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‘Our post-Christian age’: Historicist-inspired diagnoses of modernity, 1935–70

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Introduction

“‘Post-Christian Era’? Nonsense!’ declared one of Europe’s foremost theologians, Karl Barth, in August 1948, at the first assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam.

How do we come to adopt as self-evident the phrase first used by a German National Socialist, that we are today living in an ‘un-Christian’ or even ‘post-Christian’ era? ... How indeed do we come to the fantastic opinion that secularism and godlessness are inventions of *our* time; that there was once a glorious Christian Middle Age with a generally accepted Christian faith, and it is now our task to set up this wonderful state of affairs again in new form?¹

The World Council assembly was an appropriate venue for raising these questions, as several high-profile attendees used the very phrase, ‘post-Christian era’, in their diagnosis of the times. Even Martin Niemöller, a collaborator of Barth in the German Confessing Church, stated at the Amsterdam conference that ‘we already talk about a “post-Christian age”, in which we live and see the Christian church nearing its decline’.² Apparently, by 1948, ‘post-Christian era’ had become a familiar turn of phrase, at least in circles of the World Council of Churches. But where did it come from and what did it mean?

Barth’s emphatic statement notwithstanding, ‘post-Christian age’ was not a phrase of National Socialist origin. Admittedly, it resonated among secularists of right-wing political leaning, especially in the 1930s and early 1940s. By 1948, however, it had been adopted on a fairly wide scale by Christian theologians and church leaders who worried about the advance of anti-Christian forces in European societies. ‘Post-Christian age’ had come to resemble ‘secularization’ in that it invoked narratives of dramatic change, rich with emotional resonance, that different religious and political parties could use to their own purposes.³ What Barth could not foresee was that soon after World War II, secularist intellectuals would abandon their habit

of diagnosing the times as ‘post-Christian’. In the 1950s and early 1960s, ‘post-Christian age’ would come to serve primarily as a *Kampfbegriff* between two specific groups of Christian intellectuals: reform-inclined church leaders in and around the World Council of Churches who advocated a thorough rethinking of theological beliefs and church practices in the light of new societal circumstances, and more conservative Christians who interpreted such reformism as capitulation to a secular zeitgeist or as evidence that secularization did not halt before the doors of the church.

These underlying narratives of progress or decline touch upon one of the key questions in the (sparse) historical literature on post-prefixes: What did the ‘post’ in ‘post-industrial’, ‘postmodern’ or ‘postcolonial’ intend to convey? Did ‘post’ serve as a marker of critical dissociation, indicating that the root concept was no longer seen as representing a desirable condition? Or was ‘post’ an equivalent to ‘beyond’ in a chronological sense of the word, announcing the dawn of a new age in which the industrial, modern or colonial experience had become a thing of the past?⁴ Drawing on examples from Germany, France, Great Britain and the Netherlands (with a brief excursion to the United States),⁵ I will argue that the ‘post-Christian age’ was interpreted almost without exception in terms of historical stages. Seen through the prism of stadial philosophies of history, the ‘post-Christian age’ was believed to open up a new chapter in the history of Europe.

Indeed, despite the fact that the image of an imminent post-Christian era could be adapted to serve the religious-political agendas of conservative Catholics as easily as those of aggressive atheists, a striking similarity between the mid-twentieth-century authors who took the lead in exploring the post-Christian is their indebtedness to what Mark Bevir calls ‘developmental historicism’, characteristic of which are (1) the belief that history amounts to a progressive unfolding of ideas or principles and (2) the habit of dividing this historical process in distinct eras, ages or periods.⁶ Whether the post-Christian age was welcomed, as by Otto Petras, or perceived as a threat to everything holy, as in the case of Christopher Dawson, the philosophies of history underlying their diagnoses of modernity all varied on historicist themes. So, although the authors discussed in this chapter *positioned* themselves quite differently vis-à-vis the post-Christian age (or what they understood this to be), the *conceptual schemes* on which they relied in this defining and positioning were more similar to each other than one might expect in the light of their different political, religious and philosophical backgrounds.

This finding is important for two reasons. First, it allows us to situate ‘post-Christian’ among other twentieth-century post-concepts. As I will return to in the conclusion, ‘post-Christian’ resembled ‘post-capitalist’

and 'post-industrial' more than 'postliberal' or 'post-secular'. Whereas the latter group of concepts referred to *intellectual positions* held by individuals (with the prefix denoting a critical stance vis-à-vis the root concepts), the former group described the features of a *historical epoch* (the 'modern age'). Second, this shows, *pace* Mark Bevir, that developmental historicism did not disappear in the early twentieth-century 'crises of historicism'.⁷ Mid-century assessments of the post-Christian predicament illustrate just how powerful the legacies of nineteenth-century historicism still were at that time.⁸ The historicist connotations of 'post' in 'post-Christian' demonstrate, in other words, that the authors discussed in this chapter were not yet 'post-historicist'.

Otto Petras

Who was the 'German National Socialist' whom Karl Barth held responsible for coining the phrase 'post-Christian age'?⁹ Barth may have thought of Alfred Rosenberg, the Nazi ideologue, or Janko Janéff, a Berlin-based Bulgarian Nazi propagandist who in 1939 had greeted the dawn of a 'post-Christian time' and a 'post-Christian culture'.¹⁰ However, taking into account that Barth was notoriously sloppy in his references,¹¹ it is more likely that he referred to Otto Petras, who in the mid 1930s had gained attention with a treatise on the emergence of a 'fundamentally post-Christian world'.¹² Though not a National Socialist, Petras was a right-wing intellectual and admirer of Erich Ludendorff – hence politically situated at great distance from the staunch critic of nationalism that was Barth. A former Lutheran village pastor, Petras had abandoned his faith and found employment in a pedagogical institute.¹³ From the late 1920s onwards, he was a frequent contributor to *Widerstand*, a National Bolshevik periodical edited by Ernst Niekisch that also served as a platform for conservative thinkers like Ernst Jünger.¹⁴ Petras's 1935 book, *Post Christum* (After Christ), brought these threads together, arguing that Christianity was not dying, but already long dead. The book caused some stir: even Thomas Mann read it 'with interest and aversion'.¹⁵

What, then, made *Post Christum* such a remarkable study? To Barth's surprise, no doubt, Petras's pronouncement of death was partly inspired by the most vehement critique of liberal Protestantism that the Weimar Republic had seen emerge: Barth's *Der Römerbrief* (The Epistle to the Romans) in the edition of 1922. In uncompromising prose, this work had accused the German 'cultural-protestant' tradition for forgetting that God is the 'wholly Other', whose revelation in Christ is not the basic axiom of a religious worldview, but a thunder strike destroying all man-made

religion.¹⁶ Interpreting Barth's insistence on the infinite distance between God and human beings as the original essence of Christianity, Petras argued that, historically speaking, exclusive faith in the 'heavenly world above' had soon diminished to the point of disappearing altogether in the nineteenth-century theologies that had redefined Christianity into a programme for human self-actualization in a religious key.¹⁷ Literally quoting Barth, Petras therefore concluded that 'Christendom as we have known it has come to an end'.¹⁸

Yet there was a crucial difference between Barth and Petras. When Barth argued that 'the *Christian*-bourgeois or *bourgeois*-Christian age has come to a close', he referred to a period in which the church had perverted its witness by making the gospel subservient to social order and bourgeois morality.¹⁹ For Barth, the liquidation of this unholy alliance created opportunities for a new appreciation of the gospel. His iconoclasm, in other words, served a reformation. Petras, by contrast, equated the end of the 'Christian age' with the dawn of an age in which Christian faith no longer had any legitimate place. It had become anachronistic in the sense of representing a superseded stage in the development of the 'spirit'. Unlike Barth, who rejected all idealist philosophy of history, Petras saw history as a process driven by 'powers from the deep' (*Kräften der Tiefe*). Independent of human agency and consciousness, these 'powers of history' brought forth that what was 'historically necessary' (*geschichtlich Notwendig*). Historical phenomena like Christianity were thus no products of human hands, let alone created by divine purpose, but 'necessary emanations of the deep'.²⁰

Unmistakably, this argument betrayed the influence of post-Kantian idealism or, more specifically, Hegelian philosophy of history as further developed by Young Hegelians like Bruno Bauer – a staunch critic of religion who as early as 1855 had announced the end of the 'Christian-Germanic age'.²¹ Although Petras also closely aligned himself with Franz Overbeck, who had denounced the 'Christian age' as a figment of the imagination,²² Petras felt especially inspired by Bauer's argument that Christianity had once been a creative manifestation of the spirit, but ceased to be so when the spirit had further developed itself.²³ The secularization template on which Petras drew was thus a narrative developed by Left Hegelians in the years around 1848.²⁴ Consequently, when Petras argued that Christianity had 'exhausted its creative power', thereby suggesting 'that we live *post Christum* in a deeper sense than indicated by the calendar', this implies that the 'post' referred to a next stage in the development of the spirit.²⁵ The 'post' reveals, in other words, how deeply Petras had drunk from the well of post-Kantian philosophy of history.²⁶

Hans Ehrenberg

Petras's *Post Christum* reached an audience well beyond self-defined secularists. In particular, it was read widely among Christian theologians who worried about the advance of secular ideologies like 'godless Bolshevism'.²⁷ 'The end of the Christian age' (*das Ende des christlichen Zeitalters*) became a recurring phrase especially in defensive responses to the perceived dangers of Communism. For many German commentators, the end of that epoch was a looming threat that ought to be averted, first of all by diagnosing the powers intent on relegating Europe's Christian identity to the past. To that end, various terminological proposals were made. Some theologians perceived Communism as a key example of what the Jerusalem meeting of the International Missionary Council in 1928 had labelled 'secularism'.²⁸ Others perceived Communism and, after 1933, National Socialism as 'political religions', thereby emphasizing their incommensurability with Christianity.²⁹ Still others discerned in the Communist and National Socialist worldviews a resurgence of mythological thinking or a return to 'pagan' sources that justified the label 'neo-paganism'.³⁰

It was in this context that Hans Ehrenberg introduced the phrase 'post-Christian', in a meaning different from Petras's. Ehrenberg was a philosophy professor of Jewish descent who at age forty-one had given up his chair in Heidelberg for a Lutheran pulpit in Bochum.³¹ If his philosophy background made Ehrenberg an atypical pastor, so did the stream of publications that he unleashed. As early as 1932, he interpreted Communism as an offspring of European Idealism that had turned itself against the Occidental tradition, its Christian elements in particular. In Ehrenberg's view, this provoked a 'war of religion' between European Christianity and the 'antitheism' that was Communism.³² The 'anti' in 'antitheism' conveyed that Ehrenberg not simply conceived of Communism as a return to pre-Christian paganism. Although he believed Communism to be 'the most pagan paganism that has ever existed', he emphasized that it was pagan in a modern key, unimaginable without the 'Occidental spirit' on which it drew and against which it reacted.³³

In the 1940s, Ehrenberg expanded this analysis by arguing that the superiority of German National Socialism over, for instance, State Shinto in Meiji Japan was primarily due to its Christian background.³⁴ Whereas Shintoism was a 'primitive religion', 'post-Christian' Nazism simultaneously struggled against and relied on a religion that had 'formed man and world, order and life, politics and culture'. Therefore, when Ehrenberg placed Nazism on the top rung of a Fascist ladder, he did so because he believed that Christianity – the religion on which Nazism

drew in its rebellion against it – represented the highest stage of religious development. ‘The line ascends steeply from Japan via Turkey and Italy to the giddy heights of Nazism.’³⁵ Ehrenberg’s ‘post’ thus conveyed an almost opposite message than Petras’s. For Ehrenberg, ‘post-Christian’ referred to the Christian arsenals from which Nazism borrowed its weapons. ‘The material is almost equally pre-Christian and post-Christian, but the main substance is post-Christian ... and the dynamic power is exclusively so.’³⁶

Unlike Petras, then, Ehrenberg did not hail the emergence of a post-Christian era. He rather used the phrase to warn his readers against a political religion that was successful partly through ingeniously exploiting resources borrowed from the world’s most advanced religion: Christianity. Underlying this argument, however, was a philosophy of history not unlike Petras’s developmental historicism. Ehrenberg, too, assumed that reality is best interpreted through the prism of ‘ideas’, ‘systems’ or ‘worldviews’; that these ideas develop over time, meanwhile translating themselves into social, political and cultural patterns; that some ideas have greater potential than others, as illustrated by the various stages of progression realized by the ‘world’s religions’; and that distinct phases can be distinguished within this development. For someone who had studied with Wilhelm Windelband, published on Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel, lectured on ‘the philosophy of history and civilization’, and worked in close proximity to Ernst Troeltsch and Alfred Weber, these commitments were perhaps not altogether surprising.³⁷ Ehrenberg’s entire cultural milieu was shaped by the legacies of Idealist historicism.³⁸

Arnold Toynbee

To what extent can similar historicist influences be detected in Great Britain, a country that, at much smaller scale, had had its own tradition of philosophical Idealism?³⁹ Interestingly, when ‘post-Christian’ entered the vocabulary of British intellectuals, the meanings attached to this diagnostic concept resembled Ehrenberg’s. This was due in the first place to the historian and international relations expert, Arnold J. Toynbee. The first volumes of *A Study of History* (twelve volumes, 1934–61) had earned Toynbee a reputation for cultural-political diagnosis from a long-term historical perspective. As early as 1940, Toynbee told an Oxford audience that such a long-term perspective made the modern Western world appear as distinctively ‘post-Christian’. Like Ehrenberg, Toynbee applied this label in the first instance to secular ideologies with quasi-religious features: ‘Communism, which is another of our latter-day religions, is, I think, a leaf taken from the book of Christianity – a leaf torn out and misread.’⁴⁰ Toynbee considerably widened

the scope of the phrase, however, by including Communism's democratic other into the post-Christian realm:

Democracy is another leaf from the book of Christianity, which has also, I fear, been torn out and, while perhaps not misread, has certainly been half emptied of meaning by being divorced from its Christian context and secularized; and we have obviously, for a number of generations past, been living on spiritual capital, I mean clinging to Christian practice without possessing the Christian belief.⁴¹

This implied that not only totalitarian 'neo-paganism' was post-Christian, but that Western society at large had become a 'post-Christian secular civilization'.⁴² Not 'they', but 'we' had secularized to the point of becoming 'ex-' or 'post-Christian'.⁴³ In the early 1940s, when the rise of 'secular society' as a catchphrase in British media was still two decades away,⁴⁴ this was a controversial thing to say. As late as 1952, in his Reith Lecture for the BBC – by then still a Christian broadcast company⁴⁵ – Toynbee assumed his listeners to be 'surprised – and even a little indignant – to hear me speak of our western community' as being as thoroughly post-Christian as Communist Russia.⁴⁶ Critics like Douglas Francis Jerrold charged Toynbee for precisely this reason: they felt he was exaggerating the 'post-Christian' element.⁴⁷

For Toynbee, however, 'post-Christian' was a term of hope, not of despair. In his 1940 Oxford lecture, delivered just weeks after the German invasion of France and written under the influence of a befriended Benedictine monk,⁴⁸ he made the argument that even if Western civilization would come to an end, 'Christianity may be expected not only to endure but to grow in wisdom and stature as the result of a fresh experience of secular catastrophe'.⁴⁹ These were remarkable words for a historian who had always analysed world history through the prism of civilizations, without paying much attention to religion. The 1940 lecture marked a watershed in Toynbee's thinking in so far as it prioritized religion over civilization, to the extent of making the future of Western civilization depend on a rediscovery of its Christian roots.⁵⁰ Interestingly, 'post-Christian' served this call for spiritual renewal to the extent that it suggested that Europe's Christian heritage was implicitly still very much present. Recognizing that democratic values such as individual liberty could only flourish on Christian soil was a first step towards a recovery of Christian faith as Europe had known it. In Toynbee's own words:

We are uncertain about Christian beliefs and yet are very certain about something which is a consequence of our Christian beliefs, a political or social consequence – this belief in individual freedom and in the value of the individual soul. But perhaps the situation can't remain like this; perhaps we shall

have either to recover a theological basis for our belief in individual liberty or else to abandon our belief in individual liberty.⁵¹

‘Post-Christian’, then, acquired apologetic meaning in so far as it encouraged rediscovery and rearticulation of Christian assumptions underlying democratic values such as individual liberty. Even if Toynbee occasionally allowed himself to slip into nostalgia, thereby turning the post-Christian into a site of estrangement (‘I feel more at home in either the Christian World or the pagan Greek World than in our present post-Christian world’),⁵² he confidently believed that some of the ambiguities of secularization could be resolved if Christian views of God and human nature could be rearticulated in language accessible to modern human beings. Interestingly, as the 1950s progressed, Toynbee increasingly rephrased this in more ecumenical terms, highlighting the self-sacrificing love that he saw as central to all ‘higher religions’.⁵³

Although Toynbee did not share Petras’s and Ehrenberg’s German Idealist historicism – he had studied in Oxford, not in Berlin⁵⁴ – he, too, consistently inscribed the present in narratives of *longue durée* development. Also, like Ehrenberg, he emphasized the incomplete secularization of modern political ideologies: they continued to draw on Christian resources. Unlike his German colleague, however, Toynbee highlighted the potential this offered instead of the threat it posed. A democracy ‘living on spiritual capital’ is not yet fully secularized: it is still capable of justifying itself on religious grounds. For Toynbee, this was an opportunity that Western democrats engaged in a Cold War could only ignore at their peril.⁵⁵

Christopher Dawson

While Toynbee highlighted the similarities between Christianity and other faith traditions, a more specific apologetic programme was carried out by his friend and colleague, Christopher Dawson. A Roman Catholic convert, Dawson approached the ‘post-Christian’ from a different angle to Toynbee. With T. S. Eliot, V. A. Demant, and Maurice Reckitt, among others, he belonged to a group of mostly Anglo-Catholic intellectuals known as the Christendom group.⁵⁶ Already by the early 1940s, this group perceived the modern Western world as fundamentally post-Christian. In words that could have been written by Toynbee, they understood this to mean that modern Westerners had retained ‘a real devotion to some of the ethical and social results of the Christian outlook’, but largely forgotten ‘the doctrine and feeling upon which these results [had] been reared’.⁵⁷ Yet the key question for these Christendom thinkers was not how religious love could heal

a world increasingly plagued by technologically induced suffering, but how 'the formation of a new Christian culture', as Eliot put it, could prevent the Western world from plunging into neo-paganism.⁵⁸ In Dawson's robust prose, Western culture had to choose between 'total secularization or a return to Christian culture'.⁵⁹

Characteristically, Dawson placed much historical weight on this choice by arguing that nothing less than the course of European history was at stake. When Europe, after its 'pre-Christian' stage, had been Christianized in the Middle Ages, it had become 'a society of peoples with common moral values and common spiritual aims'.⁶⁰ This unity had been broken, however, in the age of revolutions, which had inaugurated a 'post-Christian' phase in European history. Characteristic of this last stage, in which Europe found itself internally divided over religious as well as political issues, was its lack of prospect: post-Christian Europe was falling prey to destructive forces unleashed by secularizing powers. 'There is no going forward on this path. If the peoples of Europe desire to survive, they must seek a new way.'⁶¹ For Dawson, this renewal required a retrieval of Europe's 'spiritual inheritance', that is, a rediscovery of the religious roots of Western civilization. 'Civilization can only be creative and life-giving in the proportion that it is spiritualized.'⁶² In Dawson's developmental scheme, the way forward thus required a step backward – a returning to the Christian stage, not by artificially restoring medieval Christendom, as some of Dawson's critics feared, but 'by relating the instruments of culture to their true spiritual ends', just as Thomas Aquinas and Albert Magnus had done in the heydays of medieval Christendom.⁶³

Unlike Toynbee, Dawson mainly held his fellow Catholics responsible for this renewal of Western culture. Instead of summoning church-leavers back into the fold of the church or expecting them to undo the 'secularization of culture', he emphasized Catholic agency. This was partly because Dawson perceived the post-Christian condition as having been made possible by Christian failure ('Our civilization has become secularized largely because the Christian element has adopted a passive attitude'), partly also because Christians alone still enjoyed direct access 'to the sacred tradition of the Christian past which flows underneath the streets and cinemas and skyscrapers of the new Babylon'.⁶⁴ Following this argument, Dawson spent much of his life, mostly notably as a Harvard professor of Roman Catholic Studies (1958–62), advocating educational practices aimed at fostering Catholic *ressourcement* in a post-Christian age.⁶⁵

Dawson's grand historical vision had more than a few affinities with historicist thinking, especially in so far as it paired a developmental view of history with stadial modes of periodization ('the seven stages of Western culture', 'the six ages of the church').⁶⁶ Most characteristic, however, was

Dawson's explicit call for the retrieval of Europe's Catholic heritage, born out of the conviction that the Western world had become too secular. Ironically, for this reason, the 'post' in Dawson, the devout Catholic, resembled that of Petras, the staunch critic of religion. Despite their different evaluative stances, both took the prefix to denote a radical dissociation from true Christianity.

Hans Hoekendijk

Secularization stories of this kind not only circulated among atheists or among Christians who saw it as their task to counter the decline of Christian culture. Such stories were also told by progressive Christians who urged the church to stay in touch with the development of Western society at large. If society had become 'post-Christian' in Petras's sense of the word, then the church could no longer assume, as it had done in the heyday of Christendom, that people would intuitively know who God is or have a latent desire for their sins to be forgiven. Therefore the church would need to reinvent itself – its theology, its rituals, its organization – if it were to remain 'relevant' to a generation for whom Christianity was a thing of the past, or so the Dutch theologian Hans Hoekendijk, among others, maintained.⁶⁷

Although Hoekendijk had attended Barth's 1948 lecture in Amsterdam,⁶⁸ the former missionary and recently appointed professor of missiology at Utrecht University chose to ignore Barth's warnings when he argued in 1952 that Europe had entered a 'post-Christian, post-ecclesiastical, post-bourgeois, [and] post-personal' stage of history. While acknowledging that the shadow of the cross still loomed large over Europe, Hoekendijk maintained that especially younger generations had moved beyond the cultural milieu with which the church was most familiar. Whereas the church was almost exclusively populated by representatives of what Hoekendijk called 'the third man', Europe was witnessing the emergence of a new type of human being, called the 'fourth man', who neither felt a need to attend church nor saw any good in rebelling against it: 'As the fourth man sees it, the church has so completely identified herself with the culture of the third man that for that reason alone he will consider all that church business as something not addressed to him. You do not respond to it anymore with a yes or no; you are no longer anti-clerical; you just do not have a thing to do with it.'⁶⁹

Hoekendijk's writing was marked by strong contrasts indeed. The Utrecht missiologist distinguished the 'Sisyphean existence' of the fourth man from the 'bourgeois' mentality epitomized by its predecessor as sharply as he rejected church practices that he perceived as out of joint with the

times. Concretely, Hoekendijk argued that 'solidarity' with the fourth man required the church to invest in lay apostolate – a more radical alternative for full-time clergy than the 'worker-priest' known in the French Roman Catholic Church – and in para-church organizations such as house churches and cell groups.⁷⁰ 'All silly stateliness and all hocus-pocus, which so often spoil our church life, can be forgotten, yes, *must* be left behind in such groups.'⁷¹ Likewise, in Hoekendijk's missionary vision, ancient cathedrals should be abandoned in favour of fellowship houses, silence centres in apartment blocks or portable chapels spread across the city like telephone boxes.⁷² The advance of the fourth man, in short, required drastic missionary measures.

Where, then, did this post-Christian figure come from? As a character profile of 'modern man' not unlike William H. Whyte's 'organization man' and Herbert Marcuse's 'one-dimensional man', the fourth man originated with the German sociologist Alfred Weber (Max's younger brother).⁷³ In Weber's historical imagination, European history could be divided into four phases, which he saw embodied by the hunter-gatherer, the agrarian settler, the bourgeois citizen and the mass man, respectively.⁷⁴ The fourth man image thus presupposed a long-term historical narrative with clearly delineated phases. This, moreover, was a developmental narrative in so far as Weber, to his regret, saw no way back: historical change could not be undone.⁷⁵ Although Hoekendijk was too eclectic in his intellectual tastes to accept all of this historical baggage, some of his critics, including especially the Dutch theologian Hendrik Berkhof, perceptively noticed that his insistence on irreversible societal change with which the church should quickly catch up was premised on a philosophy of history that schematized social and religious variety into rather rigid historical stadia.⁷⁶ In so far as Hoekendijk borrowed with Weber's fourth man some of the historicist sensibilities out of which this image had originally emerged, he assigned more weight to 'individuality' than to 'development'.

Hoekendijk's argument that the church should 'radically' renew itself in order to be 'relevant' to post-Christian citizens struck a chord among liberal Protestants across the world. While British authors in the 1950s often cited Dawson, Toynbee or C. S. Lewis as theorists of the 'post-Christian',⁷⁷ Hoekendijk served as an important source for American theologians. Figures as diverse as Samuel H. Miller, Loren E. Halvorson, Howard Moody and Harvey Cox, the influential author of *The Secular City* (1965), all attributed the phrase 'post-Christian' to the Dutch missiologist.⁷⁸ Interestingly, this happened at a time, around 1960, when quite a few American Protestants believed they were witnessing the fulfilment of Paul Tillich's 1936 prophecy that the 'Protestant era' would soon be over.⁷⁹ This caused the 'post-Christian age' to interfere rather closely with the 'post-Protestant era' that

historians of religion Martin E. Marty and Winthrop S. Hudson believed the United States to have entered into becoming a pluralist country – ‘post-Christian’ though not yet ‘post-religious’, as sociologist of religion Will Herberg put it.⁸⁰

In all these cases, ‘post’ implied discontinuity rather than continuity. Although theologian Sidney E. Mead exaggerated when he argued that ‘post-Christian’ and ‘post-Protestant’ were phrases reflecting ‘the somber mood of those identity-conscious people who are sure there was a past but who can find little basis for assurance that there will be a future’,⁸¹ it is true that past–present divides were often drawn sharply, with little eye for the continuous presence of the past that Toynbee and Dawson preferred to highlight. Among liberal Protestants in particular, the perceived breach with the Christian past was such that religious scholar Bruce Morgan was able to claim that only an ‘un-linear and thus essentially non-Christian philosophy of history’ could blind Christians to the ‘uniqueness’ of the post-Christian moment.⁸² So, here, too, the ‘post’ began to denote an ‘over and done with’, without much nostalgic feeling for the world that was lost.

Jacques Ellul

Few responded with more irritation to this discourse of radical change than Jacques Ellul, a French sociologist of technology and Reformed lay theologian affiliated with the University of Bordeaux.⁸³ Although Ellul did not eschew bold generalizations – he had a reputation for being markedly pessimistic about the moral prospects of ‘technological society’⁸⁴ – he called into question the ‘uncriticized presuppositions’ that made theologians such as Hoekendijk perceive their age as dramatically different from earlier periods in history. ‘Thus it is assumed that society is evolving, that it has little in common with the past, and that we are involved in situations which are entirely new. One seldom takes the trouble to specify what is new, but is content instead with featureless generalities about science and technology.’⁸⁵ With an indignation reminiscent of Barth, Ellul wondered whether liturgical and theological reforms aimed at reaching out to ‘post-Christian man’ had any empirical basis. ‘What if the analysis is wrong?’⁸⁶

These were typical questions for a man who seven years earlier had written a book-length critique of commonplaces such as ‘modern man has come of age’ and ‘make way for the youth’ – stereotypical phrases that emphasized in one way or another that ‘the times they are a-changin’.⁸⁷ Although Ellul acknowledged cataclysmic transformations in Western technological culture, he was less convinced that human nature changes in

tandem with technology or that God reveals himself differently to human beings with a car in their garage than to people travelling by horse or track boat. Consequently, he found himself criticizing 'an entire segment of Protestant writing today', especially in so far as it followed 'Hegelian-Marxist' templates in attributing normative significance to historical change.⁸⁸

How did this stance affect Ellul's understanding of 'post-Christian civilization'?⁸⁹ In his most elaborate musings, from 1973, Ellul distinguished two senses in which he was prepared to call the Western world post-Christian. Echoing Ehrenberg, Toynbee, Dawson, as well as the French economist Georges Lasserre,⁹⁰ Ellul emphasized that Western society still showed the marks of Christianity: 'We have not ceased to be products of the Christian era, but we have managed to reject what is specifically Christian in this product and retain only its psychic aspect. Thus, post-Christian society is a society of men who are at the point to which Christianity brought them but who no longer believe in the specific truth of the Christian revelation.'⁹¹ Secondly, Ellul understood 'post-Christian' to signify that the Christian tradition no longer supplied shared values or a common frame of reference. Christians had become a countercultural minority, as Ellul could tell from personal experience as a Protestant in a country divided by Catholic-secular conflict.⁹² Yet instead of framing this in terms of transition from one historical period into another, Ellul understood it as a long overdue correction to the 'monumental error' that had been Christendom. Just as Barth had welcomed the end of the 'bourgeois-Christian era', Ellul believed that Christians could 'thank God' for the liquidation of a settlement that had obscured the extent to which Christian hope is eschatological and hence independent from earthly powers. 'Christendom is dead. Long live post-Christendom!'⁹³

On the one hand, then, Ellul disagreed with Barth's critique of the post-Christian. Yet on the other, he shared his deep suspicion of historical categories taking precedence over theological arguments.⁹⁴ Just as Barth had identified 'historicism' as one of the two arch-enemies of Christian theology ('psychologism' being the other one),⁹⁵ so Ellul believed that Christians should reject 'conformity to history', because their standard of judgement is not historical development, but 'the coming break with this present world' that is the eschaton.⁹⁶ In contrast to Hoekendijk and his American admirers, Ellul thus minimized the importance of historical change as a theologically relevant category. 'History has no privileged significance. It is nothing but a sort of appendage to man. Man is the important thing, not history. The latter exists because man lives, and history adds no value whatsoever to man.'⁹⁷

Conclusion

According to religious historian Sydney Ahlstrom, it was in the 1960s that the idea of a ‘post-Christian world’ took root in the popular imagination.⁹⁸ There is some truth to this: ‘post-Christian’ was never a more popular phrase than in the early 1960s. Yet as Hugh McLeod has argued, many of the ideas that became fashionable in the 1960s were not new: ‘[M]any of them went back to the early twentieth century, the nineteenth century, or even earlier.’⁹⁹ This was also the case for ‘post-Christian age’. As this chapter has shown, the phrase emerged in 1930s Germany in the context of what Ehrenberg called a ‘war of religion’ between Christianity and various forms of ‘antitheism’, including Communism and National Socialism. Whereas Petras and other self-designated secularists welcomed the ‘post-Christian era’ as an age of emancipation, Ehrenberg instead warned against the ‘neo-paganism’ of post-Christian powers intent on relegating Christianity to the past. Similar ambiguities continued to mark the phrase during the 1950s and 1960s. Toynbee and Dawson experienced ‘post-Christian civilization’ as a context of estrangement. Hoekendijk, by contrast, encouraged his fellow-believers to adapt their churches to a ‘post-Christian age’. Clearly, then, ‘post-Christian’ not only *meant* different things to different authors; the term could also be mobilized in the service of different *positions* vis-à-vis Europe’s Christian heritage.

Nonetheless, what all versions of the phrase had in common was an underlying commitment to a mode of thinking about history that inscribed the post-Christian ‘age’ in a narrative of *longue durée* development in which several distinct ‘eras’ or ‘epochs’ could be distinguished. Known as developmental historicism, this mode of thinking distinguished ‘post-Christian’ in its mid-twentieth-century incarnations from more recent post-concepts, such as ‘postliberal’ as defined by George A. Lindbeck and other Yale theologians in the 1980s and ‘post-secular’ in Jürgen Habermas’s definition of 2008. None of these authors claimed that a postliberal or post-secular era was about to succeed a liberal or secular age. Lindbeck, rather, proposed a theory of religion intent on overcoming classic dichotomies between ‘tradition’ and ‘innovation’ in American theology,¹⁰⁰ just as Habermas’s post-prefix marked a stance of dissociation from a secularist position denying the legitimacy of religious voices in the public domain.¹⁰¹ ‘Post-Christian’ resembled ‘post-capitalist’ and ‘post-industrial’ – two early twentieth-century adjectives that also reached their greatest popularity in the 1960s – in so far as it announced the dawn of a new era. Like ‘post-capitalist’ and ‘post-industrial’, ‘post-Christian’ presupposed a historicist philosophy of history that made ‘ages’ and ‘eras’ appear as plausible categories in the first place.¹⁰²

The larger implication of this is that, by the 1960s, developmental historicism had not yet ceased to make its impact felt on social and religious thought. Despite the 'crisis of historicism' proclaimed by the German theologian Ernst Troeltsch in the interwar period,¹⁰³ and notwithstanding the rise of 'modernist' categories of thought, especially after World War I,¹⁰⁴ developmental historicism as late as the 1960s offered categories for interpreting experiences of profound societal change. Although historicist assumptions were challenged by a broad range of early and mid-twentieth-century thinkers, theologians included,¹⁰⁵ these critiques did not cause developmental historicism to recede into marginality immediately. The 'post' in post-Christian demonstrates that Petras, Ehrenberg, Toynbee, Dawson, Hoekendijk and Ellul did not yet live in a 'post-historicist' world.

Notes

- 1 Karl Barth, *Die Unordnung der Welt und Gottes Heilsplan: Vortrag gehalten an der Weltkirchenkonferenz in Amsterdam, 23. August 1948* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1948), pp. 16–17, quoted in English translation from 'No Christian Marshall Plan', *The Christian Century*, 65 (1948), 1330–3, 1332.
- 2 Martin Niemöller, 'Das christliche Zeugnis inmitten der Welt', *Evangelische Theologie*, 8 (1948), 123–9, 124. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.
- 3 J. C. D. Clark, 'Secularization and Modernization: The Failure of a 'Grand Narrative'', *The Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), 161–94; Jeremy Morris, 'Secularization and Religious Experience: Arguments in the Historiography of Modern British Religion', *The Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), 195–219; Hermann Lübke, *Säkularisierung: Geschichte eines ideenpolitischen Begriffs* (Freiburg: Alber, 1965).
- 4 Ella Shohat, 'Notes on the 'Postcolonial'', *Social Text*, 31/32 (1992), 99–113; Stuart Hall, 'When Was 'the Post-Colonial'? Thinking at the Limit', in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (eds), *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 242–60; Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?', *Critical Inquiry*, 17 (1991), 336–57; Graham Huggan, 'Is the "Post" in "Postsecular" the "Post" in "Postcolonial"?'', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 56 (2010), 751–68.
- 5 Although the six authors discussed in this chapter were, of course, not alone in exploring the post-Christian condition, I have selected them as case studies because of their high visibility in their respective countries, their impact on how 'post-Christian' was understood, as well as the variety of theological backgrounds from which they engaged with the term.
- 6 Mark Bevir, 'Historicism and the Human Sciences in Victorian Britain', in Bevir (ed.), *Historicism and the Human Sciences in Victorian Britain* (Cambridge:

- Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 1–20, p. 2. These two features correspond to what Friedrich Meinecke classically identified as defining characteristics of *Historismus*: an ‘evolutionary’ mode of thinking that emphasizes ‘development’ (the present can only be understood genealogically, as a product of long-term historical changes) combined with an ‘individualizing’ approach that stresses the distinctiveness of individual stages or phases within this process of change. Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, vol. 1 (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1936), pp. 2–5.
- 7 Speaking about Great Britain, Bevir argues ‘that the decline of developmental historicism can be traced to the rise of modernist ideas in the late nineteenth century and the way in which the First World War undermined the Victorian faith in reason and progress’. Bevir, ‘Historicism and the Human Sciences’, p. 3.
 - 8 This ties in with Gary Dorrien’s thesis that the German Idealist tradition cast a longer shadow over twentieth-century theology than is usually acknowledged. Gary Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit: The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2012).
 - 9 Following Barth, Martin Niemöller also postulated Nazi backgrounds in ‘Warum wollt ihr sterben ...’ (1949), in Niemöller, *Was würde Jesus dazu sagen? Reden, Predigten, Aufsätze 1937 bis 1980*, ed. Walter Feurich (Berlin: Union, 1980), pp. 62–73, p. 67.
 - 10 Janko Janeff, *Dämonie des Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: Helingsche Verlagsanstalt, 1939), pp. 185, 191. Although Alfred Rosenberg’s *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts: Eine Wertung der seelisch-geistigen Gestaltenkämpfe unserer Zeit* (Munich: Hoheneichen-Verlag, 1930) was one long plea for abandoning Germany’s Christian heritage in favour of a National Socialist worldview, the book did not yet refer to a ‘post-Christian age’.
 - 11 Cornelis van der Kooi and Katja Tolstaja, ‘Vorwort’, in Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief (Zweite Fassung)* (1922), ed. Cornelis van der Kooi and Katja Tolstaja (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2010), pp. viii–xxxviii, pp. xxiv–xxvi.
 - 12 Otto Petras, *Post Christum: Streifzüge durch die geistige Wirklichkeit* (Berlin: Widerstands-Verlag, 1935), p. 15. Another indication that this was the book Barth had in mind is its occurrence in Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. 1, pt. 2 (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1945), pp. 69, 353. See also Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen, *Briefwechsel*, vol. 3, ed. Caren Algner (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2000), pp. 617–18 n. 22.
 - 13 Armin Mohler, *Die konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918–1932: Ein Handbuch*, 3rd edn (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989), pp. 466–7.
 - 14 Paul Noack, *Ernst Jünger: Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Alexander Fest, 1998), pp. 84, 86–7.
 - 15 Thomas Mann, *Tagebücher 1935–1936*, ed. Peter de Mendelssohn (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1978), p. 225. Equally critical was Mann’s acquaintance, Ricarda Huch, in her ‘Post Christum’, in Kurt Ihlenfeld (ed.), *Die Stunde des Christentums: Eine deutsche Besinnung* (Berlin: Eckart-Verlag, 1937), pp. 191–7.

- 16 Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, 2nd edn (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1922). For background and context, see Peter E. Gordon, 'Weimar Theology: From Historicism to Crisis', in Peter E. Gordon and John P. McCormick (eds), *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 150–78.
- 17 Petras, *Post Christum*, p. 15.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 54, quoting Karl Barth, *Das Evangelium in der Gegenwart* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1935), p. 33.
- 19 Barth, *Evangelium*, p. 33 (emphasis in original).
- 20 Petras, *Post Christum*, pp. 7, 11, 13–14.
- 21 B. Bauer, *Die russische Kirche: Schlussheft* (Charlottenburg: Egbert Bauer, 1855), p. 12; Douglas Moggach, *The Philosophy and Politics of Bruno Bauer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 180–7.
- 22 Franz Overbeck, *Christentum und Kultur: Gedanken und Anmerkungen zur modernen Theologie*, ed. Carl Albrecht Bernoulli (Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1919), p. 72.
- 23 Petras, *Post Christum*, pp. 34–7, referring to Bruno Bauer, *Christus und die Caesaren: Der Ursprung des Christentums aus dem römischen Griechentum* (Berlin: Eugen Grosser, 1877).
- 24 As Ian Hunter has argued, secularization narratives of the sort that would come to dominate twentieth-century thinking about religion emerged in archetypal form in relation to the European revolutions of 1848, most notably among German philosophers, the Young Hegelians included. Ian Hunter, 'Secularization: The Birth of a Modern Combat Concept', *Modern Intellectual History*, 12 (2015), 1–32 and 'Secularisation: Process, Program, and Historiography', *Intellectual History Review*, 27 (2017), 7–29.
- 25 Petras, *Post Christum*, p. 11.
- 26 On the idealist roots of the *Widerstand* movement to which Petras belonged, see Michael Pittwald, *Ernst Niekisch: Völkischer Sozialismus, nationale Revolution, deutsches Endimperium* (Cologne: PapyRossa Verlag, 2002), pp. 212–37. Back in 1913, Petras's PhD thesis on Kant's understanding of evil had included a chapter on Kant's philosophy of history: Otto Petras, *Der Begriff des Bösen in Kants Kritizismus und seine Bedeutung für die Theologie* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1913), pp. 47–57.
- 27 Joachim Müller, *Das Ende des christlichen Zeitalters* (Wernigerode: Licht im Osten, 1938), p. 3.
- 28 David M. Gill, 'The Secularization Debate Foreshadowed: Jerusalem 1928', *International Review of Mission*, 57 (1968), 344–57.
- 29 Günter Jacob, 'Christliche Verkündigung und politische Existenz', *Junge Kirche*, 2 (1934), 309–21. See also Christian Johannes Neddens, "'Politische Religion": Zur Herkunft eines Interpretationsmodells totalitärer Ideologien', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 109 (2012), 307–36 and Werner Ustorf, 'The Missiological Roots of the Concept of "Political Religion"', in Roger Griffin, Robert Mallett and John Tortorice (eds), *The Sacred in Twentieth-Century Politics: Essays in Honor of Professor Stanley G. Paine* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 36–50.

- 30 Müller, *Ende des christlichen Zeitalters*, pp. 37–8; Erich Göttner, ‘Das Ende des christlichen Zeitalters oder die Stunde des Christentums’, *Mennonitische Jugendwarte*, 17 (1937), 44–55, 46–7.
- 31 Günter Brakelmann, *Hans Ehrenberg: Ein judenchristliches Schicksal in Deutschland*, vol. 1 (Waltrop: Hartmut Spenner, 1997), pp. 191–3.
- 32 Hans Ph. Ehrenberg, *Deutschland im Schmelzofen: Gewalten, Fronten, Entscheidungen* (Berlin: Furche-Verlag, 1932), pp. 24, 36.
- 33 *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 20.
- 34 As a founding member of the Confessing Church, Ehrenberg was among the first to protest in print against the ‘zealotry’ (*Schwärmerei*) and ‘romantic piety’ of the NSDAP. In the safer realm of private writing, he even compared the National Socialist state to an ‘anti-God’ (*Gegengott*) or ‘anti-christ’. Traugott Jähnichen, ‘Von der “Schwärmerei” zur “Gegenreligion”’: Die Auseinandersetzung Ehrenbergs mit dem Nationalsozialismus als einer “politischen Religion”, in Manfred Keller and Jens Murken (eds), *Das Erbe des Theologen Hans Ehrenberg: Eine Zwischenbilanz* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2009), pp. 98–112, pp. 100–2.
- 35 Hans Ehrenberg, ‘The Nazi Religion and the Christian Mission’, *International Review of Mission*, 30 (1941), 363–73, 367, 371, 368.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 370–1.
- 37 Hans P. Ehrenberg, *Autobiography of a German Pastor*, trans. Geraint V. Jones (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1943), p. 111; Brakelmann, *Hans Ehrenberg*, vol. 1, pp. 23, 26–9, 42.
- 38 Historicist influences can also be detected in a follow-up article in which Ehrenberg declared that he used ‘post-Christian’ and ‘post-totalitarian’ in much the same way that words like ‘post-capitalism’ and ‘post-Marxism’ had entered political discourse in the 1930s. ‘It is not implied that Capitalism, Marxism, Fascism are systems that have been overcome once and for all, but that these systems, which once had unrestricted dominion, have now passed their zenith and have entered on a period when their after-effects are working themselves out.’ Hans P. Ehrenberg, ‘After the Totalitarian World Revolution: Some Thoughts on Church and State in the World Church after the War’, *International Review of Mission*, 36 (1947), 81–7, 81 n. 1.
- 39 W. J. Mander, *British Idealism: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 40 Arnold J. Toynbee, ‘Christianity and Civilization’ (1940), in Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 225–52, p. 236.
- 41 *Ibid.*, pp. 236–7.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 239. On totalitarian ideologies as ‘neo-pagan’ and ‘ex-Christian’, compare Arnold Toynbee, *Christianity Among the Religions of the World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 17, 19.
- 43 ‘Ex-Christian’ as an equivalent of ‘post-Christian’ appears in Toynbee, *Christianity*, pp. 16–17.
- 44 Sam Brewitt-Taylor, ‘The Invention of a “Secular Society”? Christianity and the Sudden Appearance of Secularization Discourses in the British

- National Media, 1961–4', *Twentieth Century British History*, 24 (2013), 327–50.
- 45 Ibid., 332–3; Asa Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 130–1, 294–5.
- 46 Arnold Toynbee, 'The World and the West: Russia', *The Listener*, 48 (1952), 839–41, 839. This passage is absent from the book version: *The World and the West* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953).
- 47 Douglas Jerrold, *The Lie about the West: A Response to Professor Toynbee's Challenge* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1954), pp. 50, 53. See also "'Post-Christian' Era?", *The Listener*, 48 (1952), 1060; 'The World and the West', *The Listener*, 49 (1953), 50.
- 48 William H. McNeill, *Arnold J. Toynbee: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 186–7. Evelyn Charles Cary-Elwes, or Father Columba, as the Benedictine monk was usually called, referred to the 'post Christian' condition of the modern world in a letter to Toynbee, 9 February 1942, published in Christian B. Peper (ed.) *An Historian's Conscience: The Correspondence of Arnold J. Toynbee and Columba Cary-Elwes, Monk of Ampleforth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 106. In *The Sheepfold and the Shepherd* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1955), Columba would devote an entire chapter to 'the post-Christian' (pp. 72–87).
- 49 Toynbee, 'Christianity and Civilization', p. 239.
- 50 McNeill, *Arnold J. Toynbee*, pp. 187–9. To the surprise of historians and theologians alike, this became a central theme in the last volumes of *A Study of History*. See, e.g., Christopher Dawson, 'Toynbee's Study of History: The Place of Civilizations in History', *International Affairs*, 31 (1955), 149–58; Hayden V. White, 'Collingwood and Toynbee: Transitions in English Historical Thought', *English Miscellany*, 8 (1957), 147–78, 171–8.
- 51 Arnold Toynbee, 'The Cold War in the Roman Empire', *Pomona College Bulletin*, 48:4 (1950), 26.
- 52 Arnold J. Toynbee, *Democracy in the Atomic Age: The Dyason Lectures 1956* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 21.
- 53 Toynbee, 'Christianity and Civilization', pp. 249–51; Arnold Toynbee, *An Historian's Approach to Religion: Based on the Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of Edinburgh in the Years 1952 and 1953* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 296.
- 54 Characteristic was his response to Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang der Abendlandes* (The Decline of the West), 2 vols., 1918–23: 'Where the German *a priori* method drew blank, let us see what could be done by English empiricism.' Arnold J. Toynbee, 'My View of History' (1946), in Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, pp. 3–15, p. 10.
- 55 McNeill, *Arnold J. Toynbee*, pp. 223–4.
- 56 Ian S. Markham, *Plurality and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 29–43.
- 57 V. A. Demant, 'Christianity and Civilization', in W. R. Matthews (ed.), *The Christian Faith: Essays in Explanation and Defence* (London: Eyre and

- Spottiswoode, 1944), pp. 191–204, p. 202. See also V. A. Demant, ‘Our Culture: Its Religion’, in Demant (ed.), *Our Culture: Its Christian Roots and Present Crisis: Edward Alleyn Lectures 1944* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1947), pp. 97–113, p. 106. Dawson himself used the phrase ‘post-Christian’ as early as 1932 in *The Modern Dilemma: The Problem of European Unity* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1932), p. 29.
- 58 T. S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), p. 13.
- 59 Christopher Dawson, *Understanding Europe* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1952), p. 241.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p. 252.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 253. On the critical responses that Dawson’s work elicited, see Christina Scott, ‘The Vision and Legacy of Christopher Dawson’, in Stratford Caldecott and John Morrill (eds), *Eternity in Time: Christopher Dawson and the Catholic Idea of History* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), pp. 11–23, esp. p. 21.
- 64 Christopher Dawson, *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture: A Way to the Renewal of Human Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), pp. 46, 30.
- 65 Dawson’s American adventures are described in Christina Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson 1889–1970* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1984), pp. 178–203. Dawson’s courses at Harvard resulted in *The Dividing of Christendom* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965) and *The Formation of Christendom* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967). On Catholic *ressourcement* more generally, see Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (eds), *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 66 Dawson, *Understanding Europe*, p. 24; Dawson, *Historic Reality*, p. 47.
- 67 Frank Petter, *Profanum et promissio: het begrip wereld in de missionaire ecclesiologieën van Hans Hoekendijk, Hans Jochen Margull en Ernst Lange* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2002), pp. 75–116.
- 68 W. A. Visser ’t Hooft (ed.), *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches held at Amsterdam, August 22nd to September 4th, 1948* (London: SCM Press, 1949), p. 257.
- 69 J. C. Hoekendijk, ‘Rondom het apostolaat’, *Wending*, 7 (1952), 547–66, 556, 558, quoted in English translation from *The Church Inside Out*, trans. Isaac C. Rottenberg (London: SCM Press, 1967), pp. 48, 51.
- 70 Hoekendijk, ‘Rondom het apostolaat’, 555, 565–6.
- 71 Hoekendijk, *Church Inside Out*, p. 79.
- 72 *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- 73 On the rise of these apocalyptic figures in mid-twentieth-century cultural criticism, see Mark Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933–1973* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).
- 74 Alfred Weber, *Der dritte oder der vierte Mensch: Vom Sinn des geschichtlichen Daseins* (Munich: R. Piper, 1953).

- 75 Volker Kruse, *Soziologie und 'Gegenwartskrise': Die Zeitdiagnosen Franz Oppenheimers und Alfred Webers: Ein Beitrag zur historischen Soziologie der Weimarer Republik* (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitätsverlag, 1990), p. 273.
- 76 H. Berkhof, 'Tegen de bierkaai?', *In de Waagschaal*, 9 (1954), 37–9, 53–4, 71–2, to which Hoekendijk responded in 'Aanloop naar de evangelistiek V (slot): kleine boekenparade', *Woord en Dienst*, 3 (1954), 258–9. I analyse the Hoekendijk–Berkhof controversy in Herman Paul, 'The Sociological Myth: A 1954 Controversy on Secularization Narratives', *Journal of Religion in Europe*, 9 (2016), 179–203.
- 77 C. S. Lewis had popularized the phrase in his Cambridge inaugural, *De descriptione temporum* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 7 and was credited with its invention by Philip Sherrard, 'A Post-Christian Epoch?', *Encounter*, 6:2 (1956), 25–9, 25.
- 78 Samuel H. Miller, 'Post-Christian Man', *The Christian Scholar*, 43 (1960), 265–8, 265; Loren E. Halvorson, 'The Secular: Threat or Mandate?', in James H. Burtness and John P. Kildahl (eds), *The New Community in Christ: Essays on the Corporate Christian Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1963), pp. 169–86, p. 175; Howard Moody, *The Fourth Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), p. 115; Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (London: SCM Press, 1965), pp. 144–5, 148, n. 11. In *The Death of God: The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era* (New York: George Braziller, 1961), Gabriel Vahanian, by contrast, drew largely on Maritain, Dawson and Toynbee.
- 79 Paul J. Tillich, 'Protestantism in the Present World-Situation', *American Journal of Sociology*, 43 (1937), 236–48. A few years later, Tillich also introduced the phrase 'post-Protestant era': Ronald Henry Stone, *Paul Tillich's Radical Social Thought* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1980), p. 101.
- 80 Martin E. Marty, *The New Shape of American Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 32; Winthrop S. Hudson, *American Protestantism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 129; Will Herberg, 'God & the Theologians', *Encounter*, 21:5 (1963), 56–8, 57. See also Paul Goodman, 'We Are Post-Christian Men', *WFMT Perspective*, 10:11 (1961), 8–12, reprinted as 'Post-Christian Man', in Goodman, *Utopian Essays and Practical Proposals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), pp. 80–91. Helpful background is offered in Eugene McCarragher, *Christian Critics: Religion and the Impasse in Modern American Social Thought* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 147–81.
- 81 Sidney E. Mead, 'The Post-Protestant Concept and America's Two Religions', *Religion in Life*, 33 (1964), 191–204, 191.
- 82 Bruce Morgan, 'Is This the Post-Christian Era?', *Theology Today*, 18 (1962), 399–405, 399. Even critics like the theologian Georgia Harkness equated the 'post' with loss when they argued that American citizens were too much haunted by religious issues to deserve the epitaph 'post-Christian'. Georgia Harkness, 'Is Our Age of Anxiety a Post-Christian Era?', *Religion in Life*, 34 (1964), 42–9, 49.

- 83 Another outspoken critic was the American Jesuit Walter J. Ong, who denounced the ‘post-Christian myth’ for being Eurocentric and historically inaccurate. See Walter J. Ong, ‘The Absurdity of the Post-Christian Myth’, *WFMT Perspective*, 10:11 (1961), 13–17, reprinted as ‘Post-Christian or Not?’, in Ong, *In the Human Grain: Further Explorations of Contemporary Culture* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 147–64.
- 84 Jacques Ellul, *La technique ou l’enjeu du siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1954), published in English as *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973).
- 85 Jacques Ellul, *Les nouveaux possédés* (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1973), p. 62, quoted in English translation from *The New Demons*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 44.
- 86 Ellul, *Les nouveaux possédés*, p. 32, quoted in English translation from *New Demons*, p. 19.
- 87 Jacques Ellul, *Exégèse des nouveaux lieux communs* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1966), pp. 79–84, 275–82.
- 88 Jacques Ellul, *Fausse présence au monde moderne* (Paris: Libraire protestante, [1963]), p. 33, quoted in English translation from *False Presence of the Kingdom*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury Press, 1972), p. 32.
- 89 As early as 1948, ‘post-Christian civilization’ figured in the subtitle of Ellul’s *Présence au monde moderne: problèmes de la civilisation post-chrétienne* (Geneva: Roulet, 1948), though not in the book itself.
- 90 Georges Lasserre, ‘Le christianisme et les mystiques sociales contemporaines’, *La revue du christianisme social*, 49 (1936), 340–7, 343.
- 91 Ellul, *Les nouveaux possédés*, p. 38, quoted in English translation from *New Demons*, p. 24.
- 92 Andrew Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002).
- 93 Ellul, *Fausse présence*, p. 13, quoted in English translation from *False Presence*, p. 8.
- 94 For Ellul’s indebtedness to Barth, see Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ‘Barth’s Influence on Jacques Ellul’, in Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook (eds), *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1981), pp. 32–51; Jacob E. Van Vleet, *Dialectical Theology and Jacques Ellul: An Introductory Exposition* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014).
- 95 Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 249.
- 96 Ellul, *Présence*, pp. 53, 63, quoted in English translation from *The Presence of the Kingdom*, trans. Olive Wyon (New York: Seabury Press, 1967), pp. 42, 49.
- 97 Ellul, *Fausse présence*, p. 23, quoted in English translation from *False Presence*, p. 21.
- 98 Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 877.

- 99 Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 16.
- 100 George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), pp. 8, 113. Note, however, the 'postliberal age' in the title. Peter Ochs even refers to 'the epoch of postliberal theology' in *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), pp. 4–5.
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