

United Kingdom, or contemporary U.S. artist Jenny HOLZER (1950–), borrowed the ideas but not the forms of these early image-text experiments; in their work, the word overtakes the image and stands in its place. Similarly, the surrealism of René MAGRITTE (1898–1967) demonstrates a complex and uneasy relationship between image and text and their modes of signification<sup>40</sup>. And finally, the forms of the Italian futurists found their way into the world of advertising – perhaps a touch of irony, as they were created for subversion and ended up a mainstay of consumer society. Francesco DEPERO for one, though, said he was delighted to see his work “plagiarised on every street corner.”<sup>41</sup>

From all these examples it is readily apparent that, in fact, texts and images do not have to define themselves in opposition to each other: they can harmoniously coexist in a single work of art, and they can even fruitfully challenge the roles which they have traditionally played, whether those be assigned by nature or convention. The work of the early moderns was pivotal in opening up this space for exploration, and it continues to be relevant today in the postmodern quest to understand the processes of signification.

Holger LAHAYNE

# Religion, Democratic Society and the Individual in Lithuania

*We are now entering the age of post-secularism: religion is back in the public sphere. Even Richard RORTY has proposed a new public religious faith. He has come to accept that all competing worldviews are ultimately competing commitments to some orientation-giving faith, and that no conflict between worldviews can be resolved by an appeal to reason or objective standards of truth.*

*At their core, all worldviews require faith and hope. But RORTY favours a rather vague public faith, which he calls “romantic polytheism”. In modern secular democracies, poetry should take over the role that religion has played in the formation of individual human lives.*

*Yet RORTY’s vision of a new kind of faith is profoundly anti-clerical and anti-ecclesiastical. There may be, according to RORTY, congregations of believers, but the Church as an institution or public voice is potentially dangerous for democratic society, as RORTY wrote in *The Future of Religion* (with Gianni VATTIMO).*

*For him, U.S. democracy itself serves as a kind of substitute for the Church. The civil religion of democracy there, however, emphasises only relations between people and not between us and God.*

## I. Philosophical Grounding

It is not a non-theistic religion, not a vague theism or a demythologised Christianity we need. “Christianity, and nothing else,” Jürgen HABERMAS said, is the source of our Western achievements such as democracy. Any kind of religion will not help. It is not Islam, not Buddhism, not paganism and not Confucianism. It is Christianity (keeping the Hebrew/Jewish heritage) and its idea of the *individual* which made democracy possible.

<sup>40</sup> Dillon George L., *Writing with Images*. 2003. In <http://courses.washington.edu/hypertext/cgi-bin/12.228.185.206/html/wordsinimages/wordsin.html>.

<sup>41</sup> BARTRAM Alan, *Futurist Typography and the Liberated Text*. London, 2005. 22.

Thomas CAHILL explains in his great book, *The Gift of the Jews*, that generally in the ancient world human life was regarded as a reflection of life in the heavenly realm, controlled by the forces of destiny. The gods decided everything. The examples, patterns, paradigms are in heaven, ‘written in the stars’. The task of human beings is to repeat these, to act in accordance with them.

The Biblical concept is absolutely different, not cyclical but linear. The stars are no gods, and human beings are truly free. Their thinking, feeling and acting have meaning and potential to create something new.

In Genesis 12 we meet Abraham – an individual stepping into an unknown future. His is not repeating a pattern, but God is making history with him. In the Bible we see, again and again, unique individuals: bizarre, surprising people, who do not fit into any given pattern; real persons who impact history and change their destiny.

German philologist Erich AUERBACH (1892–1957) in the first chapter of *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* compared the view of personality in HOMER’S *Odyssey* and in the Old Testament.

He emphasised how deep the characters of Saul and David, how complex and multifaceted the relationships between David and Absalom, David and Joab are. Achilles and Odysseus, in contrast, are described with many beautifully arranged words, but their characters are almost without development.

If we compare this with Jacob and the other patriarchs, we see a complex inner life and change. Their behaviour is often inconsistent; they are rebellious, in conflict with themselves, their families and God. They are not one-dimensional heroes, but real persons, real people, who matter.

God is serious with them, talks to each of them person to person, reveals God’s plans, listens to them. And each of them – Abraham, Enoch, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Amos, Jonah, Job – reacts differently, believes differently, walks his own way with God.

The oft-repeated metaphor of “walking with God” in Genesis (5,22–24; 6,9; 17,1; 24,40; 48,15) fits very well to the totally new worldview in that book. To walk suggests direction and destination; twists and turns; hazards and obstacles – in one word, *adventure*.

To walk implies alternatives and decisions; it means entering new, unknown territory. And walking *with God* is intimate, personal, challenging and encouraging. “Walking” with the gods of Sumer and Babylon? An incomprehensible idea.

It is individuals that matter and change history, for better or worse. Thomas CAHILL, interviewed for a TV show by Bill MOYERS, says, while giving examples from recent South African history and Saint Patrick in Ireland:

“I do not think that real civilisation ever occurs because of anything that a nation state does. It occurs because of movements within the nation state that are led sometimes by one individual or a series of individuals.”

Clive Staples LEWIS (1898–1963) accentuated the same thought in his essay *Man or Rabbit?*: “To the Materialist, things like nations, classes, civilisations must be more important than individuals, because the individuals live only seventy odd years each and the group may last for centuries. But to the Christian, individuals are more important, for they live eternally; and races, civilisations and the like are in comparison the creatures of a day.”

The theological concept in the background is again the Creator–creature distinction. According to Jan ASSMANN, the “differentiation of God and world” was the new idea of Hebrew monotheism.

Foundational in ancient pagan worldview was the conviction that “the divine can not be extracted from the world”; thus ASSMANN calls pagan polytheism *cosmotheism*, which means the universe is divine or permeated by the divine.

On the contrary, “in monotheism the divine becomes emancipated from its integration into the universe, society, destiny, and it faces the world as an independent entity”. At the same time the human becomes emancipated and a real counterpart of God; there is now a place for partnership and relationship with God. The human now becomes an “autonomous or theonomous individual”.

“Monotheism set people free to be morally responsible,” ASSMANN says. But consciously being moral, responsible for one’s own life and decisions, facing an open future is – at least sometimes – a heavy burden as well.

It is easier to live in the pagan world, just repeating given patterns. And it is even worse: we are free individuals because we can become guilty. H. STEIN says that without moral conflict there can be no individual; the individual was born out of bad conscience: *I am responsible for my deeds, so I may be guilty*.

ASSMANN comments: “The refined and deepened sense of guilt represents a high achievement of civilisation.” That everyone “has to die for his or her own sin” (Dt 24,16; see also 2Chr 14,6; Jer 31,29–30; Ez 18,1–4. 20) is the oft-repeated foundational judicial principle in the Bible which flows out of this.

Lithuanian philosopher Juozas GIRNIUS (1915–1994) wrote in *Žmogus be Dievo* (The Human without God): “Where there is freedom, there is also guilt. Freedom elevates the human to the level of a moral being, but it also makes sin possible.”

He also emphasised that theism is a necessary condition for real guilt: “If there is nothing superior to the human, there is no one before whom the human can be guilty. From the point of view of atheism, conscience must seem a mythical survival, exactly like God.”

Francis August SCHAEFFER (1912–1984), commenting on Romans 1,21–22 about the universal guilt of humans, says:

“The whole emphasis of these verses is that the human has known the truth and deliberately turned away from it. But if this is so, then the human is wonderful: he or she can really influence significant history. Since God has made the human in His own image, the human is not caught in the wheels of determinism. Rather, the human is so great that he or she can influence history for himself and for others, for this life and the life to come. The human is lost, but great.”

The human is lost, but great: this is the view of human beings necessary for the proper functioning of democracy. Therefore it is no accident that on the foundation of non-Christian religions, no society in the world has ever developed a concept of real democracy.

Eastern religions such as Buddhism see the individual as the problem. Victoria TRIMONDI and Victor TRIMONDI write:

“The Westerners believe that enlightened consciousness still has something to do with a self. In contrast, a teacher of Tantric Buddhism knows that the individual identity of the pupil will be completely extinguished and replaced by a strictly codified, culturally anchored army of gods. It is the Tibetan Buddhas, herukas, Bodhisattvas, deities, demons (*dharmapalas*), and the representatives of the particular guru lineages, who take the place of the individual pupil’s consciousness.”

India is called the world’s biggest democracy, but this system of government started from the background of British law and administration. Mohandas Karamchand GANDHI (1869–1948) himself borrowed deeply from Christianity, and Jawaharlal NEHRU (1889–1964) had Western secularist convictions. The tradition of caste was abolished (as, of course, utterly undemocratic), but it survives somehow until today.

In Turkey, secularism was introduced ninety years ago by Mustafa KEMAL ATATÜRK (1881–1938) by sheer force, a radical revolution from above. Since then democracy is somehow working, but Turkey is still

far from real religious freedom and equality. It has not developed deep roots, so that the Kemalist system has to be fiercely protected by courts and the army, the real centres of power in the state.

South Korea left behind its authoritarian past and is now a well functioning democracy. And it is no accident that many of its leading politicians are Christians, and that the evangelical churches have been growing for decades so that soon the majority in that traditional Buddhist country will be Christian.

When the Lithuanian rulers accepted Christianity around 1400, they turned away from paganism and accepted Roman Catholicism, the Western form of Christianity, not the Orthodox faith of the neighbouring people. This was a very important step whose impact we still see today.

The spirit of the Orthodox tradition goes back to EUSEBIUS of Cæsarea, the first church historian. He was celebrating Constantine, the first Christian emperor in the fourth century, as the culmination of God’s saving work: Constantine brought about the unification of the world in a single harmonious order, one Empire, the Church and Rome as one entity.

Church architecture in this period took on Roman imperial forms; in Church art Jesus Christ was depicted as emperor: the divine *Pantokrator* Jesus Christ, the emperor as *autokrator*. EUSEBIUS was convinced that a new messianic age had dawned.

Sergei Nikolaevich BULGAKOV (1871–1944) confirmed that with Constantine the state “entered into the Reign of God”; the emperor was now “glorified by the Church as ‘equal to the Apostles’”. The Orthodox theologian writes:

“The Church drew near to the state and took upon itself the responsibility for the latter’s destiny. This rapprochement made a place for the Emperor in the Church. When he became a Christian sovereign, the Church poured out its gifts upon him, by means of unction; and it loved the Anointed, not only as head of the state but as one who bore a special charisma, the charisma of rule; as the bridegroom of the Church, possessing the image of Christ Himself. The Emperor received a special place in the hierarchy.”

BULGAKOV denied “Cæsaro-papism, in which the ecclesiastical supremacy belonged to the Emperor. *Cæsaro-papism* was always an abuse; never was it recognised, dogmatically or canonically.”

Nevertheless, the emperor “as ‘bishop for external affairs’ could exercise a great influence over the Church”. He was even called “the ‘architect’ of the Kingdom of God on Earth”. The relationship

between Church and state, which was established in principle, is a “symphony”, that is mutual harmony and independence of the two parts.” It is not an identification between Church and state, but a foundational “alliance [of the Church] with the state”.

One emperor, one patriarch, one people: this was stressed during the reign of the tsars, and it is still not questioned today. The single citizen is of minor importance; her or his rights are almost nothing compared to that of the state and the nation. There is almost no distance between Church and state; there is no dangerous voice at all.

The Western branch of Christianity followed AUGUSTINE of Hippo, the giant among the Latin Church fathers. Roman Catholics and Protestants alike regard him as one of the greatest authorities. Jean CALVIN once said he would be happy to confess his faith purely in the words of AUGUSTINE.

The African bishop favoured the opposite position to EUSEBIUS. In his major work, *Civitas Dei* (The City of God), AUGUSTINE distinguished between the city of humans, worldly rule, and the city of God, the Church. They are not at all identical. Reformed Baptist Nick NEEDHAM writes:

“Arguably, the most important thing AUGUSTINE does for us today in *The City of God* is to offer a piercing Christian critique of the pretensions of the city of humans. The reality of original sin and human depravity, AUGUSTINE insisted, is as applicable to human institutions as to human individuals. He had no time for Messianic posturings by any state, whether the Christianised Roman Empire of his own day, or any successor in the future. [...] AUGUSTINE dissented from this idealisation of the Roman Empire; no matter how Christian it might profess itself, it was just as fallible and mutable, as caught up in the flux of history and human sin, as any other kingdom.”

The spirit of *The City of God* is almost totally foreign to what the Orthodox theologians taught and what we see today in Russia. The separation of Church and worldly authority, rule of law, pluralism, individualism: all that could flourish just in the Western branch of Christendom, because there the Church did not often give in to the temptation of a too close alliance with the state.

The Roman Catholic faith is more supportive of democracy than the Orthodox; yet the Protestant tradition is still more so. If God reveals God’s ways to individuals, not just to the authorities, and if the most important thing is our individual response, as Protestants underline, then that has political implications; our own views have just as much significance as those of the authorities.



Modern democracy started in countries where people began to read the Bible for themselves. Every single person became important. And if they were so important that God sent God's Son to die for them and gave them God's Word to be studied, then they were important as citizens of their country, as well.

At the beginning of the XVII<sup>th</sup> century, Lithuania was about to become a Protestant country. Unfortunately, the Reformed churches were pushed back and almost extinguished in the course of that century.

One result was that the soil for democracy became too dry. The strict hierarchy in the Church resembled the undemocratic structure in state and society. Reformed theologians such as Jean CALVIN were much more critical of Church leaders, as we saw, than the Roman Catholics.

Even the Constitution of 3 May 1791 of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, Europe's first codified modern constitution, although guaranteeing religious freedom "to all rites and religions in the Polish lands", says in Article 1:

"The dominant national religion is and shall be the sacred Roman Catholic faith with all its laws. Passage from the dominant religion to any other confession is forbidden under penalties of apostasy." The individual's freedom was thus restricted very seriously.

The Roman Catholic Church made its peace with democracy in the XX<sup>th</sup> century, yet the hierarchical thinking is still present. In Roman Catholic social teaching, although an example for Protestants in many ways, the social ontology presupposed by subsidiarity is definitely hierarchical.

The Church, under God, is above the state, and intermediate structures such as the family are above the individual. Abraham KUJIPER's (1837–1920) concept of sphere sovereignty (*souvereïnit* *in eigen kring*), in contrast, is non-hierarchical. The individual and the spheres are directly under God.

## II. Strengthening Democracy in Lithuania

### 1. Part of the West

*We have to confirm the position of Lithuania as being a part of the West.* The Augustinian heritage is very important for Roman Catholics and Protestants alike. In a predominantly Roman Catholic country, AUGUSTINE's thinking can be a common ground for Christians, which enables us to confess together the fundamental values of our civilisation.

As pointed out by Lithuanian history professor Edvardas GUDAVICIUS, Lithuania is a latecomer to Latin civilisation. That is probably one of the reasons many intellectuals one hundred years ago, as well as more recently, favour openness to the insights of the East or even a kind of identity of Lithuania between East and West.

There may be truth in these debates, but we should not be naïve: concerning democracy, it is not *Ex Oriente Lux*, but *Ex Occidente Lux*: the democratic light is still definitely coming from the West.

### 2. Protestant Heritage

*We have to rediscover the Evangelical-Lutheran and CALVINist-Reformed heritage.* Being part of the West itself is not enough. Contemporary democracies in the West lack the necessary philosophical and theological base upon which to rest the all-important concept of human rights, law and justice.

There is no more an agreement on the nature of humans. In this context, especially the Reformed view of humans can give very good answers and make an impact. It is the Evangelical-Lutherans who emphasise the sinfulness of people, which leads to a realistic view of life and society; who see the great potential in humans and the importance of freedom; and who stress that faith has to be lived daily in practical life.

But individualism can easily become a factor that reinforces narcissism, self-indulgence, self-promotion and greed. The temptation of a purely hedonistic individualism can only be overcome by a strong sense of duty. And this comes through faith in God, cultivated in faith communities. Yoshihiro Francis FUKUYAMA (1952–) writes:

"Liberal democracies [...] are not self-sufficient: the community life on which they depend must ultimately come from a source different from liberalism itself. The women and men who made up the American society at the time of the founding of the United States were not isolated, rational individuals calculating their self-interest. Rather they were for the most part members of religious communities held together by a common moral code and belief in God."

### 3. Common Good

*We have to remember that happiness is not the first goal of democratic politics.* The citizens' well-being has to be an objective of governing. But that must not be confused with "personal peace and affluence" as overarching values, as Francis August SCHAEFFER often said.

That would mean democracy works or is accepted by a majority as long as wealth and the economy are growing. But what happens when prosperity is in danger? Freedom, law and justice are, in the end, much more important than material well-being.

We are used to thinking that democracy is the most successful system and will be accepted by more and more societies. But the enormous success of democracy after World War II went together with great economic growth.

The Soviet Union probably broke down because of the disastrous economic situation. Liberal democratic capitalism is simply more successful. Yet countries like Singapore show that material affluence and non-democratic governing may go together.

Will a soft autocratic rule be more profitable for material well-being? British-German sociologist Ralf Gustav DAHRENDORF (1929–) said: “A century of authoritarianism is not the most improbable prognosis for the XXI<sup>st</sup> century.”

Liberal democracies will not survive if their vision of the *common good* does not extend beyond the mere economic and pragmatic. They need a broader and deeper vision, and Christians can provide that.

#### 4. Creation Ordinances

*We have to see the importance of control through creation ordinances.* One of the reasons democracy in post-soviet Lithuania does not yet have deep roots is that the civil society is still weak. Many social spheres between state and individual are still underdeveloped.

It is not enough to proclaim a democratic constitution; we have to do our homework and care for justice in every area of life. David T. KOYZIS emphasises that “the mere fact of people doing and seeking justice in their families, churches, businesses, labour unions, schools, art co-operatives and so forth in itself constitutes a potent limit to the totalising pretensions of government”.

This kind of control will become more and more important in the age of post-democracy, a term made popular by British sociologist Colin CROUCH and his book *Post-Democracy*. CROUCH prophesies that the formal elements of democracy still survive: elections, debate and parties.

But they are being bypassed and crisscrossed by new, less accountable processes. Especially the global transnational company

(TNC) is for him “the key institution of the post-democratic world”. Constitutional democratic control alone will not be able to face these new challenges.

#### 5. Against Pantheism and Paganism

*We have to argue with paganism and pantheism.* Some worldviews support a democratic constitution of society, some do not. Abraham KUJIPER was very critical of pantheism, which he called a *poison*, because it is “blurring all boundaries”: between Creator and creature, or between good and evil.

“If, as Paganism contends, God dwells in the creature, a divine superiority is exhibited in whatever is high among humans,” Abraham KUJIPER writes. This was and remains the big temptation of all kinds of pantheism. The great apologists C. S. LEWIS and Gilbert K. CHESTERTON (1874–1936) agreed with him and strictly criticised paganism and pantheism.

Pantheism and paganism are quite popular today, mostly in the form of neo-Gnosticism, New Age and esoteric thought. Paganism is often confirmed as part of the Baltic heritage. Yet this faith did not give us democracy, and it is even hostile to its true spirit. So, we have to take all these teachings much more seriously and fight them with words and arguments, since democracy has to be defended.

#### 6. Resisting False Spirituality

*We must resist being enticed by super-spiritual pseudo-democratic leaders.* Today almost every ruler calls herself or himself a democrat. And some, like the Dalai Lama, seem to be a good example of a new kind of democratic leader. His talks about a universal religion of love and his non-violence are very attractive.

He emphasises that people are different, so there have to be different religions for different people; all religions are helping in different ways on personal spiritual paths. Is that not the spirit of democracy?

The *Declaration of the World Congress of Ethnic Religion* from 1998 says something very similar: “All cultures as well as all native religions and faiths should be equally valued and respected.”

All this sounds good, yet it is a good example of the already mentioned blurring of boundaries. It is pseudo-democratic to call evil good, to level all moral differences. There is much evil in many religions, and for this they *must not* be respected.

## 7. Adapting to New Challenges

With the help of the Reformed tradition, democracy will be able to adapt to new challenges. Our world is changing rapidly, and it is becoming confusing. We mentioned post-modernism, post-secularism and post-democracy. Scientific success allows some to speculate about trans- or post-humanism.

Computer pioneer Raymond KURZWEIL (1948–) even prophesied *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence*. We can be sure that the future will bring some deep changes in the ways we live together and govern our societies. We have left something behind, we are now “post-” whatever, but we do not really know where we are heading.

Some new answers have to be given – and the Reformed faith is very well suited to help. It stands on a solid foundation, does not deny the tradition and the heritage of the Church fathers and the reformers.

But it always looks for ways to be more faithful, to understand God, God’s Word and the world better. Our knowledge has to grow; we have to seek improvement. And the Reformed emphasise that Christians remain sinners and therefore may fail and go wrong.

Therefore, it is mandatory to be open to correction to learn from other traditions. The Reformed churches are not just reformed, but always to be reformed: *semper reformanda*. Even the doctrinal statements are not exempt to critique and correction. In the preface of the *Scottish Confession of Faith* (1560) it is said:

“If any person will note in this confession of ours any article or sentence repugning to God’s holy word, that it would please him of his gentleness, and for Christian charity’s sake, to admonish us of the same in writing; and we, of our honour and fidelity, do promise unto him satisfaction from the mouth of God (that is, from his Holy Scriptures), or else reformation of that which he shall prove to be amiss.”

Again, this mindset goes back to the Bible and to AUGUSTINE, who wrote at the end of his life the *Retractiones* (Retractions), correcting some of his earlier views. So the Reformed faith is not static.

And it reminds us that in this process of adapting to new situations, the insight of many people is helpful and necessary. We all have to work on new answers. Yet, as important individuals are and a democratic constitution is, we must not forget the words of David T. KOYZIS:

“Democracy may indeed be good, but it is not god.” It is good, but it is not an *ultimate* good. All our efforts will be futile if we ignore that “blessed are the people whose God is the Lord” (Ps 144,15).

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