieval shift in Legitimacy**

In *Revolutions in Sovereignty*, Daniel Philpott explores the role ideas played during the great socio-political transformations Europe experienced in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Through a study of the ideas of Protestant revolutionaries, he demonstrates how religious beliefs and ideas challenged the medieval constitution of international politics and paved the way for the rise of the modern constitution of sovereign states. Philpott demonstrates that this revolution was sustained by the work of a limited number of intellectuals or 'entrepreneurs of ideas' whose concepts and principles came to be diffused by intellectual communities, activists networks, and other types of 'couriers'.<sup>31</sup> As a result, large social swaths came to be converted and the medieval constitution lost validity. Philpott concludes with the claim that "[t]here must first be an intellectual revolution for there to be

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31 Philpott Daniel, *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations*, Princeton University Press, Oxford, 2001, p.53, 69.

a political revolution."<sup>32</sup> This point has also been made by Jonathan Israel who argued, in the case of the Enlightenment, that the demolition of the monarchical world would have been "impossible, or exceedingly implausible without a prior revolution in ideas – a revolution of the mind."<sup>33</sup> In this context, it seems appropriate to pay particular attention to the changes in ideas that preceded and accompanied the secularisation of Europe. Issues surrounding the power of ideas and material factors are thorny and have long been the subject of intense debates and this article is not the place to solve the problem. Rather, the interpretive study that follows is based on the insights of Philpott and other scholars.

Accounts of the secularisation process often deal with the Reformation, Westphalia, or the Enlightenment. In general, these historical periods are considered to be central to the critique of religion and to its decline. However, it is my contention that the roots of the process are found earlier in Europe's history. Indeed, the location of the process' starting point in the Middle Ages is supported by scholars such as Randall Collins,<sup>34</sup> Pitirim Sorokin,<sup>35</sup> Marie-Dominique Chenu,<sup>36</sup> or Quentin Skinner<sup>37</sup> who consider the Protestant Reformation as a second take-off or a single step in a process of change that can be traced back to Medieval Europe. For Benjamin Nelson, the 12<sup>th</sup> century Renaissance constituted the "prime seedbeds of the institutional and cultural developments of the Western world" and corresponded to "a watershed in the international history of the world."<sup>38</sup> The growing acceptance of a new moral purpose based on the *Libri naturales* and on the notion of 'nature' meant that from "the year 1210 to the year 1325 there occurred a complete overhauling of the structures of legitimation and theoretical rationales of Christian theology and natural philosophy."<sup>39</sup> These breakthroughs to a new logic and form of legitimacy prepared the way, step by step, for the secularisation of Europe.<sup>40</sup>

32 Philpot Daniel, *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations*, Princeton University Press, Oxford, 2001, p.51.

33 Israel Jonathan, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, p.714.

34 Collins R., *Weberian Sociological Theory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, p.76.

35 Sorokin Pitirim, The Western Religion and Morality Today. *International Yearbook of the Sociology of Religion*, Vol.2, '66, p. 9.

36 Chenu M. D., *L'Veil De La Conscience Dans La Civilisation Medievale*, Vrin, Paris, 1969.

37 Skinner Quentin, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought: The Age of Reformation*. Vol. 2, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1978.

38 Nelson B., Eros, Logos, Nomos, Polis: Shifting Balances of the Structures of Existence, In: *On the Roads to Modernity: Conscience, Science, and Civilizations: Selected Writings*, Nelson B and Huff T E (eds), Rowman and Littlefield, Totowa, 1981, p.214. Wilks M., *The Problem of Sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages: The Papal Monarchy with Augustinus Triumphus and the Publicists*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1963, p.84.

39 Nelson B., Civilizational Complexes and Intercivilizational Encounters," In: *On the Roads to Modernity: Conscience, Science, and Civilizations: Selected Writings*, Nelson B and Huff T E (eds), Rowman and Littlefield, Totowa, 1981, pp.99-100.

40 Swanson R. N., *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1999, p.103.

In his landmark *Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages*, Ullmann studies the changes in the sources and origins of law and of governmental power in Europe, that is, its moral purpose.<sup>41</sup> The Cambridge Professor of Medieval History demonstrates that in the Middle Ages political thinking was characterised by a shift between two “conceptions of government and law diametrically opposed to each other.”<sup>42</sup> In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the moral purpose that informed medieval forms of government shifted and led to the replacement of the Church’s ‘descending theme’ of government with an ‘ascending theme.’ The descending thesis conceives of absolute power as resting with God. This divine power is entrusted onto a trustworthy mediator (i.e., the pope, the emperor, or the king) who can then distribute it downwards via a hierarchy of officials. As such, the power devolved from the top to the bottom of this imaginary hierarchical pyramid is never original but always “derived from ‘above.’”<sup>43</sup> In this scheme, God is central and it informs all notions of legitimacy.<sup>44</sup> As Maurice DeWulf argues, whether power is held by rulers, legalists, the papacy, or a representative republic, “in any case, it always derives back to God as its source.”<sup>45</sup> On the contrary, the ascending thesis designates a populist conception of government in which the source of power is located in the community: “[w]hatever power is found in the organs of the government, whatever power they have in creating law, is in the last resort traceable to the people.”<sup>46</sup> As such, the power held by the representatives of the people at the top of the pyramid is always derived from below. The moral source is no longer God but ‘the people.’ Although the ascending theme of government became predominant from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onward, it only reached full maturity in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The two theses correspond more to ideal types than to a true depiction of reality. In fact, Ullmann himself acknowledges the existence of anomalies and the discrepancy between theory and reality.<sup>47</sup> While his theory might be too parsimonious for some medievalists, it provides us with a strong and adequate framework to study the long-term changes in legitimacy that were taking place at the time. Even though Ullmann’s work may contain omissions, mistakes, and questionable interpretations of important texts, his narrative seems to fit with the broader socio-cultural trends that marked the advent of modernity in Europe.<sup>48</sup> Also, Ullmann’s overall argument is supported by Reinhard Bendix’s study

41 Ullmann Walter, *Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages*, Methuen, London, 1964.

42 Ullmann Walter, *Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages*, Methuen, London, 1964, p.20.

43 Ullmann Walter, *Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages*, Methuen, London, 1964, p.21.

44 De Wulf Maurice, *Philosophy and Civilization in the Middle Ages*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1922, p.244.

45 De Wulf Maurice, *Philosophy and Civilization in the Middle Ages*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1922, p.243.

46 Ullmann Walter, *Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages*, Methuen, London, 1964, p.20.

47 Ullmann Walter, *The Individual and Society in the Middle Ages*, Methuen, London, 1967.

48 Oakley Francis, *Celestial Hierarchies Revisited: Walter Ullmann’s Vision of Medieval Politics, Past and Present*, Vol.60, No.1, 1973,

of the long-term shift in authority from kings to the people.<sup>49</sup>

Now that the broad shift in legitimacy has been outlined, it is necessary to look at the normative transformations that paved the way for the secularisation of Europe's political structures. In the following section, I look at the main characteristics of the descending order and then I sketch the return of the ascending thesis as a result of the emergence of a more attractive moral foundation. As we will see, the recovery of the works of Greek philosophers in the 12<sup>th</sup> century introduced a new moral purpose that challenged the papal claims to spiritual and temporal supremacy and that led to the emergence of an autonomous secular political realm.

### The Descending Theme in St Augustine and Gelasius I

Before the 13<sup>th</sup> century, even though religion and politics were integrated into the papacy and the differentiation of the political from the religious sphere did "not make historical sense," some sort of evolution in this direction can be traced back from the early days of Christianity.<sup>50</sup> The incredible spread of the faith since its inception called for the indispensable development of a complex institutional structure to organise all Christians. In practice, this meant that even though it was "pursuing religious ends, the leadership of the Church was compelled to adopt political ways of behavior and political modes of thought."<sup>51</sup> As Sheldon Wolin argues,

By the end of the second century, [Christianity] had ceased to be a loose association of believers, bound together by ties of doctrine and the vague primacy of the early apostles, and had become instead an institutionalized order...it was gradually realized that a believing society did not differ from any other kind of society in its need for leadership, governance, discipline, and settled procedures for conducting business.<sup>52</sup>

From 380 onward, by an imperial decree, Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire, and by the same token, "the papacy...became focalized as a governmental institution."<sup>53</sup>

Such an evolution in the nature of the Church marked a turning point

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pp.3-48. Bartelson Jens, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, pp.101-102.

49 Bendix R., *Kings or People: Power and the Mandate to Rule*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978.

50 Ullmann Walter, *Medieval Political Thought*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1975, p.16, 18.

51 Wolin Sheldon, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2004, p.88.

52 Wolin Sheldon, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2004, p.96.

53 Ullmann Walter, *Medieval Political Thought*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1975, p.20.

which led to a profound questioning of the legitimacy and status of the authority of both pope and emperor. By the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century, "there was no basic difference between the concept of the monarchic function of the pope and that of the emperor."<sup>54</sup> The Church had become a politico-religious complex and such a dualism of authority within Christianity needed to be justified and legitimised.<sup>55</sup> How could the Church be intertwined with the Empire yet avoid becoming a political instrument? How was the brute military power of the Roman Empire to be reconciled with the message of Christ? Such a task was undertaken by St Augustine and for centuries, his answer prevailed.

St Augustine (354-430) famously considered politics to be a necessary evil that was on the whole most regrettable but unavoidable. For the Bishop of Hippo, men's post-lapsarian condition called for the creation of some sort of coercive arrangement to tame their passions, greed, and selfishness. The subjection of man to man through some form of government was a divinely sanctioned solution to punish the sinners, test the faithful, and control man's destructive impulses. Before one could hope to reach the blissful state of eternal life in heaven, one had to be a pilgrim in this world and endure the harshness of the present abode. Thus, the Augustinian ideal painted a picture of political communities as "artificial and purely conventional institutions designed (albeit at the behest of divine inspiration)... to control the consequences of fallen human nature."<sup>56</sup>

For St Augustine, politics was essentially limited in its ability to fulfil men's quest for eternal salvation. Since the most fundamental needs of men were those that no earthly society could ever satisfy, the form of government was of little significance. As St Augustine put it: "As for this mortal life is concerned, which is spent and finished in a few days, what difference does it make under what rule a man lives who is soon to die, provided only that those who rule him do not compel him to do what is impious and wicked?"<sup>57</sup> Earthly life was ultimately fleeting and transient and as long as a political government – whether pagan or Christian – could secure peace, order, and allowed the faithful to pursue their religious quest for salvation unhindered by political concerns, it had fulfilled its function within the divine plan. As a result of his teachings

[an] intricate pattern of religion and politics, intersecting but not absorbing, was fashioned to teach that the political and the spiritual were distinctive, however complementary they might be at certain points; that while each ought to benefit the other, neither

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54 Ullmann Walter, *Medieval Political Thought*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1975, p.22.

55 Wolin Sheldon, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2004, p.99.

56 Nederman Cary, *Medieval Aristotelianism and Its Limits: Classical Traditions in Moral and Political Philosophy, 12th-15th Centuries*, Variorum, Aldershot, 1997, pp.4-5.

57 Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, RW Dyson (ed.). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p.217.

could achieve the other's salvation; and since it followed that the one ought not to be judged by the mission of the other, each had to be understood to an important degree in its own terms.<sup>58</sup>

Yet, ultimate allegiance was to the divine order. For the Bishop of Hippo, the wretchedness of earthly existence still required one to look beyond the present life.

Two generations after the death of St Augustine, the authorities of both Church and emperor were justified through papal pronouncements. Gelasius I (pope between 492 and 496) developed the doctrine of the Two Swords as a means to reaffirm the authority of the Church and the unity of Christian society. Gelasius argued that *sacerdotium* (the Church) and *regnum* (the emperor), though with separate powers, corresponded to the spiritual and the temporal arms of a united Christian society, a duality within Christ's body. As to the relationship between these two 'governments,' Gelasius I was quick to add that the emperor had the duty to assist the realisation of the divine plan in this world through the use of his sword "for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Romans 13:4). As a member of Christianity, the emperor was a son (*filius*) of the Church, remained under the pope's jurisdiction, and was denied any autonomy. By the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, it was agreed that *papa a nemine iudicatur*, i.e., 'the pope is judged by no one.' Besides sacramental power (*potestas ordinis*), the pope came to enjoy some sort of jurisdictional power if not jurisdictional sovereignty (*potestas jurisdictionis*).<sup>59</sup> While these pronouncements by no means marked the separation of religious affairs from temporal ones, they laid down the foundation for a 'division of labour' within Christianity. Indeed, in religious matters, the clergy remained in control, while in temporal matters the clergy obeyed imperial laws because of the divine source of the emperor's power. But both authorities were subject to the authority of God.

The descending themes of the Augustinian and Gelasian theological doctrines remained widely accepted until the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Political theories that called for the complete submission of earthly rulers to spiritual powers set "the predominant tone of political debate in the Latin West down to the thirteenth century and, in many respects, beyond."<sup>60</sup> In fact, one has to wait for the rediscovery of Aristotle, and the Thomist synthesis to witness major challenges to the doctrines of the Two Swords and of the Two Cities. Combined with an increasing resistance of rulers to accept their role as 'sons of the Church,' these theological challenges proved devastating to the Church's authority and marked

58 Wolin Sheldon, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2004, p.111.

59 Canning J., *A History of Medieval Political Thought, 300-1450*, Routledge, New York, 1996, p.32.

60 Dyson in Aquinas Thomas, *St Thomas Aquinas, Political Writings*, R W Dyson (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, pp.xxiv-xxv.

an epochal shift in forms of legitimacy.

At the political level, the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries witnessed the emergence of proto-territorial states in England, the Norman kingdom of Sicily, and France.<sup>61</sup> The striving of territorial entities within the universal jurisdiction of the Church posed major political, theological, and legal issues.<sup>62</sup> While the medieval view whereby temporal and spiritual powers coexisted within the Church had proved a viable alternative for centuries, the papacy and lay rulers began to question this arrangement in a fundamental manner. Both parties came to recognise the essential need for an ultimate authority. Pope Gregory VII (1025-1085) thought to increase the Church's independence from non-Christian elements through its centralisation under the pope's command.<sup>63</sup>

The 12<sup>th</sup> century introduced major innovations in the theory of papal monarchy.<sup>64</sup> Numerous canonists and publicists began to challenge the dualist approach to authority and to develop hierocratic theories of power to assert the supremacy of the papacy. The pope took over the title of Vicar of Christ and began to claim 'fullness of power' - *plenitudo potestatis*. Along with his bishop's mitre, he came to acquire a crown - *regnum*.<sup>65</sup> Claims to political supremacy found their utmost expression with Innocent III and under his leadership, the medieval papacy reached its 'apogee'.<sup>66</sup>

Arguing that the salvation of all was entrusted onto the pope, Innocent III (1161-1216) proclaimed his ability to govern in such a way as to halt and combat any hindrance that might be in the way to the salvation of the Christian society. Therefore, he not only claimed the right to universal jurisdiction, but arguing that sin was the main obstacle to salvation, maintained that whenever sin was implicated, the pope had a duty to act. Under 'reason of sin' (*ratione peccati*), the papacy was given power to intervene in any situation.<sup>67</sup> As Adda Bozeman explains

Under Innocent III the church had become an international state. It had the power to set large armies in motion...to control the mighty and the meek, to raise funds by direct taxation, and to bring offenders to justice. It controlled education, propaganda, social welfare, and the courts, and it wielded the awesome power of eternal

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61 Strayer J. R., *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1970, p.10.

62 Canning J., *A History of Medieval Political Thought, 300-1450*, Routledge, New York, 1996, p.83.

63 Canning J., *A History of Medieval Political Thought, 300-1450*, Routledge, New York, 1996, p.87. Ullmann Walter, *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages*, Methuen, London, 1972, pp.148-149.

64 Morris C., *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050 to 1250*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989, p.205.

65 Morris C., *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050 to 1250*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989, p.130.

66 Morris C., *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050 to 1250*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989, p.205. Ullmann Walter, *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages*, Methuen, London, 1972, p.225.

67 Ullmann Walter, *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages*, Methuen, London, 1972, p.224.

life and death.<sup>68</sup>

As a result of Gregory VII and Innocent III's challenges, the Church distanced and separated itself from secular political authorities. This separation strengthened the papacy but begged for the definition of the role secular rulers were now to play. Because their religious authority was no longer justified, kings and princes had to find another foundation on which to establish their power. As Joseph Strayer put it, "the Gregorian concept of the Church almost demanded the invention of the concept of the State."<sup>69</sup> Such a demand found an answer in two major intellectual transformations.

The first transformation was the "emerging rationalism of medieval jurisprudence" under the influence of Roman law and the rediscovery of Roman literature – especially of the work of Cicero.<sup>70</sup> The second and most important transformation corresponded to the recovery of the great works of Aristotle which "entailed a rather radical re-orientation in the realm of thought."<sup>71</sup> So radical a re-orientation that, Ullmann claims, "[i]t would be hard to point to any historical phenomenon of doctrinal order which was to effect such far-reaching changes."<sup>72</sup>

The recovery of *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* through Christianity's encounters with Islam allowed for the rediscovery of Aristotle's political thought during the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. The introduction of ancient Greek philosophy in the context of the Middle Ages proved inspiring and provocative as it provided rulers with the tools they had until then lacked to dispute the ecclesiastical order and the theological foundation of its legitimacy.<sup>73</sup> Aristotle's conception of man as a political animal by nature proved a direct challenge to Christian revelation. Because it implied that the realisation of men's nature could only be achieved

68 Bozeman A., *Politics and Culture in International History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1960, p.256.

69 Strayer J. R., *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1970, p.22.

70 Nielsen D. A., Inquisition, Rationalization and Sociocultural Change in Medieval Europe, In: *Time, Place, and Circumstance: Neo-Weberian Studies in Comparative Religious History*, Swatos W H (ed.), Greenwood Press, London, 1990, p.112.

71 Ullmann Walter, *Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages*, Methuen, London, 1964, p.231. Cary Nederman argues that 12<sup>th</sup> century scholars were acquainted with Aristotle's philosophy by means of alternate sources prior to the rediscovery and translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotelian ideas were already integrated into the intellectual life of medieval Europe and the recovery of the *Ethics* only 'confirmed and reinforced' ideas that were familiar and even traditional. Cicero played a very important role in this regard and was central to this 'underground tradition' that circulated elements of Greek philosophy. Nederman Cary, *Medieval Aristotelianism and Its Limits: Classical Traditions in Moral and Political Philosophy, 12th-15th Centuries*, Variorum, Aldershot, 1997, p.59, 67, 75.

72 Ullmann Walter, *Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages*, Methuen, London, 1964, p.231. Cary Nederman has noted that even though "Aristotle was perhaps the single most decisive classical figure in medieval moral and political philosophy," the idea of a swift and ubiquitous 'Aristotelian revolution' in the Middle Ages is essentially a 'scholarly chimera.' Nederman Cary, *Medieval Aristotelianism and Its Limits: Classical Traditions in Moral and Political Philosophy, 12th-15th Centuries*, Variorum, Aldershot, 1997, p. ix, II:193-94. Cary Nederman argues that the importance of Aristotle is exaggerated and that Cicero's influence was of greater significance. This dispute does not affect the line of argument developed in this thesis since ultimately both Cicero and Aristotle shifted medieval scholarship in a naturalistic direction.

73 Ullmann Walter, *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages*, Methuen, London, 1972.

within the perfect *polis*, it offered a way for people to realise their potential independently of the Church and without the mediation of the ecclesiastic hierarchy. Not only was the political dimension of mankind thought to be superior and to encompass all others, but more importantly, the origins of the political community and the authority of the rulers were no longer found in God but in nature.

Aristotle's philosophy culminated in the view of the state as the supreme community of citizens and as the by-product of the proper functioning of the law of nature. The establishment of the 'natural' realm cannot be underestimated. In effect, earlier challengers to the pope's theocracy, "because they spoke the same language, used the same Bible and the same similes, and worked with the same patristic equipment as their opponents did," remained unsuccessful.<sup>74</sup> But in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, as Ullmann argues, "what generations of writers and governments had been seeking was now found in the simple application of the concept of nature. The State was in a word, a natural thing, and herewith the conceptual gulf between it and the Church was opened up."<sup>75</sup> Ultimately, Aristotle allowed for the creation of a reality outside the wholly Christocentric intellectual framework of the papacy. Revelation was now confronted by the Aristotelian source of morality. Equipped with the concept of nature, the ascending theme of government and law was recovered at the expense of the papacy, paving the way for the general differentiation of the religious and political spheres at the heart of the secularisation process.

### **The Political Implications of 'Nature'**

Faced with the Aristotelian threat, Pope Gregory IX (1143-1241) had no choice but to forbid the study of his works until they had been 'examined and purified.' Amongst others, Thomas Aquinas undertook this vast task of bringing Aristotle within the sphere of the Church and making it 'compatible' with the revealed Word of God. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Aquinas (1225-1274) introduced political theory to medieval Europe and worked toward the development of a science of government based on natural human reason. The work of the Dominican monk was deeply influenced by his thorough study of Aristotle. In particular, the ideas of a teleological and self-sustaining nature and the definition of man as a social and political animal became important pillars of the Thomist philosophy. In an Aristotelian fashion, Aquinas held that man's natural instincts would ultimately bring about the development of an organised community, of which the pinnacle was the state. The state was a natural thing that emerged according to natural laws and through the use of natural reason. Knowing that nature was God's creation and possessed its own intrinsic laws it could now operate without the spir-

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74 Ullmann Walter, *Medieval Political Thought*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1975, p.193.

75 Ullmann Walter, *Medieval Political Thought*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1975, p.179.

itual mediation of an ecclesiastical body.

This reappraisal of the relationship between the Church and the state opened up a major conceptual gulf: “[t]he State was a natural product; the Church a supra-natural product.”<sup>76</sup> In fact, the natural origins of political government meant that the Church was no longer necessary for the proper conduct of political affairs as these were no longer divine in any sense, but natural. Conversely, because the state worked according to the divine laws as expressed in nature and accessed through reason, it could function independently from the Church.<sup>77</sup> Civil law was “thus attributed an importance in spiritual terms that it had not heretofore enjoyed. Most importantly, this link between nature and spirit made politics, from a Christian perspective, an important and worthy endeavour.”<sup>78</sup> Earthly politics was no longer incompatible with the spiritual realm as St Augustine had upheld, but could now have a positive function of its own in facilitating “man’s attainment of the [supernatural] end for which he was created.”<sup>79</sup> Likewise, as the upshot of the workings of natural and rational laws, the political realm and secular rulers were given an autonomous role in God’s plan.<sup>80</sup>

The redrawing of the boundaries of the spheres of politics and religion led Aquinas to revive the theory of the Two Coordinate Powers according to which “the temporal power was inherent, not derived, and that the secular state must be recognized... as part of God’s plan and as rooted in man’s nature.”<sup>81</sup> In *Scripta Super Libros Sententiarum*, Aquinas judged that

Spiritual and secular power are both derived from the Divine power, and so secular power is subject to spiritual power insofar as this is ordered by God: that is, in those things which pertain to the salvation of the soul. In such matters, then, the spiritual power is to be obeyed before the secular. But in those things which pertain to the civil good, the secular power should be obeyed before the spiritual, according to Matthew 22:21: ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.’ Unless perhaps the spiritual and secular powers are conjoined, as in the pope, who holds the summit of both powers.<sup>82</sup>

For Aquinas, political institutions were thus “justified on a purely human plane, independently of religious values, which do not alter the natural order of

76 Ullmann Walter, *Medieval Political Thought*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1975, p.179.

77 For Aquinas, the use of reason was “nothing less than the rational creature’s participation in the eternal law.” Aquinas quoted in Bozeman (1960: 250).

78 Nelson, B. R., *Western Political Thought: From Socrates to the Age of Ideology*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1982, p.92.

79 Copleston F. C., *Aquinas*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1991, p.242.

80 Williams Harold, *International Relations in Political Theory*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1992, p.41.

81 Bozeman A., *Politics and Culture in International History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1960, p.245.

82 Aquinas Thomas, *St Thomas Aquinas, Political Writings*, R.W. Dyson (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p.278.

which the state is a necessary expression."<sup>83</sup>

The recognition of the importance and autonomy of politics, though seriously qualified, marked the clear-cut separation of the two realms and allowed Aquinas to reconcile Aristotle with Christianity. Through his attempt to bring Aristotle within Medieval theology, St Thomas ultimately, though unintentionally, argued that the intelligibility of nature did not depend on revelation and led medieval political thought in a more naturalistic direction. Likewise, the philosophy of Aquinas marked a turning point in the acceptance of the descending thesis of government and law. The legitimisation of the existence of the state independently of the supernatural realm meant that the institutional foundation of Christianity and the corresponding monopoly of the papacy were now superfluous. Even though nature was God's creation, the creation of the natural provided an alternative source of legitimacy for the kings. Besides, it only took a generation for the link between God and nature to be severed and for the laws of nature to draw their validity from their inherent reasonableness, a source of validity independent from the divine. Overall, what Aquinas achieved was to make "available the intellectual equipment by which his successors – notably Marsiglio of Padua – were at last to begin to unravel the long established interweaving of secular and spiritual themes in European political discourse."<sup>84</sup>

### **The Ascending Conception of Legitimacy**

The Aristotelian and Thomist ideas deeply influenced the new-born study of the art of government. And by the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century major works had been written on the relation between the political and the supernatural; "Nothing less than an intellectual revolution had progressively occurred."<sup>85</sup> Indeed, "'political theory' in the Middle Ages and early modern period was not the possession of a few articulate, self-possessed political theorists labouring away in their studies but, instead, was the making manifest of a whole climate of opinion that permeated the culture."<sup>86</sup> Among the many thinkers to foster this climate of opinion, three of them are of particular importance to our subject: Dante Alighieri, John of Paris, and Marsiglio of Padua. These scholars dealt with important issues brought up to the fore by the recovery of Aristotelianism and the spread of naturalism. The themes and ideas they developed greatly influenced political thinking for centuries, especially that of the Reformers. In the remainder of this

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83 D'Entrèves A. P., *The Medieval Contribution to Political Thought: Thomas Aquinas, Marsilius of Padua*, Richard Hooker, Oxford University Press, London, 1939, p.24.

84 Dyson in Aquinas Thomas, *St Thomas Aquinas, Political Writings*, R W Dyson (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p.xxxvi.

85 Canning J., *A History of Medieval Political Thought, 300-1450*, Routledge, New York, 1996, p.134.

86 Elstain J. B., *Sovereignty: God, State, and Self*, Basic Books, New York, 2008, p.67.

paper, I outline the most important implications of the work of these three scholars for our understanding of the shift in legitimacy at the heart of the process of secularisation.

In *De Monarchia*, Dante (1265-1321) attempted to tackle three broad issues pertaining to the necessity of monarchy, Roman history, and the divine source of monarchical authority. The third theme was meant as an address and contribution to the debate that was raging at the time on the relationship between the emperor and the papacy. Through a careful development of Thomist themes, Dante maintained that the pope's authority only extended over the supernatural realm, and thus, that the natural realm was left to the emperor and secular rulers. Arguing that 'what comes from nature comes from God,' Dante denied any papal right of supervision over political affairs.<sup>87</sup> Instead, based on his acceptance of the Thomist idea that grace only perfects nature, the Italian poet argued:

Temporal government does not receive its existence from the spiritual, nor the power which is its authority, nor even its operation as such; but it does receive help from the spiritual government to operate more powerfully by the light of grace with which the blessing of the supreme pontiff infuses it in heaven and on earth.<sup>88</sup>

As a result of this separation, Dante maintained that the mediation of the clergy between God and man was supererogatory. Moreover, based on his beliefs in the divine origins of the emperor's authority and in the natural necessity of having a single sovereign, he established imperial supremacy in temporal affairs.

In conjunction with this re-working of the relation between the natural and the supernatural, Dante further developed the ascending thesis of government which Aquinas had begun to restore. While Aquinas had developed the themes of the 'will of the people' and political representation, Dante went further and came to argue that 'the function of any right government is to see that men exist for their own sakes.' These developments in political thought at the turn of the 14<sup>th</sup> century marked the beginning of the modern concept of popular sovereignty and Dante's work was "a prophecy of the modern State."<sup>89</sup>

In a similar vein, John of Paris (1255-1306) challenged the papal claim to authority over both temporal and spiritual realms. Following Aquinas, he defined man as a political and social animal and located the origins of political authority in natural law. The position adopted by John of Paris differed from Aquinas' in that he starkly marked the difference between the Church as a purely mystical entity and the state as a purely natural one. By the same token, he allocated purely sacramental powers to the former and purely jurisdictional powers to the latter. In his *On Royal and Papal Power*, John of Paris equated the spiritual Church

87 Dante A., *De Monarchia*, Moore E and Reade W H V (eds), Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1916, p.88.

88 Dante A., *De Monarchia*, Moore E and Reade W H V (eds), Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1916, p.71.

89 Figgis J. N., *Studies of Political Thought from Gerson to Grotius 1414-1625*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1916, p.25.

with the supernatural, and the temporal political government with the natural.<sup>90</sup> This clear-cut opposition of the two spheres was accompanied by the claim for the independence of the two realms from one another's jurisdiction. As such, in theory, any temporal object was relocated under the authority of the state, leaving only the spiritual lands to the Church.

Following Aquinas and Dante, John of Paris argued that the power of the king was derived from the will of God as expressed through the will of the people. In the cases of both Church and political government, rulers and holders of offices drew their power from elections or the consent of the people. In fact there was a dual source of authority in the case of prelates; their power was "not from God through the pope but immediately from God and from the people who elect or consent."<sup>91</sup> However, like Aristotle, Aquinas, and Dante, John of Paris conceived of nature as being the creation of God, and as such there remained a major step to be taken before men could become independent from the Father and His divine law. Such a step was taken by Marsiglio of Padua in *The Defender of the Peace*.

Opposing natural reason to revelation, Marsiglio (1290-1342) argued that the relationship between nature and God was not factual but rather a matter of faith that could not be demonstrated through the use of natural reason. As a consequence of the unknowable nature of this relationship, the Italian medieval scholar affirmed the strict separation of the natural and supernatural realms. From this separation, there followed that the only object of study that could matter to a student of government and political science was the natural political entity devoid of any supernatural features.

Contrasting with the idea of Thomas Aquinas that 'grace does not do away with nature but perfects it,' Marsiglio broke the link between the two. Politically, this meant that secular communities became ends in themselves and could not be perfected by any supernatural element. Whether citizens were Christians or pagans mattered very little since the constitutive element of "the only public body that lived on its own laws and on its own inner substance," the state, "was the citizen pure and simple."<sup>92</sup> By the same token, the authority of the laws did not reside in its divine source but was derived from the universal body of citizens within the political community, i.e., the will of the people.<sup>93</sup> Laws were no longer revealed but made and the 'congregation of the faithful' gave way to the 'congregation of citizens.'

Like Dante, Marsiglio maintained that the only domain reserved to the

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90 Paris John of, *On Royal and Papal Power*, Monahan A P (ed.), Columbia University Press, New York, 1974.

91 Quoted in Tierney B., *The Crisis of Church and State, 1050-1300: With Selected Documents*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1988, p.208.

92 Ullmann Walter, *Medieval Political Thought*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1975, p.206.

93 Padua Marsilius of, *The Defender of the Peace*, Brett A. S. (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, pp.66-72.

Church was the care of the souls. There followed that the Church's wealth or 'coercive jurisdiction' were irrelevant if not damaging to the proper conduct of its tasks.<sup>94</sup> He saw the papacy's 'plenitude of power' as a major source of strife and disruption to the tranquillity that humans naturally seek. The Italian scholar criticised the juridical powers of the Church and argued that these had been unjustifiably seized from both Christ and princes, the sole judges in divine and human matters respectively. Far from holding any such juridical powers, coercive function, or 'intrinsic dignity,' Marsiglio argued that the priesthood was of conventional origins and only held a voluntary position of 'stewardship' as well as "a power of ordering church ritual and of regulating persons in respect to the practice of divine worship in the temple or house of God."<sup>95</sup> Instead, Marsiglio claimed that the Roman emperor was the supreme holder of coercive authority. As the elected prince of the universal body of faithful citizens, the emperor was endowed with all powers over the priesthood.

This redrawing of the roles and spheres of influence of both religion and politics marked the secularisation of the papal-hierocratic doctrine. As Wilks notes, Marsiglio's society no longer exists for a religious end, but instead, "the Christian religion is permitted to flourish in the society for the purely secular end of internal security... The human society of Marsiglio is a complete inversion of the papally-inspired Christian society, and in nearly every way is an exact parallel to it."<sup>96</sup> For Donald Nielsen, it is this shift in orientations towards inner-worldliness that was linked with "the rise of universities, the growth of towns, the emergence of new handicrafts and forms of intellectual and manual labor, and the rationalization of cultural life in general."<sup>97</sup>

## Conclusion

In this article, I attempted to develop a theoretical approach to the secularisation process based on recent advances in Sociology and international political theories. In particular, I drew on renewed interests in issues of legitimacy to develop a perspective on secularisation using resources from the field of IR. In the first part, I looked at the recent redefinition of the secularisation process. I argued that faced with the revival of the religious factor in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, philosophers and sociologists were pushed to re-appraise long-held assumptions regarding the nature of modern societies. The secularisation thesis was criticised

94 Padua Marsilius of, *The Defender of the Peace*, Brett A. S. (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, pp.161-163.

95 Padua Marsilius of, *The Defender of the Peace*, Brett A. S. (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, p.316.

96 Wilks M., *The Problem of Sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages: The Papal Monarchy with Augustinus Triumphus and the Publicists*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1963, p.113.

97 Nielsen D. A., *Inquisition, Rationalization and Sociocultural Change in Medieval Europe*, In: *Time, Place, and Circumstance: Neo-Weberian Studies in Comparative Religious History*, Swatos W H (ed.), Greenwood Press, London, 1990, pp.20-21.

and challenged, leading scholars to develop a neo-secularisation approach. As a result, the secularisation process was redefined as a long-term shift in legitimacy that facilitated the re-location of decision-making away from the Church and towards secular institutions.

In the second part, I considered the recent development of theoretical approaches to long-term transformations in legitimacy in the field of IR. Drawing on the work of Christian Reus-Smit and Daniel Philpott, I sketched an approach to secularisation using resources already present in the field. I explained that the process could be understood as a shift in the meta-values or moral purpose that legitimised political authority that ultimately enabled the shift in power and functions from the Church to secular rulers. I traced the secularisation of Europe in parallel with changing norms of legitimacy in the Middle Ages. Based on Ullmann's study of principles of law and government, I outlined the shift in legitimating principles from God to the notion of 'nature'. I explained how, as a result of intellectual changes, the constitutional structures legitimating the authority of the Church were challenged. The notion of 'nature' became widely accepted and led to the increase in legitimacy of secular forms of authority based on the ascending theme of government. Medieval thinkers such as Dante, John of Paris, and Marsiglio of Padua spearheaded a profound purge of all Christian and supernatural elements from the Augustinian doctrine of the Two Cities and the descending theme of government. The end result was the slow secularisation of European societies. Now that the connections have been drawn between the medieval shift in legitimacy and secularisation and that these connections seem to be supported by the historical record, I would like to conclude the paper on a theoretical note.

In an article entitled 'International Crises of Legitimacy,' Christian Reus-Smit provides a very comprehensive definition of key terms.<sup>98</sup> He uses the term 'international' to refer to the "amorphous social realm that encompasses the complex array of political relations among states and non-state actors ...that transcend and constitute the territorial boundaries of sovereign states."<sup>99</sup> As a Europe-wide phenomenon that afflicted the Church, the Empire, and secular rulers, and that was ultimately rooted in both domestic and transnational processes, secularisation clearly had an international dimension. Moreover, as a 'critical turning point' whereby the Church's inability to adapt led to the collapse, demise, disempowerment, and slow decline into irrelevance of Christianity, secularisation can be defined as a crisis<sup>100</sup>. The protracted nature of the process and the unfolding of events over centuries made it a 'chronic' crisis, but a crisis nevertheless.<sup>101</sup> Knowing that this great crisis led to the transfer of the Church's entitlement "to

98 Reus-Smit Christian, International Crisis of Legitimacy, *International Politics*, Vol.44, No.2/3, 2007, pp.157-74.

99 Reus-Smit Christian, International Crisis of Legitimacy, *International Politics*, Vol.44, No.2/3, 2007, p.166.

100 Reus-Smit Christian, International Crisis of Legitimacy, *International Politics*, Vol.44, No.2/3, 2007, p.166.

101 Reus-Smit Christian, International Crisis of Legitimacy, *International Politics*, Vol.44, No.2/3, 2007, p.168.

issue authoritative commands” to secular rulers, to the decrease in compliance from those subjected to its authority, and to the increased failure of its decisions to be “socially sanctioned,” the secularisation process can be described as a chronic international crisis of legitimacy.<sup>102</sup>

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## СЕКУЛАРИЗАЦИЈА КАО ЛЕГИТИМАЦИЈА МЕЋУНАРОДНЕ КРИЗЕ

### Резиме

Научници из области међународне политике недавно су дошли до закључка о глобалном оживљавању религије. Од зачетка области међународне политике теза о секуларизацији узимана је здраво-за-готово, а религија одбацивана као неважна. Међутим, у складу с текућом трансформацијом, која утиче на друштва широм света, као и са преиспитивањем тезе о секуларизацији од стране социолога, нови извори морају се развити унутар међународних односа како би се боље разумели актуелни догађаји. Док се теорије и концепти развијају унутар социологије и политичких наука, исти нису доступни међународној политици. С обзиром на то, овај чланак даје оквирну теорију секуларизације базирајући се на изворима у оквиру саме области. Ослањајући се на широку традицију конструктивизма овај чланак изнова тумачи секуларизацију као дуготрајну међународну кризу легитимитета.

**Кључне речи:** легитимитет, секуларизација, религија, међународна политика, средњи век.

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