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An Elusive Dream? Religious Freedom & the reign of God

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TALK TITLE:

“An Elusive Dream? Religious Freedom & the reign of God”

PRESENTER:

Anthony E. Clark, Ph.D., Edward B. Lindaman Endowed Chair in Chinese History
(Whitworth University)

TIME & LOCATION:

Thursday, 24 September 2015

7:00 pm – 8:00 pm

Weyerhaeuser Hall Robinson Hall Teaching Theatre (RTT)

ABSTRACT:

This first public lecture as Lindaman Endowed Chair shall center on the topics of religious freedom and the reign of God, which at first appear to be contradictory ideas. How can the human person be truly free while also being confined to obedience to God’s will and design for Creation? The talk will explore Christian understandings of the reign of God in a world seemingly torn apart by sectarianism and religious difference, focusing on the historical legacy of China vis-à-vis religious freedom and the putative separation of Church and State.

TALK:

- Thank you to Dr. Simon for your kind introduction, and thank you to my colleagues and students here at Whitworth for helping create a scholarly and spiritual atmosphere that encourages spirited intellectual engagement within a context where faith remains an important component of the academic project.
- Also, I should say at the outset that my remarks tonight might appear to follow several unrelated strands, but I assure you that whatever I unravel over the next 45 minutes is part of the same ball of yarn. When I first moved to Spokane seven years ago I attended an Indian sitar concert, and the performer warned that the sitar travels to seemingly unrelated directions, but that in the end the music coalesces into more unified melodic stream. “Bear with the journey,” he said, “all will come together in the end.” So, please bear with my intellectual sitar concert tonight – “all will come together in the end.”
- The topic of my talk was inspired by an experience I recently had in China. While visiting a church in Beijing I noticed a groundskeeper tenderly watering a small patch of grass beneath a large tree; it was the best-kept spot on the church property. Naturally, I asked him why. He told me that during the summer of 1966, the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) a crowd of Maoist Red Guards surrounded the church and dragged the 80-year-old Chinese priest to the spot beneath the tree. They shouted at the priest: “You are have no right to spread your false religion! You have no right deceive the people!” The priest responded with something like, “But God is the one with true rights.” They began to torture the old man, demanding that he abandon his faith in God. The old priest refused, so he was buried alive while he intoned prayers at the spot where the grass has remained preserved as a commemoration of the reign of God.
- I should also acknowledge here that I am aware of the growing and unrelenting religious intolerance occurring in the Middle East today, intolerance that continues to displace and take the lives of countless persons under the injudicious banner of the “reign of God.” I will not be discussing these atrocities tonight because such actions begin in the realm of ideas – so, I’ll confine my remarks to

ideas so that we might better frame how we envision religious freedom and the reign of God. Ideas are the engine of human action, and greed as much as religious radicalism can compel persons to control and confine the religious beliefs and practices of others. Our own wealth-obsessed culture often appears to prioritize wealth above goodness. Socrates, as quoted by Plato, once exclaimed that, “Wealth does not bring goodness, but goodness brings wealth, and every other blessing, both to the individual and to the state.”¹ Ideas matter, whether they motivate cruelty based on religious belief or cruelty based on greed.

Introduction

I would like to begin my first talk as the Edward Lindaman Chair by conjuring two somber dichotomies in an effort to critique how we think in modern society. And then I would like to make some surprising turns into Western philosophy, ancient China, Christian dogmatics, and modern China, and conclude with some remarks about religious freedom and the reign of God in our personal lives and the world in general. I won't explicitly confront many of what present society considers “pressing issues,” such as race, gender, and sexual identity, because all of these questions are best scrutinized after we have grown better acquainted with God's will. I will, however, admit one perhaps controversial argument: I do not support the ideal of separating Church from State, as it is imagined today, for if God is indeed the ruler of all creation, then it is foolish to remove him from the rule of any government. That said, I am not naïve to the conundrums precipitated by radical theocratic dictatorships, but such governments are not Christ-like, which would render them more merciful and charitable. A sure sign that a government has grown distant from the Creator is that it has become destructive rather than creative.

To the dichotomies: First, the Genevan Enlightenment philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), opened his work, *Du Contrat Social* (The Social Contract, 1775) with the assertion that, “Man is born free; and is everywhere in chains.”² And second, among Raphael's (1483-1520) most famous paintings are his “School of Athens,” which valorizes *human* genius, and his “Disputation on the Eucharist,” which celebrates the insights of *faith*. When I hear others discussing this remark by Rousseau it is almost

always in the context of human potential – attained or suppressed – and when I visit Raphael’s paintings in Rome I see large crowds in adoration of the “School of Athens,” while I alone look at his depiction of faith. We humans love ourselves, and we seem little predisposed to surrender our *apparent* freedom, the freedom to attain to our own desires, for the *less* apparent freedom of what we can assent to without an evident assurance of personal gain and liberation. The reality of *evidence* has replaced in our current society the evidence of *reason*. Said another way, whereas Aristotle argues that humans are by nature rational beings, Rousseau’s anthropology has inverted this assumption, suggesting that we are not rational creatures, but are rather the makers of our own purpose. As Allan Bloom (1930-1992) echoes Rousseau’s ideas, “There are no ends, only possibilities.”³

Rousseau denies Aristotle’s insistence on a teleology, that there is a purpose and aim for all things, and has made human desire and the individual ascent of the will dominant over any external law, such as the rule of God. Putting a Cartesian spin on Rousseau, we might describe his philosophy as an exclamation that, I feel therefore I am, and the better we feel the better we are. So, as I now turn to the the dichotomy of human freedom and the reign of God, we must first admit, I believe, that we are living in a Rousseauian age; still largely in the wake of Rousseau and the Enlightenment, it is painfully difficult for most of us to imagine surrendering our conditioned desire for freedom to the reign of God, whose reign comes with laws and a purpose-driven teleology that might require us to change course . . . and even change our minds. Voltaire’s (1694-1778) reaction to Rousseau represents a better strand of Enlightenment thinking. When Rousseau sent to Voltaire a copy of one of his publications in 1754, Voltaire replied in a letter: “No one has ever used so much intelligence to persuade us to be so stupid.”⁴ Voltaire was unwilling to allow Rousseau’s philosophy of feelings to supplant his own philosophy of reason.

Truth and Taming the Floodwaters

I anticipate some will react to my support of Aristotle and Voltaire’s resistance to Rousseau with the question: “How can one be *certain* of what, precisely, is the aim and law of our lives?” And even more, “How can one be certain that her or his interpretation

of God's will is the *true* interpretation?" Inevitably, most discussions of God's will and aim revolve around the knotty philosophical puzzle of defining and discerning *truth*; but I'll leave a more protracted consideration of this question to my colleagues in Philosophy. A few words from ancient China, however, might help clear a path for engaging the subject of religious freedom and the reign of God, and perhaps even the relentless question of truth. My scholarly work is in the area of Chinese history, so I hope you'll understand my use of China as a case study for my subject tonight. We might simply ask, is it possible to know God's will for the world, or is the hope of knowing his laws, in the end, and elusive dream? Regardless of whether truth is or is not discernible, ancient Chinese thinkers understood that there must be some standard by which behavior should be measured. In his essay, *Tianzhi*, 天志 or "The Will of Heaven," the fifth-century BC philosopher, Mozi 墨子 (ca. 470-ca. 391 BCE), wrote that:

. . . if men do not do what Heaven desires, but instead do what Heaven does not desire, then Heaven will likewise not do what men desire, but instead do what men do not desire. . . . Therefore the sage kings of antiquity sought to understand clearly what Heaven and the spirits would bless, and to avoid what Heaven and the spirits hate, and this is why they worked to promote what is beneficial to the world and eliminate what is harmful.⁵

Mozi argues that Heaven, perhaps the closest Chinese notion of a supreme governing power, has a normative plan for all existence, and even punishes those who contradict that plan. In another passage, he insists that, "The will of heaven is to me like a compass to a wheelwright or a square to a carpenter. The wheelwright and the carpenter use their compass and square to measure what is round and square for the world, saying, 'What fits these measurements is right; what does not fit them is wrong'."⁶ Put more simply, Mozi maintained that there does exist a higher law, or measure, by which humans are accountable, and by which they are rewarded or punished.

Other Chinese thinkers were not so convinced of our actual ability to *know* the difference between round and square. The Daoist philosopher, Zhuangzi (3rd century BCE), 莊子 for example, argued that human understanding was more relative. His

position on truth is famously illustrated in his passage on dreaming that he is a butterfly.

Once upon a time Zhuangzi [Zhuang Zhou] dreamed that he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting about happily enjoying himself. He didn't know that he was Zhuangzi [Zhou]. Suddenly he awoke and was palpably Zhuangzi [Zou]. He didn't know whether he was Zhuangzi [Zhou] who had dreamed of being a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming that he was Zhuangzi [Zhou].⁷

Zhuangzi's butterfly dream represents China's highest level of suspicion regarding the human ability of apprehending reality, but most people who quote this passage do not include what he said next. Immediately after recalling his dream, Zhuangzi asserts that, "Between Zhuangzi and the butterfly there is certain to be a distinction; this is called the order of things."⁸ In other words, even though he is suspicious of our ability to know the ultimate truth of reality, he insists that distinctions exist; truth exists. Zhuangzi suggests that knowledge is relative, but he is not a Relativist.

Mozi held that there is a divine standard by which all must abide and Zhuangzi believed that ultimate standards are ultimately unknowable. Neither were particularly pragmatic; for a more pragmatic philosophy we must turn to another early Chinese text, the *Shujing*, 書經 or "Book of History." This work contains a myth of a great flood, *Da hongshui*, 大洪水 which covered vast portions of the earth. The ruler first called upon Gun, 鯀 to alleviate the waters, but Gun resisted the nature of water by constructing dykes that gave way. Gun's son, Yu, 禹 however, was more enlightened. Unlike his father, Yu examined the nature and laws of the waters and, as the *Book of History* recalls, "opened the passages for the streams throughout the nine provinces, and conducted them to the sea."⁹ In other words, taming the floodwaters was only possible after Yu learned to obey the laws of nature, laws that result in success and failure depending on whether one conforms to what is correct and incorrect.

To summarize my points so far: China has, until recent centuries, believed in a definitive truth, superintended by a divine Heaven, that rewards or punishes those who obey or disobey its precepts. To put all this into a Western framework we might turn to the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius (121-180 CE), whose ideas were summarized well in

Ernst Cassirer's work on the philosophy of human culture. According to the Aurelius, "both the universal order and personal order are nothing but different expressions and manifestations of a common underlying principle."¹⁰ Freedom, according to both the classical Western and Eastern understandings, is not a freedom to follow one's own designs without consequences; for both China and the West there was an understood power that monitors and encourages obedience to a divine law. Truth and the taming of floodwaters could not be separated without unwanted results.

Religious Freedom and The Kingship of Christ: A Christian View

I'll return to Rousseau, Aristotle, Mozi, and Zhuangzi in a while, but let's turn now to the question of religious freedom as understood in recent history. In the realm of secular thought, the eighteenth-century British (well, actually, Scottish) moral philosopher and economist, Adam Smith (1723-1790), was among the early advocates for what we now imagine as religious freedom. In his, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Smith argues that allowing people to freely practice their own religious tradition promotes two salutary benefits in any free society; it helps prevent civil unrest and it moderates intolerance. He writes that:

The interested and active zeal of religious teachers can be dangerous and troublesome *only* where there is either but one sect tolerated in the society, or where the whole of a large society is divided into two or three great sects; the teachers of each acting by concert, and under a regular discipline and subordination.¹¹

Smith's concern is not that religions share space on the same national landscape, but that religious leaders exert contentious zeal, or that one or two religious traditions dominate the other minority belief systems. Smith exemplifies the pragmatic view held by most secular societies today, which prioritize social harmony over religious truth. Christians – I should say most Christians – attempt to navigate between the understood need for social harmony in our present pluralist society and the knowledge that Christianity is the only true religious reality.

How, then, have Christians traditionally articulated their vision of religious

freedom? When the Protestant missionary in China, and professor of History at Nanjing University, Miner Searle Bates, published his book, *Religious Liberty: An Inquiry*, in 1945, he defined religious freedom in these words: It is an “absence of compulsion or restraint.” And in more positive terms, Bates suggests that genuine liberty “requires a choice of good aims or objects.” True freedom, he insists, cannot choose to “do what is evil.”¹² As a Christian, Bates cannot merely support religious freedom as a means to attain social harmony, but it must moreover be directed to the good. Freedom, then, is confined to the structure of a moral law. The American television personality of the 1950s, Bishop Fulton Sheen, expressed Bates’s notion of religious freedom in slightly different terms. “The center of our being then is not ourselves,” Sheen affirms, “but in God; the secret of our freedom then is not in choice but in goodness.”¹³ Sheen supplants the secular notion of freedom as an openness to choices, and places it in its proper context, within the context of goodness as willed by God. At the Second Vatican Council, the Council Fathers declared that all persons “are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.”¹⁴ So, religious freedom forbids coercion. The Council, however, continues to avow that this principle “leaves untouched traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of men and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ.”¹⁵ One might not agree with the Catholic doctrine that it is the “one Church of Christ,” but one cannot miss the Council’s implication that religious liberty in no way detracts from authentic, even insistent, belief. The historical, and consistent, Christian understanding of religious freedom is the unrelenting view that religious coercion is never acceptable. Equally unacceptable is the position that God’s reign must be attenuated or compromised for the sake of social harmony.

In Yves Congar’s, OP, (1904-1995) summoning book, *Jesus Christ*, published in 1965, he emphasizes forcefully that for Christians there can be no other view than that, “The Lordship of Christ is total and absolute.”¹⁶ This is, he reminds his reader, consistently affirmed in the Old and New Testaments. In addition, Congar recalls that God’s reign is connected often to his role as creator. In Colossians 1:16 we read, “For

him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and *for* him.”¹⁷ And of Christ’s kingship, Sacred Scripture is replete with examples. Revelation 1:8, for example: “ ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘the one who is and who was and who is to come, the *almighty*’.”¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 11:3 begins with the assertion that, “Christ is the head of every man.”¹⁹ And quite strongly, St. Paul’s letter to the Romans exclaims, “For this is why Christ died and came to life, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.”²⁰ The Hebrew Bible, too, repeats this theme. Isaiah 33:22, for example, conveys, “The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king.”²¹ Finally, Jesus himself said to his followers: “Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me.”²² There is little room, it seems, for a Christian adherence to Sacred Scripture without an obedience to God and his laws.

This is perhaps why thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau grew increasingly distant from the confinements of Christian moral teaching. Rousseau was born a Calvinist, later rejected Calvinism for Catholicism, and finally rejected Catholicism for what he termed a “natural religion,” based on his observations of the natural world. In Rousseau’s understanding of “nature,” the imposition of a divine law, such as one imposed on us by the God of Jewish and Christian scripture, was the antithesis of his own preferred idea of “*amour de soi*,” a kind of positive self-love, influenced largely by a natural impulse toward self-preservation. Surrender to a notion such as the kingship of Christ was, according to Rousseau, a forfeiture of the kingship of humanity, which was one of the calling cards of the French Revolution (1789-1799). To return to Yves Congar: Congar’s theology of the reign of God, which he placed above the sophisms of the French Revolution, can be summarized in one of his central assertions: “Christ, our Leader, is enthroned in heaven, at the right hand of the Father. He reigns here below in the Church, but his kingship is still disputed on earth, ‘until God has put his enemies under his feet’.”²³ While Christ is indeed the divine ruler over all creation, the world, as Congar continues, “is in ignorance of the Lordship of Christ and more or less seriously resists it.”²⁴ This complex matrix of ideas contends human freedom against religious freedom and human kingship against divine kingship. It might help at this point if I back away

from these debates for a moment and offer an example of how creation suffers when humanity places itself above the Creator.

Religious Freedom and the Co-Creative Duty of Humans Toward Creation

Among the clearest thinkers about human freedom from a Christian point of view is the Greek Orthodox theologian, Metropolitan John Zizioulas. In one of his essays, he engages the contradictory nature of contemporary ideas of human freedom, interrogating the now common belief that one should be “free” to choose his or her continued existence. He recalls hearing a young person exclaim, “No one ever asked me whether I wanted to be born.” Zizioulas writes, “we believe that we must be able to choose between two or more options, and we must have our say at every step of life.”²⁵ Put another way, he recognizes that modern persons define “freedom” as the ability to say yes or no to a given choice, even regarding ones own existence. Zizioulas calls out the reckless logic of such an idea: “. . . you cannot say ‘no’ to your own existence, or if you could you would cease to exist and your freedom would disappear with you.”²⁶ Simply said, we are not ultimately free to make any decision, for choosing non-existence, as a “free act,” is to necessarily eliminate freedom which relies upon being in a state of existence. What concerns Zizioulas, and me, even more than unreasoned notions of freedom, are the frightening results of the abuse of human freedom, especially on our environment. To be blunt, I suggest that human freedom, as we employ it, has become a threat to creation.

Zizioulas speaks of humans as “created with freedom,” and humanity may set itself “for the world or against it.”²⁷ Rather than interpreting humanity’s “dominion over the earth” as a mandate to *rule over* creation, Zizioulas asserts that this implies that human persons are rather “made responsible for it.”²⁸ He relates this statement to the assertion in Genesis 1:26 that humans were created in the image and likeness of God. The early Church Fathers interpreted this in several ways, but one of the dominant views was that, as Zizioulas puts it, “Man will of course wish to create his own world, analogous to the way that God creates.”²⁹ What separates humans from animals, according to an Eastern Christian point of view, is not that we are aware of our own existence and animals are not – this appears to be true of animals as it is of humans, though to a lesser

degree – but that, Zizioulas insists, “An animal cannot create a world of its own; this is only a possibility and a temptation for man.”³⁰

One of the significant ways that we are “like” God, then, is that we, too, share God’s ability to create, the difference being that we cannot create from nothing as God can. The privileged human position as, in a fashion, co-creator, produces not only a rich potential for wholesome human creation on earth, but also affords humanity the freedom to distort this privilege and threaten the creation with which we have all been entrusted. As Zizioulas expresses this idea, “To demonstrate his freedom man can either deface the world until perhaps he eventually destroys it, or he can take it and affirm it of his own free will.”³¹ Properly understood from a Christian view, freedom should only be exercised properly confined to God’s will and design. Among the most alarming problems today, as I see it, is that humanity has placed its own desires above God’s intended purpose, and the creature has largely rebelled against the Creator. Zizioulas laments, and I share his lament, “It is particularly crucial to say this now that we really have become a threat to our natural environment as a whole.”³² An important element of genuine religious freedom, then, is the co-creative duty of humans toward creation.

Back to China: Religious Freedom in a State of State Rule

I’ve spoken so far largely about *moral* freedom and the reign of God, which is an inseparable component of religious freedom, but the center of my interest here is really on *religious* freedom. So, I’ll now return to China as a venue for exploring this subject. China has strayed far from its early notion of a divine law, by which humanity measures its behavior as right or wrong, and by which it is judged and rewarded or punished. Zhuangzi’s distrust of ontological or hermeneutical certainty has also been discarded for the vicissitudes of political ideologies that valorize state jurisdiction over even the slightest possibility of a divine purpose. To safeguard the state’s control of religious belief while retaining a patina of tolerance, China’s constitution is carefully articulated. Article thirty-six of the *Constitution of the People’s Republic of China* asserts: “No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do

not believe in, any religion. The state protects normal religious activities.”³³ In other words, religious freedom is predicated on the laws of the state, and no other entity, and empowers state officials, who have an admitted agenda to eradicate religious belief, to discern what religious beliefs are “normal.” Whereas America culturally submits itself to majority vote, as if truth or God were swayed by majority vote, China enforces the state’s vision of social harmony by means of constitutional decrees formulated by a single party and a small number of invested party members. Christians have intellectually struggled with such a paradigm, for if governments are afforded such “rights,” what, then, are the rights of God? China’s officials have accurately perceived the inevitable antagonism between secular states and Christians, even if some Christians ignore those oppositions.

Sacred Scripture affirms God’s authority over all human agencies, even those endowed with political power. More than once we are told in Scripture that Jesus Christ is the “ruler over all the kings of the earth.”³⁴ Clearly, the dilemma for China’s officials is to on the one hand allow for what it declares to be “religious freedom,” while knowing that some religions, such as Christianity, affirm quite clearly that God’s reign eclipses the whims of any state, and even any majority. Medias, majorities, trends, and tyrants are ultimately powerless, according to Scripture, to change or even reinterpret God’s reign, and freedom to choose one’s contrived or desired reality over the one created by God is, in the end, folly. At this point I should state my position clearly: From an authentic Christian point of view there is no religious freedom without an underlying understanding that while no-one should be coerced into believing in Christianity, there is always present the reign of God, whose laws arbitrate all material and spiritual reality. In his encyclical, *Libertas Humana*, or “On the Nature of Human Freedom,” Pope Leo XIII (1810-1903) wrote:

The binding force of human laws is in this, that they are to be regarded as applications of the *eternal* law, as in the principle of *all* law. . . . Where a law is enacted contrary to reason, or to the eternal law, or to some ordinance of God, obedience is unlawful, lest, while obeying man, we become disobedient to God.³⁵

I do not intend to pit humanity against God; such an understanding of the relationship between Creator and creature would be distorted. The aim of Leo XIII’s assertion is to suggest an appropriate hierarchy of obediences, placing God’s reign above human reign,

inasmuch as human reign contradicts God's intentions. When the Maoist Red Guards "struggled against" the 80-year-old Chinese priest in Beijing in 1966, they held a distorted view of human freedom. Without recourse to God's Word and will, the priest's insistence on the reign of God was a threat to their own radical adherence to a contrived ontological reality, one that located human will above divine will. The priest's voice was too uncomfortable for them, so it was silenced beneath several under layers of soil. The apparent rivalry between religious freedom and the reign of God remains an enduring challenge to the intellectual project of our time, which seeks to dismantle such rivalries by declaring them constructed.

When Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) attacked the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009), calling it little more than "*bricolage*," he called into scrutiny the human ability to settle upon ultimate truths as nothing more than contrivances that are pre-conditioned by the limits of our language. "The limits of our language," Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) argued, "is the limits of our world." And when Michel Foucault (1926-1984) and his followers reduced all human reality to two fundamental positions, the empowered and those resisting power, he deliberately or non-deliberately relegated all religious claims to mechanisms of self-empowerment, not unlike Nietzsche's notion of the "will to power." I admit that these currents of thought can be useful tools of analysis, but no matter their intellectual force, they do nothing to change the divine reality. Academic theories, academic departments, and academic publications can offer much to our better understanding of God's will and reign, but they do nothing to change divine reality. To God's will and reign we are free, if freedom is simply defined as the ability to select between choices, to disregard or disagree with the notion or reality of God's existence and kingship, but for those of us who are Christians, we are bound to the necessity of discerning God's will and laws, and bound to the necessity of acquiescing to them. But allow me to insert one important detail; *all* of what I have so far said about religious freedom and the reign of God must be understood in consideration of the cornerstone of all God's laws – mercy. In the Epistle of James we read this critical assertion: "So speak and so act as people who will be judged by the law of freedom. For the judgment is merciless to one who has not shown mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment."³⁶ Here is a typical Christian belief that amuses the theorists of the so-called

“linguistic turn.” Scripture speaks here of the “*law of freedom.*” And paradoxically, God’s judgment shall show no mercy to those who show no mercy. But for Christians, this is precisely kind of apparent contradiction that makes perfect sense.

Conclusion

Such apparent contradictions remind me of Zhuangzi’s dream, and the enduring challenges of mitigating between freedom and kingship. China is a strong example of an intellectual view in our present historical context that places the rights of political contingencies above the rights of a divine reign. Christians, I suggest, should not concede to the reign of anything other than the will of God, but Christian intellectuals must also admit the philosophical challenges of consensus. I’m optimistic that we can make progress toward working this problem out, but we must resist the anti-intellectual laziness that prefers entertainment to rigorous thought. I’ll end here with references to two Christian intellectuals, G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936) and William James 1842-1910). In his work, *Heretics*, Chesterton wrote this:

There are some people – and I am one of them – who think that the most practical and important thing about a man is still his view of the universe. We think that for a landlady considering a lodger, it is important to know his income, but still more important to know his philosophy. We think that for a general about to fight an enemy, it is important to know the enemy’s numbers, but still more important to know the enemy’s philosophy. We think the question is not whether the theory of the cosmos affects matters, but whether, in the long run, anything else affects them.³⁷

Each one of us in this room has a philosophy, a view of the cosmos, and our views influence how we think and behave. Whether we view matters as did Rousseau, or whether we are influenced by Aristotle, Jacques Derrida, or Jesus Christ, we are what we think. And in increasingly obvious ways, we are also subject to what governments and universities think. But what of what God thinks?

In a lecture by William James entitled, “What Pragmatism Means,” he reflects on a discussion he had with others while camping in the mountains. A dispute centered an

imagined scene:

[A] live squirrel supposed to be clinging to one side of a tree trunk, while over against the tree's opposite side a human being was imagined to stand. This human witness tries to get sight of the squirrel by moving rapidly round the tree, but no matter how fast he goes, the squirrel moves as fast in the opposite direction, and always keeps the tree between himself and the man, so that never a glimpse of him [the squirrel] is caught.³⁸

The metaphysical problem is this: does the man ever actually go around the squirrel or does he only go around the tree? In the end, there were no agreements; the answer was too elusive. Is knowing God's will like attempting to catch sight of the squirrel in James' allegory, or has God helped us know his laws in revealed scripture and the faculties of our created and creative intelligence?

I'll end with what I am really attempting to say. I am concerned that Rousseau's ideas have not only created a new secular notion that how we are to behave is subject to majority vote or the vicissitudes of feelings, whether majority opinions or shifting sentiments are right or wrong, has also inflicted Christians with the same views and behaviors. Have we forgotten what God has willed for his creation? We may be free to believe what we wish, but are then truly free? Have we constructed intellectual paradigms that have inserted us into Zhuangzi's dream, uncertain whether truth is what we *create*, or whether it is what we must *obey*? Mao Zedong (1893-1976) famously said once that, "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." Without a genuine surrender to reign of God, I wonder if Mao's assertion is the only reality to which humanity will default, or can we, if we are willing, surrender to a better reality, one that requires obedience to laws that challenge our present culture?

NOTES:

¹ Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*, Translated by Hugh Tredennick (London: Penguin Books, 1954), 53.

² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, Translated by G. D. H. Cole (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2003), 1.

³ Allan Bloom, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau,” in *History of Political Philosophy*, Second Edition, Edited by Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 537.

⁴ Quoted in Kenneth Clark, *Civilization: A Personal View* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1969), 274.

⁵ Mozi, “*Tianzhi*,” 天志 translated in Mo Tzu, “The Will of Heaven,” in *The Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsün Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu*, Translated by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 87.

⁶ Mozi, “*Tianzhi*,” 83.

⁷ Modified from the translation from Victor H. Mair, *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Bantam Books, 1994), 24.

⁸ “周與胡蝶，則必有分矣。此之謂物化 (Zhōu yǔ húdié, zé bì yǒu fèn yǐ. Cǐ zhī wèi wùhuà). *Zhuangzi* 莊子, “*Qi wu lun* 齊物論.”

⁹ *The Shoo King*, Translated by James Legge (Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1991; reprint from the Oxford University Press edition from 1935), 77.

¹⁰ Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), 7.

¹¹ In Fonna Forman, Ed., *The Adam Smith Review*, vol. 7 (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 137. Emphasis mine.

¹² Miner Searle Bates, *Religious Liberty: An Inquiry* (New York, NY: International Missionary Council, 1945), 295.

¹³ Fulton J. Sheen, *Freedom Under God* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1940), 250.

¹⁴ *Dignitas Humanae*, 2.

¹⁵ *Dignitas Hunmanaе*, 1.

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- ¹⁶ Yves Congar, OP, *Jesus Christ*, Translated by Luke O'Neill (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1966), 173.
- ¹⁷ Colossians 1:16, NAB. Emphasis mine.
- ¹⁸ Revelation 1:8, NAB. Emphasis mine.
- ¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 11:3, NAB.
- ²⁰ Romans 14:9, NAB.
- ²¹ Isaiah 33:22, NAB.
- ²² John 14:21, NAB.
- ²³ Congar, *Jesus Christ*, 185.
- ²⁴ Congar, *Jesus Christ*, 185.
- ²⁵ John Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, Edited by Douglas Knight (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 73.
- ²⁶ Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, 73.
- ²⁷ Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, 95.
- ²⁸ Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, 95.
- ²⁹ Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, 95.
- ³⁰ Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, 96.
- ³¹ Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, 97.
- ³² Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, 97.
- ³³ *Constitution of the Peoples Republic of China*, Article 36.
- ³⁴ Revelation 1:5, NAB.
- ³⁵ Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas Humana*, 10 & 13. Emphasis mine.
- ³⁶ James 2: 12-13, NAB.
- ³⁷ Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (New York: John Lane, 1905), 150-16.
- ³⁸ William James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 27.