HAVE WE MADE PROGRESS IN THE INTEGRATION OF SECULAR LIFE WITH THE TRANSCENDENCE OF FAITH? A 25 YEAR RETROSPECTIVE ON CHARLES TAYLOR'S *A CATHOLIC MODERNITY*?

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¿HEMOS AVANZADO EN LA INTEGRACIÓN DE LA VIDA SECULAR CON LA TRASCENDENCIA DE LA FE? UNA RETROSPECTIVA A 25 AÑOS DE *A CATHOLIC MODERNITY*? DE CHARLES TAYLOR

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RESUMEN

Han pasado 25 años desde la publicación de *Marianist Award Lecture* de Charles Taylor en la Universidad de Dayton en 1995, titulada "¿Una modernidad católica?" Esta se consideró como una evaluación relevante de la modernidad católica a modo de un breve resumen de la obra de Taylor "Las fuentes del yo" (1989) recientemente publicada en ese momento. Desde entonces, él ha transitado hacia nuevas reflexiones sobre fe y religión tal como lo muestra en su obra maestra "La era secular" (2007). El objetivo de este artículo es valorar el impacto que la tesis de Taylor sobre una modernidad católica tiene en el amplio diálogo entre fe y cultura.

Palabras claves: Charles Taylor / catolicismo / modernidad / argumento trascendental / secular

ABSTRACT

Twenty-five years have passed since the publication of Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture [hereafter "Lecture"] at the University of Dayton in 1995 entitled A Catholic Modernity? At the time, it was considered a remarkable assessment of Catholic modernity that was a concise summary of Taylor's then recently published Sources of the Self (1989). Since then he has moved towards further reflections on faith and religion, as displayed in his master work A Secular Age (2007). The point of this paper is to assess the impact that Taylor's thesis of Catholic modernity has on the broad dialogue of faith and culture.

Keywords: Charles Taylor / catholicism / modernity / transcendental argument / secular

Charles Taylor is unique among Catholic philosophers in his enthusiastic embrace of many aspects of what has been called modernism. The Catholic Church historically opposed many modernist tenets, particularly those that questioned the centrality of religious faith, committed to secular humanism, and encouraged individual autonomy in thought and action.[1] The opposition to modernity by the Catholic Church came to a peak in the Vatican's 1907 condemnation of modernism. It restricted Catholic theologians from considering or even discussing, many of modernism's tenets for decades thereafter.[2]

The Church has struggled with a history of often unbending doctrines of faith and morals, in addition to a vision that the highest perfection requires the embrace of a monastic form of life. The foundational structure of the Church, though, has always had to adapt to new societal circumstances.[3] In response to societal changes, during the last centuries, the Church has, in many regions, begun open up much more to secular law and culture. Taylor concerns himself not with this ongoing ecclesiastical assimilation, but rather steps back and considers secular law and culture from a philosophical position that itself has been closely associated with modernism, that *of transcendental argumentation*. This method is the catalyst for many of the innovative insights in Taylor's Lecture.

This paper will first analyze Taylor's model of transcendental argumentation. We will then show how his model is the central tool used to derive the conclusions about modernity and faith which he draws in the Lecture. Finally, after examining a biblical account of the relation between religious faith and the secular, we will assess how Taylor's 1996 Marianist Lecture, *A Catholic Modernity*?, is still applicable today to what Taylor maintains should be a positive and creative tension between

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1 Taylor addresses modernity by investigating the theme of the lived and experienced meaning of the world: "what is observed is a displacement of the objective systems of values or of 'higher goods' that were previously implicit in the perception of the outside world (the world itself configured and carried such meanings) and that, with the advent of modernity, retreat into the personal sphere." G.H. Marcon, R. Furlan, "The Issue of Identity in Postmodernity: Authenticity and Individualism in Charles Taylor," Psicologia USP, vol. 31, 2020. See also Taylor, Ethics of Authenticity (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

2 See *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (On the Doctrine of the Modernists). Promulgated by Pope Pius X, Vatican City: 1907.

3 In Taylor's estimation of the history of the Catholicism, "the terms reform and reformation represent something constantly present in Christendom. From the early beginning, the Church has been in the process of changing and looking for new forms of expressing its faith." Tone Sveltely, *Rereading Modernity - Charles Taylor on its Genesis and Prospects* (Boston College Dissertation, 2012), p. 455, fn. 80.

Catholicism and modernity.[4]

Transcendetal Argumentation

Charles Taylor's philosophical journey has been lengthy and multifaceted. In early works, he was engaged in criticisms of the dominant logical positivism and naturalism of his analytically- oriented Oxford colleagues. He then turned to hermeneutics and phenomenology, working with the texts of Heidegger, Gadamer, Wittgenstein, and other Continental thinkers. Later, alongside Michael Sandel, he engaged in the communitarian critique of liberalism. He continues to be active in social and political philosophy in much of his scholarship.

Taylor developed his model of transcendental argumentation in the late 1970s. Transcendental argumentation combines aspects of phenomenological methodology with a Kantian transcendental framework. It starts with

> some feature of our experience which they [transcendental thinkers] claim to be indubitable and beyond cavil. They then move to a stronger conclusion, one concerning the nature of the subject or the subject's position in the world. They make this move by a regressive argument, to the effect that the strong conclusion must be so if the indubitable fact about experience is to be possible.[5]

Taylor attributed the inspiration for this argument to the later Wittgenstein, with additional insights from Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. The original source lies in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, particularly in his employment of transcendental arguments to deduce and justify, against skepticism, the concepts used in the Table of Categories.[6] Similar Kantian influence is also found in the works of Catholic philosophers Joseph Maréchal, Bernard Lonergan, and Hugo Meynell.

Transcendental arguments, on Taylor's account, have several features:
• They give *indispensability* claims: "the condition stated in the conclusion

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4 Jeffrey McCurry wrote a review of the Lecture in 2002, noting that continued thinking needs to be done about Taylor's thesis that we can consistently resist the evil effects of our consumptive and violent culture while we continue to honor its very political structures that make those evils possible. See his "Review of A *Catholic Modernity?" Modern Theology* 18:3 (July 2002): 409-410.

5 Charles Taylor, "The Validity of Transcendental Arguments," in *The Sheed and Ward Anthology of Catholic Philosophy*, eds. J. Swindal, H. Gensler (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), p. 472.

6 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. P. Guyer, A. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), A80/B106.

is indispensable to the feature identified at the start."[7] Thus, they are *regressive*, or backward-looking arguments regarding the conditions of possibility for a given claim.

• They are a *priori* and *apodictic*, effectively self-evident. They begin with one's incorrigible experience *of* something. Taylor notes that it is similar to the way the "I think" for Kant accompanies all of one's representations.[8]

• For Taylor, their claims concern the experience of *embodied agents*, and form chains of apodictic indispensability for them. These agents act in a field of perceptions and possibilities intrinsically related to interbodily interaction.[9] This aspect of transcendental argumentation is not found in Kant's version.

Transcendental arguments thus provide a method of *orientation for action*. Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* describes agents as always acting within a perceptual field that has an orientational structure towards a *world*.[10] With Merleau-Ponty in mind, Taylor argues that the field is constituted not only by up-down spatial referencing, but also by a totality of "how one would move and act in the field."[11] The field is relative not only to the positioning of the agent's body, but also to the perceptual field of potential action for an agent. One acts in this *equilibrium* that unifies the corporeal actions that one undertakes with the physical and socially constructed world that the individual inhabits: a world that is comprised by religious and secular persons.

On Taylor's account, the up and down of an individual's field and orientation towards a world constitute the transcendental constructions of the individual's embodied sense perceptions: there would be no perception without them.[12]

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7 Taylor, "The Validity of Transcendental Arguments," p. 475.

8 Experience must have an object, it must be coherent, and must be shaped by the categories. See "Transcendental Arguments," p. 475.

9 An example would be where individuals recalled more negative life events when sitting in a slumped position, and more positive events when sitting in an upright position. See, Thomas Fuchs and Sabine Koch, "Embodied Affectivity: on Moving and Being Moved." Frontiers in Psychology, April 14, 2014. https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00508/full.

10 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, tr. D. Landes (New York: Routledge ,2012), pp. 205-208.

11 Taylor, "Transcendental Arguments," p. 473.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 474. Note that, however, embodied experience is derived not simply from one's body, since if that were so identical twins would essentially have the same set of experiences. It involves also a social embodiment as well, deriving from all environmental and personal interactions over has over one's life.

Having a sense of ourselves as embodied agents is a necessary condition of our experience having these features... For while it may not show that a reductive mechanistic account is impossible, a proof that we are inescapably embodied agents to ourselves does show the form that any account must take which invokes our own self-understanding.[13]

Such perception is not contingent on following a set of facts or objective rules but rather *constitutive* since humans could not even perceive or act without the reality of such a unified field. Taylor thus supports Wittgenstein's dictum that "the arrow points only in the application that a living being makes of it."[14] Rules do not contain the principles of their own application: application requires that the agent draw on a background of unarticulated understandings or sense of things.[15] All activity also requires the agent's awareness of the end of the action: the goal emerging from the embodied situation. Moreover, the subject needs to be aware of the conditions for the *failure* of an action in order to achieve the individual's point:

> Thus we can't just say: whoever is aware must *know* the basic conditions for failure, in the sense of having already accepted some formulation for them. But we can say that we must be able to recognize these as conditions of failure.[16]

Failures become stimuli for either reorientation towards new actions or restraint from repetition of prior failed actions.

The model of a transcendental argument, however, still allows questions to be asked: what remains of the access to *things in themselves* prior to engagement with them (Kant's problem); what is the particular nature of the "*self-evidence*" of the experiences that begin the arguments; and how do actions follow from the interpersonal *discourses* that guide many of the actions themselves?[17] A fourth question can also be asked: how do the conditions of possibility for given action orientations *change*

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13 *Ibid*.

14 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. G.E.M. Anscombe (London: Pearson, 1973), §454.

15 See Taylor "To Follow a Rule," in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 170- 171.

16 Taylor, "Transcendental Arguments" p. 476.

17 These three questions we cannot take up in this paper. Yet, concerning the third question, Taylor claims that we formulate the limiting success conditions which we must recognize once we grasp the formulation. The "we" who is referred to here is presumably a subject or a community sharing a world. See "Transcendental Arguments," p. 477.

over time? This is the question that we shall take up below since it is most appropriate to the interaction between modernity and the traditions of a faith commitment.

Taylor's phenomenologically based method thus illuminates not only our everyday experience of objects and interpersonal interactions, but also our broader experiences of culture, ethnicity, and religion. How do embodied agents adapt to contexts that constantly change over time?

Taylor's assessment of modernity and catholicism

Taylor brings to his investigations a rich background in political thought and cultural history. His *Sources of the Self* (1992) is replete with historical analyses of societal and cultural change. When Taylor considers either simple or complex experiences or events, such as the development of selfhood, his approach of transcendental argumentation employs a threefold model of *time consciousness* to discover the constitution of the whole of the living present for an agent: *retention* (from the past), *protention* (towards the future), and then both as inseparably embedded within the agent's primal impressions.[18] This model thus holds time to be not a series of "nows" of these impressions, but rather a *duration* pre-determined as

> a sense of past and future directly given...The initial absences of pastness and futurity are present in all our experience.[19]

This is not the "homogenous empty time" of the modern age, which is given to repetition and chronological measurement.[20] It rather contributes to a multifaceted and comprehensive view of selfhood in lived history.

In the Lecture, Taylor relies on this time consciousness to affirm his thesis that devotions and pious practices in the Catholic Church have always broadened the faith through evangelization that adapts to the *particular* historical and present needs of the faithful.[21] The same need to adapt to local circumstances occurred with Matteo Ricci and his work within the Jesuit missions in 16th century China at the very dawn

18 For a comprehensive description of internal time consciousness, see Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction of Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 130-145.
19 *Ibid.*, p. 136.
20 Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 58.
21 Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 8.

of modernity. Ricci's efforts were not without polemics, considering the Chinese Rites controversy that it prompted. Ricci and the Jesuits supported allowing Chinese converts to continue to participate in their ancestral customs, while the Dominicans and other missionaries refused to allow these customs for their converts. Pope Clement XI eventually denied the practice of including the ancestral customs.[22]

Taylor approves not only Ricci's inclusion of the Chinese rites, but also the future-looking *evangelization* that he and his fellow Jesuits were promoting. The Jesuits wanted to provide modern faith expressions for the Chinese faithful while still allowing them to maintain features of their previous rites. The parallel with the Catholic Church today is that Catholicism needs to accept and embrace the secular contributions of non-believers, other faith traditions, and numerous diverse cultures. These groups are now part of what Taylor calls a secular "rights culture" that seeks a kind of religious recognition similar to what has already been granted by legal institutions.[23] However, some separation of church and state is still necessary in order for a secular society to function in an efficient way since many of a society's citizens are faithful to religious organizations. Although religious, many of these faithful nonetheless engage in practices that are indeed non-secular yet not inimical to secularism.

Second, the Lecture critically assesses modernity's "affirmation of ordinary life." The ordinary life dynamic drives humanistic attempts to form all-encompassing equalities of the distribution of goods and services as well as to reinforce individual, social, and cultural forms of recognition.[24] But when its meeting of goals fails, indignation can result. Taylor adds that Nietzsche himself rejected the path of ordinary life, but his ensuing embrace of "will to power" was cruel and bereft of empathy. Will to power retained only a simplistic metaphysical "affirmation of life."[25] The alternative for Taylor is to embrace a culture in which the attitudes of the faithful are shaped by prophets and martyrs who were

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22 See Pedro Luengo Gutiérrez, "Christianity and Chinese Rites Controversy: Spirit Tablets in 17th Century," *Journal of Chinese Studies* 1:1 (2012), pp. 71-82. Gutiérrez details the way in which the depictions of religious artifacts were caught up in the controversy.

23 However, Taylor is, however, critical of some aspects of the "rights culture."

24 See also, Taylor, A Secular Age, p. 26.

25 Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity?*, p.25. Thomas Nevin affirms the same. But he points out that Nietzsche's ostensibly excoriating pronouncements about religion ended up, ironically, not so much a poison but a tonic for Christianity. It was reinforced by his stylized preaching as a self-proclaimed "near Christian." See Nevin, *Nietzsche's Prodigal Fathers: A Study in Prodigal Christianity* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 4, 270.

dedicated to "more than life."[26] Taylor focuses on the "abundant life" that endorses the theocentrisms ranging from the obedience of the "Thy will be done" of the *Our Father* to certain meditative practices of Buddhism.[27] He envisages a faith that should be beyond the common understanding of traditional faith, and thus be *revolutionary*.

For Taylor, the ultimate measure of the Catholic embrace of modernity then lies in its conformity not to a secular humanism, but to the *Greatest Commandment* biblical injunction of the double love of God and neighbor.[28] This thereby extends also to the love of self that serves as the basis for the love of neighbor in the Commandment. Augustine, in *On Christian Teaching*, claims that the Commandment is the first principle for determining how to interpret unknown and ambiguous signs in Scripture: if a passage is ambiguous or difficult to understand, one adopts the interpretation that most builds up the love of God and neighbor.[29] Taylor is open to a secular society that both focuses on human rights and affirms the achievements of the modernity that has produced many of them, while nonetheless is also attentive to modernity's failures, such as Auschwitz and Hiroshima. This transcendentally and thus retroactively derived assessment helps one to realize the humbling degree to which some of the most impressive diffusions of the Gospel message in history have "depended on a breakaway from Christendom."[30]

Taylor further develops his thesis about modernity in *A Secular Age* (2007). Three ideas emerge. First, the contemporary secular world has bequeathed us with a "buffered self."[31] Many people live in nations where their basic physical needs and security are effectively guaranteed, so they interiorize their individual identities while having to limit their free aspirations. Second, Taylor criticizes the support some give of secularization by the "subtraction argument." The subtraction argument holds that the secular person, by subtracting out religion and blind adherence to custom, actually comes to know reality more truly than the religious person does.[32] Taylor argues, rather, that secular does not

26 Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity*, p. 21.

27 John 10:10.

28 See Mt 22:35-40

29 See St. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, tr. A. Green (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) pp. 20-21.

30 Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity?*, p. 37.

31 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 37-41.

32 Wendy Brown criticizes Taylor's use of the subtraction argument, though she is sympathetic to much of it, by claiming it is based on cognitive ideas and not on the more powerful causes of secular thinking in material forces that spark ideological thinking that the secular works to

supersede the sacred: "fullness of the linger and languor of religion and spirituality parallels the making of the modern identity."[33] Nothing *needs* to be subtracted from either the religious or the secular. Third, Taylor rejects Max Weber's claim that secularization has stemmed from the growth of the unavoidable "iron cage" in modern societies of instrumental, scientific, and technical rationality.[34] For Weber, these advances diminish the social relevance of religion. But Christian theologians have long recognized the importance of the integration of science and religion.[35] Taylor defends three secularizing transitions in history that have not diminished religion: the transition from the divine to a scientific explanation of the natural world; the changeover from a divine right to a populist and republican basis for governance; and the move away from the presences of spirits and indubitable moral foundations to a demythologized but ethical world. As for the latter, however, Taylor points out that secular dealings with problematic religious or political movements (e.g., witch hunts in colonial America or McCarthyism in the 1950's) have sometimes failed. Taylor suggests that a phenomenological analysis, which explains these problematic spiritual phenomena as often emerging from "free floating anxiety," can lessen overreactions to them."[36]

In sum, Taylor notes that increased secularization has not seen the overall diminution of religion but rather its diversification and, in significant cases, its growth. However, he admits that the secularization thesis has failed to come to full fruition and has also produced some negative consequences.[37] Like Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, he talks of the "disenchantment" of culture that secularization can bring about.[38] They viewed disenchantment as the inevitable result of

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overcome. See her "The Sacred, the Secular, and the Profane: Charles Taylor and Karl Marx," in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age,* eds. J. VanAntwerpen, M. Warner, C. Calhoun (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 89.

33 Joshua Hollman. "Christian Identity in a Secular Age: Charles Taylor and Martin Luther on the Authenticity of the Self in Society," *Concordia Theological Journal* 6:1 (2018), p. 2. See also Taylor, A Secular Age, pp. 25-27.

34 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, tr. T. Parsons (New York: Routledge, 1992).

35 Consider, for example, the importance for St. Augustine that science—which "discovers by investigation"— should play a key role in the interpretation of Scripture. See Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, p. 54.

36 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 89.

37 Jeffrey Alexander argues from a sociological perspective that Taylor's account still bemoans the passing of what is sacred given the emergence of the secular. Alexander misses the religious and philosophical insight in Taylor that the transcendent cannot simply pass into the immanent but remains embedded in it. See Alexander, "Cultural Sociology in a Secular Age," *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 9 (2021): 3–8.

38 *Ibid*., p. 25-26. Taylor adds that it is a tragedy, however, that "the codes which churches want

the Enlightenment emphasis on the reduction of value to empirical and measurable determinations. Taylor concludes *A Secular Age*, though, with the perceptive claim that both secular ideologists and conservative Catholics alike need to realize that there are more secular ways to be Catholic than either side currently imagines to be possible.[39]

What has changed now?

From the point of view of a phenomenologist employing transcendental arguments, nothing ever goes out of existence for an agent: we carry our retentions of the past in our everyday experience along with our protentions and our possibilities. Using this phenomenological structure, Taylor's earlier assessment of modernity still endures. The goal of this paper is not to examine what particular practices of the Church have changed in twenty-five years, such as its dealings with the sex abuse crisis or its ostensibly declining social and political influence in many countries, but rather how modernity continues to inform the Catholic faith in light of its future – and vice versa.

In the spirit of Taylor's transcendental arguments, then, we can analyze a particular biblical passage that provides a further interpretation of the ongoing creative tension between the Church and secularism.

The Christian faith centers on *salvation* as God's universal will for all creatures.[40] Christ's death and resurrection were redeeming actions meant for the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of an individual's relationship to God. Salvation is ordinarily understood to require some measure of Christian faith and practice, and so *prima facie* is a challenge to secular culture and nonbelievers.

A paradigmatic proclamation about salvation is found in the biblical account of the Final Judgment.[41] Two bracing and yet relevant realities emerge from the passage. First, the Son of Man, who is Christ, levels a judgment on each awaiting entry into the Kingdom at the end of time. He measures the merit of each action an individual has done for the Kingdom. The judgment of an action is solely based on whether

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to urge on people" still suffer from "the denigration of sexuality, horror at the Dionysian, fixed gender roles, or a refusal to discuss identity issues." *Ibid*., p. 503.

39 *Ibid*., p. 504.

40 Salvation expresses fundamentally that all reality is good and worthy of love. See Karl Rahner, "Salvation," *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (London: Burns & Oates, 1975), p. 1499.

41 See Mt 25:31-46.

the individual served "the least": the stranger, the poor, the hungry, the naked, and the imprisoned. Caring for these persons was caring for *Christ himself*. Christ asks no questions of them, but he deems each as either worthy or unworthy to enter the Kingdom. However, those who are judged to be worthy then ask a simple yet perplexing question: if the qualification for salvation was for Christ to have been present to them in "the least" they served, and they were blind to Christ's presence in them, why are they *worthy* to be saved? The answer is that they were in fact serving Christ directly, even without knowledge of his presence.

This surprising passage reinforces the salvific value of the secular. Both the saved and the condemned effectively lived in worlds in which they did not recognize or know Christ. Yet these same worlds all provided sufficient opportunities for them to serve those in need, where Christ dwelt. The preconditions for those to be saved thus required no specific religious background: a secular background was sufficient, as long as those who were to be saved had not presumably rejected Christ (there is no suggestion that either the saved or the condemned did). They simply had been unable, or perhaps unwilling, to recognize Christ dwelling in the poor.[42] Such seems to be consistent with the modern, secular, and humanist spirit: to serve without the expectation of a personal or spiritual relationship with, or a personal gain from, those served.

The upshot of the passage concerning the Final Judgment is that each embodied person *of any faith* has, even if unbeknownst to the individual, the possibility for a *relationship* with Christ by serving one of the embodied poor.[43] Christ is then able to be recognized in two ways: either through ecclesial sacramental life or in solidarity with the poor or disadvantaged. How does this relationship happen, however, in our continuing and arguably increasingly secular world?

In 2010, Taylor engaged in a debate with Jürgen Habermas concerning how citizens of faith engage with secular culture. Taylor began by suggesting that the French Revolution's notions of "liberty, equality, and fraternity" could serve as a model for conceptualizing the "goods" of secularism. Many secular states have functioned well within this general scheme. How can this example inform our current thinking about recalcitrant divisive issues in modern societies? By using

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42 One could, though, argue that the majority of the world today does have a basic understanding of Christianity's claims of about Jesus Christ as God's son.

43 This has a close connection with Karl Rahner's notion of the "anonymous Christian." See Rahner, *Do You Believe in God?*, tr. R. Strachan (New York: Paulist, 1969), pp. 5-9.

a transcendental argument, Taylor suggests that individuals analyze the *social imaginaries* embedded in societal issues. Individuals ought to be able to understand these imaginaries as informing fields of interactions that project social expectations. Agents are then conscious of "the deeper normative notions and images" that underlie their actions.[44]

How do these imbedded normative presuppositions influence human behaviors and social policy? Taylor considers the case of the legal prohibition of Muslim students from wearing the hijab in French and German public schools. He points out that, in such matters, a distinction is often made between secular and religious attitudes towards societal norms. The secular attitude is supposed to avoid tolerance for exceptional religious practices, yet focus on the democratic society's commitment to diversity. For Taylor, however, secular diversity resists not only the privileging of one religion over another, but also the privileging of one cultural or intellectual social imaginary over another. Taylor believes that the normative ideas in a society should involve a "revisionary polysemy" of *various* doctrines and ways of thinking.[45] Rather than pit the religious against non-religious, secular, or atheistic viewpoints, the normative governance ought to be neutral among all of these viewpoints – whether Kantian, Marxist, or utilitarian. One should not fetishize one basic principle, be it either *laïcité* in the French legality of the hijab or non-religiously informed reason in the idealized analysis of Habermas or John Rawls. Instead, each side must recognize a genuine plurality of principles. Taylor realizes that this recognition of plurality depends on the ability of societal members to act in mutual commitment and trust in order to form a collective identity – a tall order. Furthermore, he allows that the normative identity built from this neutrality may itself take on "quasi sacred status."[46]

In response to Taylor, Habermas rebuffs the claim that secular and

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44 Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 19-22. "Taylor's imaginaries approach has served as a guide to explore the cultural face of Chile's political modernity by attending to the unique way in which the North Atlantic modern social imaginary has been re-configured when placed within a pre-modern (colonial) Hispano American social imaginary…. In fact, in colonial times and during the first half of the nineteenth century the pueblo was the self-governing community, the real political unit in Chile. In contrast to it, the idea of a Chilean 'nation' resonated as a very abstract notion." Taylor's model of social imaginaries explains the tension between the national and the local. See also Dario Montero, "A Taylorian Approach to Social Imaginaries: The Origin of Chile's Democratic Culture," (Dissertation: Friedrich-Schiller Universität Jena, 2015), pp. 28ff.

45 Taylor, "Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism," in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, eds. E. Mendieta, J. VanAntwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 56.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

religious thinking have equal status as operative principles in the public sphere. He argues that unlike its secular counterpart, religious reasoning requires "membership in a community of believers" and participation in some kind of cultic practice.[47] Thus, the religious range of extension is intrinsically more limited than the secular. Taylor, in response, questions Habermas's implicit appeal to the presence of a "experience" in religion. For example, Martin Luther King Jr.'s religious message about the principles of the United States Constitution could be understood broadly without any appeal to restricted experience or practice, which Habermas posits of religion. Habermas insists that any putative neutrality about societal norms and laws of politics or persuasion still inextricably relies upon an underlying rational consensus among both sides concerning *political* essentials. Yet in the public sphere — Habermas's term for the totality of deliberative political decision making — religious citizens inevitably realize that some of their arguments cannot be understood by all citizens without *translation*. This requirement of translation remains a barrier to neutral political decision making in modernity.

Taylor's final response to Habermas is telling. He reconfigures the problem of the secular and modern by shifting it from a political to a specifically phenomenological register. He argues,

> The world is a gift. We are given to each other. We can't choose. This is part of what we are, this gift.[48]

The attitude of giving and the gift transforms the dialogue dramatically. The dialogue is no longer relying solely on translations between opposed interlocutors. Although the discussion is never exhausted, shared transcendental argumentation will discover a given impetus toward the positivity of shared ends and goals.[49] Taylor concludes that religious and secular modernists should find this common presupposition they share in this essentially *apriori* gift of shared identity with each other.

Taylor does not revise his earlier claim that service to marginalized groups can often be done better while working within a secular culture

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47 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 111. The phenomenological notion of the gift is most notably developed by Jean-Luc Marion. The gift "delivers Being/being [the ontological difference]. It delivers it in the sense first that the gift gives Being/being and puts it into play, opens it to its sending, as in order to launch it into its destiny." Marion, *God Without Being*, tr. T. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 101. The gift is the divine stimulus of all of reality.

49 Taylor, "Why we Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism," p. 112.

than by Christian means. He seemingly follows the secular truth of the Last Judgment. With the notion of the gift, as a kind of transcendental apriori, Taylor additionally reveals in another register the relationship of all persons, and indeed all creatures, to the Divine. Christ took on the human condition with its attendant suffering and, through this alone, made possible a relationship of all humankind to himself. It is through service to others that individuals, even if unaware, meet the One who is the condition for all service. This transcendental argument is vividly present in all encounters with the poor and "least of these" who condition the presence of Christ in the everyday of the secular and ordinary life.[50]

Conclusion

This paper's intent has been neither to critique nor to complete the aims of Charles Taylor in the past twenty-five years. We have sought only to further analyze his principle of the important and dynamic relationship between Catholicism and the secular.

What does this relationship mean for Catholic modernity in practice? It emphasizes, perhaps ironically given its pre-modern development, the *sacramental* nature of Catholicism wherein union with Christ comes through ordinary signs of everyday life: water, bread, wine, in addition to language and prayer.[51] From these common elements emerge continued evangelization fully conscious of the secular.[52] The connection with the secular mirrors also the need for ecumenism among Christian denominations. Echoed by Thomas Merton, the Church always needs to work alongside other faith traditions towards the common good. The Church needs to see itself as one body with many parts.[53]

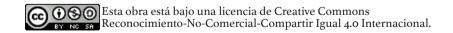In sum, Taylor has used transcendental arguments to grasp

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50 Herbert McCabe, God Matters (New York: Continuum, 1987), p. 12. McCabe sees two key means of encounter with Christ as illustrated in Scripture: the poor and the sacraments. "The poor are the sign of sin in the world" (p. 113). Their reality prompts Christ's judgment. The sacraments celebrate the coming of the Kingdom.

51 Notably, the term "sacramental" does not appear anywhere in Taylor's Lecture.

52 A clear example of this would involve the use of social media by the Church. This is a tool that can be seen through two lenses. It has negative effects, such as cyberbullying and viral messaging, but also can instantly spread needed information to millions of people worldwide. This kind of secular tool is strongly endorsed by most Christians. In his message for the World Day of Social Communications in 2019, Pope Francis urged responsible use of the internet, saying it should be used to liberate but not to entrap.

53 See 1 Cor 12:12-20. In Buddhism, Thomas Merton found a deeper meaning to his Christian beliefs that he may not have found if he had not taken part in *dialogue*. Such dialogue leads individuals to become more accepting and aware that their view of a faith tradition is not the only viable one. They thus discover new respect for traditions other than the one that they follow. See Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation* (New Directions, 1972).

the interactions among secularism, faith, and reason. Our additional argument regarding the biblical notion of salvation and the Final Judgment not only utilizes his framework, but also yields his promise. What is at stake is an all-embracing evangelization.[54] This extends from engendering engagement with other faiths to safeguarding a legal respect for the separation of church and state.[55] Careful reflection finds that the religious and the secular both seek mercy and justice, thus the religious and the secular deserve the careful monitoring and unleashing of their power to embrace all of humanity. This task of ongoing reflection, as Taylor then proclaims, lies at the very heart of a Catholic modernity.

54 See Mt 7:1: "Stop judging, that you may not be judged."

55 In "Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism," Taylor uses the term "fetishization" to characterize favored institutional arrangements that prohibit certain religious practices such as the wearing of a hijab in a public school (pp. 41-42).