

Multiculturalism And Modernity

Posted By *Rod Dreher* On January 1, 2017 @ 2:11 pm In | [69 Comments](#)

Reader Anna, who lives in Budapest, recommended to me the 1994 Macedonian film *Before The Rain*. It's not available on Netflix or Amazon Prime streaming, but she found [a version on YouTube subtitled in English](#).^[1] Unfortunately, it's also subtitled in Greek, which sometimes makes reading the English subtitles difficult. Still, you get used to it, and you certainly get the gist of what's being said. It's worth watching. [Here is a link to Roger Ebert's four-star review](#).^[2] Anna writes:

I've just seen [your post on Hagia Sophia](#)^[3], and realised there is a film that is an absolute MUST-WATCH for you, based on your recent posts let alone the music. This Macedonian masterpiece won the Golden Lion in Venice in 1994 and is one of the most acclaimed foreign-language films since the fall of communism.

The first reading is that it is about the never-ending circle of violence (in this particular case, between Macedonians and Albanians), but a deeper understanding points to seeing the difference between East and West, tradition and modernity, and why it has become nearly impossible to live in either. The structure is built like a triptych and in the centre of it is a Christ-like figure, Aleksandr Kirkov.

Anna is exactly right. I'm going to talk about the movie in this post, trying my best to avoid spoilers, focusing on what it has to say to us about our own challenges today.

The film is structured in three parts. In the first, set in rural Macedonia, one of the new Balkan republics emerging from Yugoslavia's break-up, a young Orthodox Christian monk tries to protect an Albanian Muslim girl who is hiding from a mob of Orthodox men trying to kill her. The second part, set in London, focuses on the relationship between an unhappily married English photo editor and an acclaimed Macedonian-born photographer, Aleksandr Kirkov, who asks her to leave her husband and return with him to his homeland. He has just won the Pulitzer Prize for his war photography, but he's burned out on war, and just wants to return to his village and live a quiet life. The third part follows him back home in the Macedonian countryside, which is where the film began.

Kirkov is an ethnic Macedonian of Orthodox Christian heritage, though he pretty clearly doesn't practice the faith. In the film's beginning, a lakeside (presumably Lake Ohrid) Orthodox monastery is an occasional place of refuge for Albanian Muslims fleeing Christian persecution. We learn that ethnic and religious tensions between Albanian Muslims and Christian Macedonians are ramping up, and have become violent. In the first section, the monks have (unwittingly, for most of them) given shelter to an Albanian girl from a nearby village. So strong is the ethnic hatred that when Christian men come looking for her, they pay little respect to the authority of the abbot or the sanctity of the monastery. They just want to kill.

But they are not alone. As we will learn before this section ends, their Albanian enemies — until recently, seen as neighbors — are so drunk with ethnic pride and hatred that they violate other sacred boundaries in asserting the tribe's prerogatives.

Kirkov comes from this region. We meet him in the film's second part. He has been in Bosnia documenting the civil war there, and explains to Anne, his editor (and lover), how by simply doing his job, he inadvertently became responsible for the death of an innocent. Filled with guilt and disgust over man's inhumanity to man, he decides to quit the business, and invited Anne to leave with him for Macedonia.

There is the matter of her husband, to whom she is estranged. They meet over dinner to talk things over. The viewer can tell why Anne might have been drawn to the burly, strong-feeling Aleksandr, and away from her relatively milquetoast English husband. Doesn't make it right, but you can see how it might have happened. We are given to understand that the repressed Oxford-trained woman is irresistibly drawn to wildness. During her anxious dinner with her husband, there is an outbreak of serious violence in the restaurant that appears to have something to do with a feud between Balkan immigrants. The point seems to be: if you welcome immigrants into your society, do not be surprised when their own blood feuds and barbaric ways play out on your own streets.

Note well, though, that writer-director Milcho Manchevski's 1994 screenplay ^[4] delicately points out that the British too have their own ethno-religious dispute that erupts into daily life: the Northern Irish problem. When a character makes a crack about the violent Balkan patron and waiter, saying that "at least they're not from Ulster," the restaurant owner, a man of almost comic sophistication, politely points out that he himself is an Ulsterman.

With Anne back in London making up her mind, Aleksandr returns to his home village. When he last lived there, it was part of Yugoslavia, and governed by Titoist communism. Ethnic Albanians and Macedonians went to school together. Things have changed greatly in his absence. Old hatreds have reappeared. It has become the kind of place where an angry character taunts Aleksandr to take up a rifle, and avenge "five hundred years of your blood." (Under Ottoman Turk rule, Albanian Muslims enjoyed many privileges over the oppressed Christian masses.)

Aleksandr wants no part of it. In fact, he wants to stand against it. But can he?

Much turns on a line heard more than once early in the film: "Time never dies. The circle is not round." This mysterious remark is key to the film's moral. While it is true that violence and hatred are inescapably part of the human condition, we are not condemned to live them out. Yes, events recur, but the existence of time means that they are more like a spiral than a circle. If we choose life, if we choose goodness, we break the repetitive circle — not permanently (something that will not happen this side of the Second Coming), but we may make it less likely that our children will suffer the same fate. In this sense, *Before The Rain* is a more or less conventional anti-war film.

But things get messier in Anna's second reading. Aleksandr has come out of a traditional culture, one that still lives by the old ways, and has found success in a liberal, First World culture that has

for the most part put religion and ethnicity behind. In fact, he makes his living observing the poisoned fruits of that world (generally speaking), and selling those images to people who live in the liberal world, which has honored him (e.g., Pulitzer Prize) for his work. It was when his work as an observer broke the invisible wall, implicating Aleksandr in the violence, that he renounced his work and sought to return to his home village.

The silence of the monastery, where the only things heard are Scripture, sung prayers and Psalms, and the occasional words among the monks, keep it as a sort of paradise free from the wild passions consuming those outside its walls. Early on, when the angry search party of Christians comes looking for the Muslim girl, the abbot tells the search leader that the monastery has served as a place of refuge for Bosnian Muslim refugees, because all are the same in God's eyes. No Muslims are there now (as far as the abbot knows), but the abbot does not apologize for what they have done. The Christian thugs love the sound of gunshots and the sonic violence of hip-hop music: in this film, these are signs of the modern world. One of the Christian thugs literally cannot stand silence, and it renders him beastly and insensate.

When the film's narrative shifts to London, we hear the same kind of soundscape. In one of the opening scenes in London, a young man who is a messenger for the photo editor Anne talks to her dreamily of drugs and music and sex. He looks at a photographic image of Madonna (!), breasts showing and dressed like a dominatrix (this was her "Sex" period), and is overcome by a vision of Paradise in which the entire world is pulsing with pagan sexual energy. "Just imagine, someone out there's shagging right this very second," he says. It is a remarkable image of worldly corruption. Online, I stumbled across this paper about "[listening](#)" in *Before The Rain* ^[5]. Excerpt:

The Orthodox monastery and church on Lake Ohrid (composed of several actual settings but presented as one location in the film), is itself a place quite "unreal, closer to a mythical land than to current-day Macedonia." With its profound silences, this setting creates a unique environment in which one can hear properly. The classic Greeks distinguished *sigâô*, denoting a general absence of sound, from *siôpaô*, referring to the absence of human speech. Adjusting these terms to modern times, it becomes apparent that the monastery creates both *sigâô*, the absence of the intrusive noise of modern life (traffic, industry, machines, media), and *siôpaô*, the absence of verbal noise. Situated in a breathtaking but rugged terrain accessible only by foot, the monastery offers the silencing of the modern world's noisy everyday life and its multiple voices and demands for attention, or, in other words, a reclaiming of that silence which has "today . . . become an endangered species," as contemporary acoustic ecologist Gordon Hempton puts it. In terms of the verbal noise or, as Corradi Fiumara calls it, the "environmental degradation . . . with regard to the world of language," that is, "an unmonitored saturation of written or spoken words and . . . a concomitant lack of silence," the complete absence of things such as electronic media allows the creation of *siôpaô*, or the silencing of this endlessly proliferating "saturation of words."

The author of the paper, Gordana P. Crnkovic, observes that the thuggish Macedonian Christian brutes are listening to the same violent hip-hop song that passing teenagers in London are. She writes that there is a "connection by noise" to the modern world in London, and the largely pre-

modern world of the Balkans. The only place in the film where one can escape modernity and find silence is the monastery. If you plan on seeing the movie, **do not read Crnkovic's paper in advance**, as it is full of spoilers. She does point out that the young monk Kiril, who is at the center of Part I, does not speak a word of Albanian, and is himself two years into a vow of silence. But his dwelling in the soundscape of the monastery has taught him to "listen" such that he knows that he has a Christian responsibility to shield the hunted Muslim girl, though he cannot speak her language. My kids and I are all home sick from the Liturgy today, but earlier this morning, I was reading to them from today's Scripture reading. I ended up talking to them about the reading, and telling them how our culture today is so full of lies and confusion. Always return to Scripture and the Church, I told them, to know what is **real**. Writing this post and reconsidering the film, which I saw last night, brings that point home powerfully.

So, this is the world to which Aleksandr returns. In London, he seemed to believe he could return home and live a quiet life without taking sides. "I don't want to be on the same side with any of them," he tells Anne. "Brainless mongoloids butchering each other for no reason." This is an illusion, an illusion that his British passport and his life lived in the West has allowed him to cultivate. Back home, the clan and the tribe rule, not individuals. That is a Western thing. Aleksandr's imagination was formed in the Tito era, when tribe and clan and religious identity were suppressed. Now, with the passing of communism, they have come roaring back, but Aleks is ill-equipped to survive in this world.

Reader Anna, recall, wrote of the film that:

a deeper understanding points to seeing the difference between East and West, tradition and modernity, and why it has become nearly impossible to live in either.

In my interpretation, it is nearly impossible for Anne and her English husband to live in modernity, because she lacks rootedness (Anne blames her husband for their unhappy marriage, but her mother says no, dear, the problem is you), and because she lives in a world of busy-ness, such that she has no inner peace within which she might deal with her passions productively. Again, you can see why the "noise" of the rugged, masculine war photographer's life appeals to her. It speaks to an inner fantasy she has of living a life of passion, not the settled, urban, modern life that she has in London. The images she processes as part of her job — shots of war, but also of sexual passion — call to her. The vulgar messenger invites her to go to the Glastonbury festival with him, for a veritable orgy of drugs, music, and sexual excess. You can tell that she wants to do this, but will not allow herself. To see her sympathetically, one can imagine the difficulty of living such a hollow life, one in which her restlessness is unsatisfied. That restlessness is part of what makes her human — but as a modern, she has no way to connect it to transcendence, which would order it. Aleks invites her to go live a relatively primitive life with him in rural Macedonia — something that tempts her, because it seems to her more "real" than the rarefied cosmopolitan but dull life she has in London.

Of course it is impossible for Aleks (and Anne) to live in the premodern Balkans, because their modernity would not allow them to escape the destructive historical passions of the village. Aleks is tied to many of these people by blood, and blood carries obligations with it. Nor, we see, are the

Albanian Muslims in the neighboring village immune to these forces. The Old World, so to speak, really is one of much more intense passions and drama than what Anne and Aleks could have had back in London ... but the shadow side of all that premodern, or anti-modern, "authenticity" is very black indeed.

Anne and Aleks are victims of their poetic imagination, thinking that it is possible to live as observers (literally or figuratively) without being involved. This is their tragedy. In fact, the dissolution of Anne's marriage comes from her inability to commit herself to the man who is actually her husband. In a sense, she wishes to be an "observer" of their marriage: in it, but not of it. This is not possible, though. On the other hand, she balks when Aleks asks her to commit to him in Macedonia. Anne desires more than modern life gives her, but she will only be satisfied with total commitment — something that she cannot bring herself to give.

Aleks, again, is a man of passion and commitment, willing to risk his own life for his art, as he has proved again and again. Now he's willing to sacrifice his art for the sake of life. He has discovered that it is impossible to be a mere observer, that simply by recording what you see, you become part of it. The murderous violence taints him. He has this idea that if he goes back to the village, he will return to some kind of childhood innocence. Even though he surely knows better, this is the craving that drives him.

To Anna's point, it is remarkable how globalization has brought aspects of Western culture to this remote Balkan village (the popular music, the children's chatter featuring Western pop culture icons), but also the violence and atavistic passions of the Balkans to the West. You can't escape modernity, nor can you escape pre-modernity. I need to think more about the role of the monastery in the film. The holy iconography on the wall makes sacred art of human history and passion, even violent passion (none more violent than the murder of God Himself by men). Yet the monks themselves aren't fully removed from time and passion. They wish to be neutral in the conflict between Muslims and Christians, but they aren't allowed to be, in the end — and the first section of the film concludes with an act by the abbot that is highly questionable, though his motivation is in question.

Before The Rain doesn't offer a solution to the problem of war and violence, but it does offer strong commentary on nature of that problem, as it manifests in our own time and place, and on false solutions. It does, however, tell us that we are not fated to relive these conflicts — that they are perpetuated by human choice. I am interested in the role that religion — the Christian religion specifically — might play in breaking the circle of violence, by drawing violence into itself, and releasing it through Christ's sacrifice. The late René Girard's theory of mimesis is important here.

Excerpt from a primer on it: [6]

Mimetic theory explains the role of violence in human culture using imitation as a starting point. "Mimetic" is the Greek word for imitation and René Girard [7], the man who proposed the theory over 50 years ago, chose to use it because he wanted to suggest something more than exact duplication. This is because our mimeticism is a complex phenomenon. Human imitation is not static but leads to escalation and is the starting point for innovation. Girard's great insight was that

imitation is the source of rivalry and conflict that threatens to destroy communities from within. Because we learn everything through imitation, including what to desire, our shared desires can lead us into conflict. As we compete to possess the object we all want, conflict can lead to violence if the object cannot be shared, or more likely, if we refuse to share it with our rivals.

Girard believes that early in human evolution, we learned to control internal conflict by projecting our violence outside the community onto a scapegoat. It was so effective that we have continued to use scapegoating to control violence ever since. The successful use of a scapegoat depends on the community's belief that they have found the cause and cure of their troubles in this "enemy". Once the enemy is destroyed or expelled, a community does experience a sense of relief and calm is restored. But the calm is temporary since the scapegoat was not really the cause or the cure of the conflict that led to his expulsion. When imitation leads once again to internal conflict which inevitably escalates into violence, human communities will find another scapegoat and repeat the process all over again.

By reading ancient myths Girard realized that ancient sacrificial religions originated in a community's attempt to ritualize the scapegoating cure. Prohibitions forbade the mimetic envy and rivalry that lead to conflict; ritual sacrifices recreated the expulsion or death of the scapegoat. By reading the Bible, Girard realized that the Judeo-Christian tradition reveals the innocence of the scapegoat and so renders ancient religion ineffective. The last 2,000 years is witness to humanity's attempt to find non-sacrificial ways to control our rivalry and conflict. Christian apocalyptic literature predicts our failure to do so. Finding ways to form unity and ease conflict without the use of scapegoats is thus the key to establishing a real and lasting peace.

More:

Q. What role did scapegoating play in ancient sacrificial religions?

A. Girard hypothesizes that the spontaneous phenomenon of scapegoating occurred over and over in early proto-human groups and was eventually ritualized into ancient sacrificial practices. This use of ritualized scapegoating to control conflict and establish unity is what made culture possible. Often it is believed that ancient religions arose out of mistaken or delusional thinking and were unnecessary add-ons to human evolution. Girard believes the opposite: ancient sacrificial religions were incredibly reasonable and realistic and absolutely essential to human development. Without peace and unity, no community can accomplish anything; they disintegrate before they can innovate. And peace and unity is exactly what the ancient sacrificial practices provided.

Scapegoating is also the origin of the apparently contradictory nature of the ancient gods who often represent both good and evil qualities in one divinity. This makes sense once you realize that after the elimination of the scapegoat (ritualized into sacrifice), the scapegoat is miraculously discovered to be a divinity who restores order and peace. The gods thus represent the principle of order and disorder, a principle that controls outbreaks of violence within the community by executing a small dose of violence against an isolated victim or victim group.

Q. What is myth?

A. Modern scholars tend to think that myths are completely imaginary, fabricated stories that arose out of the primitive mind of early man. Often it is thought that myths came first and then rituals and sacrificial practices evolved out of these stories. For Girard, it is always the reality of spontaneous scapegoating violence which comes first. This violence brings peace to a conflicted community and over time rituals which repeat the violence against the scapegoat in a controlled form emerge as preventive measures against the return of the violence. Myths are the stories told by the community to justify its use of ritual violence against the victim.

The purpose of myth is to conceal the truth of the innocence of the sacrificial victim, because in order for the sacrifice to be effective the community must believe in the guilt of the victim (just as it did when the scapegoating occurred spontaneously), Therefore, myth places blame solely on the victim, siding with the community, or crowd. Myth further justifies itself by demonizing the victim as the sole source of the contagious violence and disorder within the community. Thus for Girard myth is at best only half the story: the community does indeed experience a sense of relief and restoration of peace when the victim is sacrificed. But myth also conceals the deeper truth that the victim was arbitrarily chosen, innocent of the community's problems, and wrongly executed.

Q. Is Christianity an example of a myth?

A. Christianity is often critiqued as simply an example of another ancient myth that involves a dying and rising god. For Girard, however, it is Christianity which destroys the power of myth to conceal the innocence of the victim. In the Christian narrative, the victim of the crowd's violence is innocent, falsely accused by both religious and secular authorities, and put to death in the most shameful of circumstances. There is no duality within Christ as there is with the gods of myths: Jesus is not portrayed as the cause of the community's problems, but always portrayed as innocent despite the accusations against him. Girard has famously said that the secret heart of the sacred is violence itself. He has also said that the Christian gospel reveals is that the secret heart of God is non-violent, self-giving unto death. Quite a contrast!

Read the whole thing. ^[6] Girard was a convinced Catholic, though I have no idea what the convictions are of the people who wrote that primer.

I don't know to what extent the filmmaker sees Orthodox Christianity as offering a way out of the circle of violence, or as offering some sort of illusion of hope. Several times we hear the wild Balkan men proclaiming the "eye for an eye" ethic — which Jesus explicitly repudiated (but which Donald Trump proclaimed was the most meaningful part of the Bible ^[8] to himself; so much for the "barbarians" being confined to the hills of the Balkans!). True, the monastery in the film was a place of peace, and the monks courageously offered refuge to Muslims fleeing Bosnian violence. But the act of the abbot towards the end of Part I makes one wonder whether or not local politics affected his vision, or if there is something else blinding his moral vision. Whatever the truth, the abbot fails to live up to his stated beliefs, which is a sign to us that even the best among us may fall.

More to Girard's point, the role of iconography in Orthodox Christianity may be compared to the role Aleksandar plays as a war photographer. He wishes to bear witness through his photographs to the inhumanity of war. It is only when by accident his attempt to be an observer causes someone to die that he leaves his profession, feeling tainted by murder. What about the iconographer, and those whose faith is illumined and shaped by iconic images (in the church and monastery) of violence? Do the images help us to refuse violence — or do they in some sense sacralize it? This is an open question in the film, I think. I know how I, as an Orthodox Christian, answer that question, but then again, I was not raised with them, as Orthodox peoples in the Balkans were.

Incidentally, there's a scene early in Part II in which Anne walks by a church in London and peeks in on a boy's choir singing a prayer in Latin. It's a startling contrast to the rich, deeply masculine chants of the Orthodox East. I don't think the director is faulting Catholicism or Anglicanism, but is rather illustrating how in Western Europe, Christianity and its chants have become a feminized, aestheticized phenomenon, as opposed to the Christian East. On the other hand, in the post-Christian West, one doesn't find blood feuds, or cases in which Christian men storm around with guns demanding "an eye for an eye." There's a paradox there. Yet Anne, living in this peaceful modern setting, finds it altogether sterile and unsatisfying. She reminds me of the decadent, exhausted sophisticates in Cavafy's poem "Waiting For The Barbarians" [9]. For Anne, Aleks and his people are "a kind of solution."

Enough from me. Let's hear what you think. I'm especially eager to hear from Anna in Budapest, who I thank heartily for recommending this film to me.

69 Comments To "Multiculturalism And Modernity"

#1 Comment By [Christopher](#) On January 3, 2017 @ 11:15 am

JonF says:

"Christopher,
I think you overstate your case. Hesychasm concerns our relationship with God, not with one another..."

Ah, but that is just it isn't Jon, that our relationship with God IS our relationship with each other? It is not just that our relationship with one another (and our Self – following Descartes) is "influenced" or "has the character of" our relationship with God – it's that the primary relationship that each of "has" (as if it is a "possession" of our mind) with God is "ontological" – it determines who and what we are (morally, spiritually, relationally, even materially as in "if any of you are sick..."). Thus our relationship with God "controls" everything else.

This is why the monk in the movie has a relationship (on a mystical level – as all relationships are mystery) with the girl – not because of "dialogue", rather because he has learned the proper place of dialogue, which is much less important than anyone in the modern world understands.

Indeed Jon, I would go so far as to say that your division of relationships into sacred (or as you say, "special") and profane (the kind we have with "one another") is one of the central and most important aspects of Reformation and secularization. As the song goes, God is just one of us since the Mysterious Incarnation, and since all human destiny and fulfillment is "caught up" in the His Body, that means ALL relationships require first of all a Hesychastic disposition on our part.

I could speak to the role and place of positive "theological language" but that is not the central thing being communicated by the movie/this discussion.

Apparently, originally I actually understated my case...forgive me!!

#2 Comment By [Christopher](#) On January 3, 2017 @ 11:28 am

Tom G says:

"...This question needs more words, and possibly more silence & thinking about, than it has been getting."

This gets back to Rod's point about the "feminization" and "Aestheticizing" that has been occurring in (mostly Western) forms of Christianity. The Evangelicals intuit this, and so you see them reacting with their "real men love Jesus" quips/bumper-stickers and I presume theology (in their sermons/strategy – I don't attend their services so it is an assumption on my part).

There have been book length treatments on this phenomenon (can't recall any of the titles right now). It is actually something I look for when I visit (or when moving, consider) a parish – I intentionally look for the men, the ones in the prime of life with healthy (i.e. married) relationships and children. It is a sure sign of the *spiritual* health and vitality of the community.

It is also why when the ecclesiastical hierarchy (Bishops in the East, all clergy in the west) become homosexualist conclaves/closets that the Church has real problems *spiritually*. This has (and is) a current problem with more than one Synod in the USA right now...

#3 Comment By [Chris Cosmos](#) On January 3, 2017 @ 1:27 pm

There are time-honored methods or approaches to ending the cycle of violence and emerging from the boredom of security fetishes, comfort and hedonism. And that is the mystical path shared by nearly all major traditions where God is encountered directly through "the Cloud of Unknowing" or, to be less vague, through surrendering your ideas about your self and the nature of the world that culture has imposed on you as your rite of passage. That "other" way of knowing is possible and, it appears to me, may now be the only reasonable way forward because every other path seems blocked.

#4 Comment By [Hector St Clare](#) On January 3, 2017 @ 1:29 pm

And anyone who has studied the Balkans, as I have, knows that it is. Bosnian Islam is and was (for centuries), known for both being more lax than even Turkish Islam and its unique forms. Whether this is due to the shadowy 'Bogomils' is another matter; John Van Amsterdam Fine, thinks not. Rather, the Bosnian Catholic church was just a rather heterodox (in form at least) Catholic church due to its isolation (and remember, even the Croats, totally orthodox, kept their own language, script, and liturgy until the 20th century).

The Bogomils aren't that "shadowy". We mostly know what they believed (if nothing else, through the writings of their opponents), and we have a couple of the texts like the Secret Book of John that they're supposed to have relied on. If you're arguing that it's unclear how widespread the Bogomil church was, that's true, I don't think we have demographic data from that area. The ruling class in Bosnia subscribed to Bogomil beliefs though, at least for a time. And from what I've been able to glean from a casual search yesterday some remnant of the heresy did manage to survive until the Turkish conquest.

Bosnian Muslims are indeed (as I suggested above) more "lax" than Muslims from other parts of the world, you can see that in the fertility rates. Muslims in Bosnia have the lowest fertility rate of any Muslim group in Europe: the Turkic groups in Russia and Germany are a bit higher, Central Asians higher than that, then the South Asian Muslims in the UK, and finally the Somali Muslims in Scandinavia are at the top.

As Catbird noted you're really interested in the physical phenotype, and you know, I can't really blame you or argue with you on that. Muhammad Ali said more or less the same kind of thing, that he didn't want to see "people who look like me" vanish from the planet.

#5 Comment By [JonE](#) On January 3, 2017 @ 2:06 pm

Re: Indeed Jon, I would go so far as to say that your division of relationships into sacred (or as you say, "special") and profane (the kind we have with "one another") is one of the central and most important aspects of Reformation and secularization.

Beware of pretending that the Incarnation immediately deifies us and that there is no difference between God and us. There is, profoundly so. Also, you are talking about a monk- but monasticism is a special path which most of us will not walk (and should not walk).

The division between Sacred and Profane did not show up in the Reformation; it is an ancient one and represents a very valid distinction. We should never pretend that we are somehow already at the New Jerusalem. That is a recipe for both spiritual hubris and spiritual sloth.

#6 Comment By [Siarlys Jenkins](#) On January 3, 2017 @ 2:11 pm

I, at least, am pro-white because I like whiteness at the physical level.

That's an important consideration in choosing a marriage partner, and nothing wrong with that. Its a rather insignificant basis for public policy. As long as any people with a congenital melanin deficiency opt to marry someone of a similar complexion, one can expect there will continue to be offspring in the world who match. If nobody is motivated to do that, then who would care about the complexion of the next generation?

I've read some time back that the Albanians are more or less direct descendants of the Illyrians, dating back to ancient times. That would of course distinguish them from Slavs, who are relative late-comers to the area.

You may wish your home comfy and warm but that does not give you leave to churn out CO2.

I fully support research on passive solar heating systems. Hopefully the price will come down considerably. It is rather expensive to burn natural gas, as it should be.

It would be interesting to hear who and what is going to vet uprisings and give permission for those which are a priori evaluated to pose no danger of spillover.

#7 Comment By [Jeremy Hickerson](#) On January 3, 2017 @ 2:37 pm

great post, Rod! Very interesting ideas; I'll have to see the film.

#8 Comment By [Mia](#) On January 3, 2017 @ 4:23 pm

"I've told the tale before of my late aunt, born and raised on the plains of North Dakota, who was a staunchly liberal Democrat (and Hillary supporter, FWIW) until the nomination and election of Barack Obama-then something flipped inside her, and she went to her grave as a raving Tea Partier."

I'm not sure I understand the implication of this comment. Is the objection that her being a Hillary supporter or that she was in the Tea Party? I'm not aware that either of those are particular racist positions, but I know that in the 2008 election the Hillary supporters became the PUMAs - be sure to look them up if you don't know who they are and what they did in the Democratic Party - and they were extremely angry at a number of the underhanded things that they had found (and documented)Obama doing to win the election. I was not a Hillary supporter but rather liked Obama when I started paying attention to them, and they had a few really solid points to their complaints about what was going on. Many of them fled what they saw was the left taking over the party and

turned Libertarian or Republican. It would have been a completely natural step not necessarily driven by tribalism or racism for her to move into the Tea Party movement.

#9 Comment By [M_Young](#) On January 3, 2017 @ 6:50 pm

"That's [the continued existence of white people an important consideration in choosing a marriage partner, and nothing wrong with that. Its a rather insignificant basis for public policy."

Siarlys, the government gets involved in many aesthetic concerns. Zoning is a great example, the number and size of billboards allowed on highways is another. The national parks are another. The preservation of so-called 'endangered species' is another.

#10 Comment By [M_Young](#) On January 3, 2017 @ 6:58 pm

Hector, you are right that I was imprecise; I was referring to the especially shadowy presence of the heretical 'Bogomil' group in Bosnia, not their not exactly sunlight existence elsewhere (they were centered on what is now Bulgaria). But the most convincing work on the subject shows that their presence, even among the nobility in Bosnia, was doubtful. In fact, the idea seems to have come from the Austrians in an attempt to do some of that 'invention of tradition' stuff that the Left is so often convinced that nationalists do.

BTW, I got the guy's name wrong...it's John Van Antwerp Fine. All those Benelux cities sound the same to me.

#11 Comment By [Christopher](#) On January 3, 2017 @ 8:21 pm

JonF,

Neither myself nor the whole Hesychastic tradition is under any illusions about our "metaphysical" position vis-a-vis God – not sure what you are worried about here.

No, the path of the monk and the path of everyone else is separate but not different in any significant way – the end point (sanctification, theosis, etc. etc.) is EXACTLY the same. Monasticism was a relatively late development and yet the Church produced plenty of Saints, and will long after monasticism is but a memory.

No, the division between the Sacred and Profane is NOT a "valid distinction" on any significant level. Sure, if one is doing dialectical theology (which is really just philosophy) then the distinction is academically interesting, but then the Christian East always recognized the proper place of such theologizing. The distinction was also largely understood in the West until the Reformation made the division a fundamental truth of the human condition and a kind of "necessity" (both metaphysical and epistemic) at the heart of (its version) of Christianity.

Your anxiety of a kind of "immanentization of the Eschaton" is abstract and dialectical – Classical Christianity does not have this worry because it rests on different premises about man, God, and the Incarnation. Heck, all you have to do is look out your window to be disabused of this idealization...

#12 Comment By [Siarlys Jenkins](#) On January 4, 2017 @ 12:27 am

M_Young, I was entirely unaware that billboards had been deemed "persons" within the meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Further, I no more support government intervention in the "esthetics" of my choice of a marriage partner, than in anything else that is none of its business.

#13 Comment By [JonF](#) On January 4, 2017 @ 1:44 pm

Christopher,

Communication is a very different thing with humans than it is with God. With God quiet is absolutely necessary. With humans– well, we all should[probably listen more than we do– but language is a necessity, and indeed it is a God-given gift which, yes, can be misused, but which should not be treated with moral suspicion any more than anything God has given us should be. Again, you can be a moral exemplar without words, but you cannot actually explain the Gospel. “Christ is risen!” uses words too.

And, the Sacred and Profane are different. The Kingdom of Heaven is time-loose; our secular world is bounded by Time. This was well understood by the ancients and the medievals.

#14 Comment By [Christopher](#) On January 4, 2017 @ 5:22 pm

JonF,

Just one final thought from me: Yes, “language” and “dialogue” have their place – what I am suggesting is that it is much easier to get dialogue’s place (i.e. its moral & metaphysical place in our being, in our relations, and our morality) completely wrong than it is to get it right. Indeed, I suggest that the entire modern world has got it completely wrong (e.g. when Descartes places it at the very center of our being “existentially”). Harder for Protestants to hear (and this merely reveals the division of Christendom) is that they got it wrong also (following the Scholastics, and leading to the modern error itself).

Circling back to the original post by Rod, this error is directly related (and causal) to the “violence” that plagues us. Again, if you take to the time to take seriously the Hesychastic Tradition (and not *reduce* it to “monks”, etc. – Orthodoxy in no way does this) you will be appalled (if you are a modern person) at the low place given to dialogue and words. You don’t have to agree with this Tradition, but it is what it is.

We will have to disagree as to the ontological/theological place of the Sacred and Profane in the context of this discussion. Interesting you bring up Time. That said, I will say that in contemporary thinking Time is often misused, in that it becomes a kind of placeholder for the mind (dialectically – this vs. that) to try to grasp the Eschaton and *oppose* this (fill in the blank – usually “this life”, “this world”, this ‘age’, etc.) to that (the “ages of ages”). It is a false dialectic – the “Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” – here, now and we are NOT “bound” by Time if we would only repent, take up our cross, and follow Him. Time is NOT in metaphysical *opposition* to the Kingdom any more than anything else. I say all this to simply point out that you are doing philosophy, and not theology per se. You will (rightly – first impressions are not to be dismissed) be suspicious that I am Platonizing Christianity, and on the surface it does appear that way and thus all your objections centered around proper distinctions (and I don’t mean that ironically – they ARE proper distinctions). If you have not already, try reading Nyssa or Maximus without being put off by their “Platonizing” philosophy! However, did deeper and you will see something else...

#15 Comment By [Heartright](#) On January 4, 2017 @ 6:58 pm

@siarllys

Oh, you dont vet things beforehand.

The neighbours simply gang up IF they think things get out of hand (see Vietnam v Red Khmer.)

The bonus of such seemingly arbitrary methods is that it incentivises a very narrow nichefocus on not putting a foot wrong.

I say, that should also do wonders for tax discipline: knowing that some unseen person taking umbrage at your fiscal creativity may lead to the confiscation of everything you ever had or will have.

It puts a very high premium on ALWAYS erring on the side of caution – who wants to end up in the work house for a slightly questionable dinner declaration?

#16 Comment By [Heartright](#) On January 4, 2017 @ 7:16 pm

@M Young

Brussels sounds as much alike to Scheveningen as Stockholm sounds like Örnsköldsvik.

Odds are you cannot pronounce the latter ones at all.

[NFR: I can not only pronounce "Scheveningen," I have also eaten pannenkoeken met kersen there, at a cafe on the pier. But the Swedish one, niets. — RD]

#17 Comment By [Siarlys Jenkins](#) On January 4, 2017 @ 9:29 pm

who wants to end up in the work house for a slightly questionable dinner declaration?

You mean like failing to use another dinner guest's preferred pronoun? This stuff can easily get out of hand.

But three cheers for the Vietnamese move against the Khmer Rouge, which did more for human rights than the USA and the UN put together over the previous five years or the next fifty.

#18 Comment By [Heartright](#) On January 5, 2017 @ 2:49 am

@rod

The sk in örnSKöldsvik is 99% similar to the sch in SCHeveningen but with 3 added complications, the first being the dropping of the S under certain conditions, the second being an inflection of the SK based on the subsequent vowel, and the 3rd being the local regiolect which is fairly rife with Sami and Finugrian influences.

So asking a local does not really help (how local is local?), and with only a year's residence, I simply slur my way through it. You know, dancing bear routine.

There is a nice vid on the random guttural sound problem in Danish (not Swedish) which I really recommend, it is a local Scandinavian Comic classic! Kamelåså! Vän, vi förstår inannan ikke!

[10]

On the upside there is hauntingly Beautiful stuff like this.

[11]

@siarlys: realistically, it puts having a personal preference on a pronoun waaaaay out of reach – No consequences for 3rd parties, zero footprint, remember?

#19 Comment By [JonE](#) On January 5, 2017 @ 4:26 pm

Re: That said, I will say that in contemporary thinking Time is often misused

I very much agree, Christopher, and in fact I think the ancients and medievals were more right than most modern thinkers when it comes to time, even if they got some the details wrong (i.e., suggesting that "eternity" begins out past the moon).

I am not out off by Plato at all, by the way, though I think he got some things wrong as well (morphai are not eternal and unchanging; they too change over time, locked in a delicate pas de deux with the world of matter). Though that applies to metaphysics, not to practical this-world concerns like politics or aesthetics where I'll take Aristotle any day.

URL to article: <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/the-limits-of-multiculturalism-and-modernity/>

URLs in this post:

[1] a version on YouTube subtitled in English.: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZkLFDHSEeU>

[2] Here is a link to Roger Ebert's four-star review. :

<http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/before-the-rain-1995>

[3] your post on Hagia Sophia: <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/the-virtual-hagia-sophia/>

[4] Milcho Manchevski's 1994 screenplay :

http://manchevski.com/docs/beforetherain_screenplay.pdf

[5] "listening" in *Before The Rain*: http://manchevski.com/docs/SR-Spring-2011_Crnkovic.pdf

[6] Excerpt from a primer on it.: <https://www.ravenfoundation.org/faqs/>

[7] René Girard: <https://www.ravenfoundation.org/meet-rene-girard/>

[8] Donald Trump proclaimed was the most meaningful part of the Bible:

<http://www.politico.com/blogs/2016-gop-primary-live-updates-and-results/2016/04/trump-favorite-bible-verse-221954>

[9] "Waiting For The Barbarians": <http://www.cavafy.com/poems/content.asp?id=119&cat=1>

[10] : <https://youtu.be/s-mOy8VUEBk>

[11] : <https://youtu.be/wsl-KHGe4Kk>

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