# The Theology of the Great Society

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## I

HARVEY COX'S *Secular City*[1] presents with admirable clarity the theology of the "Great Society" or the "American Empire."

> Our competition with the Communists [writes Mr. Cox], is not that they favor a world revolution and we do not. Rather, we must espouse a different kind of revolution, a revolution that makes the fruits of the earth available to all people without depriving them of the benefits of political and cultural freedom. We must be *more* revolutionary than the Communists and we must carry through the revolution first in the United States if it is to convince anyone anywhere else.[2]

The technological revolution as promoted from our side does not attack religion. It ignores it. "The age of the secular city, the epoch whose ethos is quickly spreading into every corner of the globe, is an age of 'no religion at all' " (p. 3).[3] "Western Christendom, based partly on the biblical Gospel, partly on late Greek philosophy, and partly on pagan world-views, is over. It surivives only in the memory of neo-Thomist theologians and cultural arcadians" (p. 220). Nonetheless Mr. Cox would show that "far from being something Christians should be against, secularization represents an authentic consequence of biblical faith. Rather than oppose it, the task of Christians should be to support and nourish it" (pp. 17f).

*The Secular City* is an interesting and valuable work because it never questions the typical and dominant assumptions of American society. The author knows how his countrymen think and in no way separates himself from them. Mr. Cox is strongly held by the original faith of the American Revolution. Through organized technology it will be extended to all mankind. In this vision he has no time to lament the end of Christendom. The Christian past merits attention only "to strengthen our capacity to deal with secularization today by showing where it came from" (p. 17). For "secularization . . . is the legitimate consequence of the impact of biblical faith on history" (p. 17).

For Mr. Cox, older theology in its various forms was the reflection of what he calls "town culture." This he regards as a long transitional stage between the tribe and the "technopolis," between the society based on blood relation and the technological society of all men. "Town culture" began in the decay of the Greek polis. The new American revolution is completing the work of the French and Russian revolutions in destroying it. "Town culture" gone, its theology has no relevance. There is thus no theological debate possible for Cox, whether in the language of Thomas or in that of more recent schools. Not even Tillich and Barth were fully citizens of "technopolis," and knew its language.

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[1] *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York: Macmillan, 1965).

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 181. All parenthetical page references are to this work.

[3] The last phrase is quoted from Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

> Tillich speaks to those who still feel the need to ask "religious" questions even when we ask them in nontraditional ways. These are questions he believes to be inherent in the very structure of human existence. The difficulty, however, is that they are obviously *not* questions which occur to everyone. . . . They especially do not occur to the newly emergent urban-secular man (p. 79).

Tillich's theology expresses the "mourning period which began with the death of the God of metaphysical theism and Western Christian civilization, but the wake is now over" (p. 80). Barth rid himself of the bad inheritance, but did not work out fully "a theological view of man that would celebrate rather than deprecate his responsibility as creator of the meanings he lives by, as fashioner of the symbols that give direction to history" (p. 83).

It would be an easy but unprofitable task to show that Mr. Cox understands nothing of older theology. For him and the man of "technopolis" for whom he writes, it has gone the way of alchemy and astrology. "Closed world-systems," ultimate values, timeless truth belong for the technopolitan to the time of man's immaturity.

> Values have ceased to be values and have become valuations. Secular man knows that the symbols by which he perceives the world and the values by which he makes his decisions are the products of a particular history. As such they are limited and partial (p. 31).

Such, one may agree, is indeed the attitude in which men are fixed by modern education: the dogmatism of radical empiricism. It grew with the natural sciences. The social sciences have extended it to every aspect of human life. One must begin by accepting this prevalent culture or withdraw from modern life. What is worth examining is this attitude itself and how it supports the theology Mr. Cox builds on it.

The pragmatic mentality is of course as old as the American Revolution. What is new in Cox's secular theology is not the idea but its triumph in modern urban life over the surviving elements of Christian culture. So long as most men lived in limited and seemingly stable communities the "synthesis of Protestantism and bourgeois culture which came to birth in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" (p. 220) did not wholly die. In the complexity of technopolis where human relations are mostly impersonal and unstable the masses become pragmatic. Having no given established order to rely on, they become self-reliant, know themselves as the source of the order that works in their changing situation and (one may add) nothing transcending the order of the moment is encountered, except subjectively—in the confidence of being above any particular order. The man of "technopolis" Mr. Cox describes, therefore, as "pragmatic and profane." "By *pragmatism* we mean secular man's concern with the question 'Will it work?' . . . By *profanity* we refer to secular man's wholly terrestrial horizon, the disappearance of any supramundane reality defining his life" (p. 60). Thus, one may say, the principles of the Revolution have become the common faith as never before.

What "secular man" does believe more than pragmatically, one should observe, is that he is radically free in the face of nature and human authority. (From within his pragmatic standpoint Mr. Cox cannot speak clearly of this distinction. But the following states his intention exactly enough.) Otherwise profane, he is vulnerable to religion at this point: the unlimited in human freedom he is prepared to worship. The absoluteness men in unenlightened times ascribed to their gods he knows to be nothing else than his own freedom. Since this religion of humanity, whether in its pragmatic or in its metaphysical (or Marxist) form, is not obviously true, it needs the support of argument. But how does the pragmatist speak absolutely about his pragmatism? The way was shown long ago by Auguste Comte: through a comprehensive science of the human—sociology. In sociological perspective myth and metaphysics are incomplete attitudes, contained and given their place within the empirical or scientific attitude. And beyond this last it is impossible to go, since it is the open, infinite, free attitude. Mr. Cox assents without reserve to this proof. And indeed there is no better to be found for his pragmatic religion.

All the same, one may comment, this sociology of history is profoundly ambiguous. Partly it affirms that *in fact* science has succeeded to myth and metaphysics. But for the pragmatic believer it has the further meaning that this progress has been achieved once for all, is irreversible. "It will do no good to cling to our religious and metaphysical versions of Christianity in the hope that one day religion and metaphysics will once again be back. They are disappearing forever . . ." (p. 4). The infinite possibilities of science and technology, their power to win freedom for mankind—an empirical theory of human development does not ground this faith but merely gives it the confirmation of a limited past experience. (But for Mr. Cox this ambiguity is unavoidable; it belongs to his position.) The religion of pragmatism is, despite itself, myth and metaphysics. It, no less than another, is a total view. If not, it is no faith but the dispersed labour of the many sciences and techniques, without common purpose. This is a grave inconvenience: the pragmatic humanist shows himself religious, polemical, dogmatic when by his own standards he should remain modestly within partial viewpoints. (Mr. Cox is wholly unconscious of this difficulty.) The worst is that his claim to be the maker of his own symbols, values, meaning is disproved in the crucial case: he does not make for himself the idea of his freedom. This idea is not in his power but exercises power over him, as the Christian god over his ancestors.

"Secular man" therefore, one may conclude, finds himself still in need of traditional religion to understand his rejection of it. He feels need still of clergy and of theologians like Mr. Cox to help him sustain his secular faith. It is only half the story to say, with Cox, that he is indifferent to religion, asks no religious questions. The other side is that the burden of his new freedom weighs heavily on him. He flees it in abject conformity or empty revolt.

> The Gospel . . . does not summon man back to dependency, awe, and religiousness. Rather it is a call to imaginative urbanity and mature secularity. It is not a call to man to abandon his interest in the problems of this world, but an invitation to accept the full weight of this world's problems as the gift of its Maker (p. 83).

But Cox cannot explain whence comes the confidence and strength to bear this weight. Or, whence the knowledge that a maker has indeed given man this burden to bear. In truth, since neither Weber nor Freud suffices him here, the free American is turned back to the biblical sources of his freedom.

What does "secular man" look for in the Bible? A strengthened capacity to deal with secularization today, says Cox, by showing where it came from. But in this lies the same unnoticed ambiguity. In looking to the beginnings of human freedom does he seek to clarify his sociology of modern freedom? Or does he doubt his freedom and seek to ground it in a primary divine freedom? "Secular man relies on himself and his colleagues for answers. He does not ask the church, the priest, or God" (p. 81). But "the meaningful ordering of the world is itself a human enterprise, an *undertaking which man assumes as God's partner*" (p. 77).[4] Is God a useful symbol made by man or man's creator? To this question Cox can give no answer.

In fact Cox speaks of God in both ways. He is a name which points to the unlimited in a given historical situation: "When we use the word *God* in the biblical sense, we are not speaking about but 'naming.' . . . To name is . . . to locate something in terms of our history" (p. 242). But again: "The freedom of man depends on the prior freedom of God, and man would be a prisoner of his own past if it were not for God who comes in that future-becoming-present where human freedom functions" (pp. 261f). Cox protests that this unlimited is "not to be identified with some particular quality in man or in human reciprocity, and He is not just a confused mode of speaking about relationships between men" (pp. 259f). But equally he insists that the name "God" does not mean a transcendent highest Being. His statements point to the following (which, however, exceeds his position): "God" means the transcendent, hidden, irrational in human decision and action—that through which incomplete knowledge is related to the common good in particular circumstances.

Were Cox less innocent of philosophy, he would say: "God" means human reason. But for this he must escape his pragmatic standpoint from which man is not his freedom but the ever incomplete process of freeing himself. From this standpoint man's freedom transcends him, and may, if one choose, be named "God." Cox proceeds in this way. "God" for him is first and positive, the incompleteness of experience, derivative. But another

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[4] My italics.

"secular man" (the atheist) is equally free to regard experience as positive, "God" as an empty beyond, a nothing. So fine is the line between belief and atheism. Cox is aware of this. "The difference between men of biblical faith and serious nontheists is not that we do not encounter the same reality. The difference is that we give that reality a different *name*, and in naming it differently, we differ seriously in the way we respond" (p. 260). But in fact the difference is only that the believer has a symbol for the history of human liberation, as a whole—for Humanity. The non-believer is immersed in the process, does not relate himself in imagination to the whole.

The cult of Humanity with a symbolism drawn from the Bible and especially the Old Testament—there is the religion of "secular man." Creation reveals the deliverance of man from the powers of nature, the Exodus his escape from the tyranny of the state, Sinai the elevation of human welfare above objective standards. In Christ was revealed mature humanity, requiring no more the childish supports of myth and metaphysics (definitive truth) (pp. 21–36). But in this Mr. Cox only takes us back to the origins of American democracy, to the religion of the Enlightenment. His theology in fact retains all the limitations of that first descent of the Heavenly City to this world—to the secular. Far from being, as he thinks, the completion of the French and Russian revolutions, "technopolis" is a return to an earlier revolution. For the "secular city" is both realized and unrealized: ". . . the revolutionary regime has seized power but the symbols of authority are still in the hands of the old displaced rulers" (p. 131). "History is a permanent crisis in which the defeated old regime still claims power while the victorious new regime has still not appeared publicly on the balcony" (p. 131). But in that case, so we must comment, the seizing of power is unreal; it exists only in the belief of the secularized church—God's *avant-garde* in carrying out the revolution. Thus for Cox's position Humanity remains an unattainable ideal, and in Christ is revealed nothing after all: "in Jesus God does not stop being hidden; rather He meets man as the unavailable 'other' " (p. 258).

The expansion of modern technology has unbalanced thinkers more acute than Mr. Cox. It has seemed to be a totally new phenomenon, not to be measured by older concepts. In fact, Americans for two centuries have characteristically believed the real to be that which works, which is humanly useful, and technology is nothing but the fulfilment of this belief. Mr. Cox is not unaware of this continuity: "Our infant republic has sprouted and shot up in every direction, and we can no longer button its clothes around it" (p. 115). But he thinks also that "we need a new revolutionary theory, pertinent to the pressures of the times" (p. 115). His new theory differs from the old, however, only in words. "We are now choking on a serious imbalance between the technical and the political components of technopolis" (p. 115). The technicians, the innovators, the liberals are (he says) the bearers of the revolution but lack cohesion; between them and the established wealthy class (whose ideal is private freedom) "a titanic struggle is now going on, the outcome of which will shape the countenance of America and of the world for decades to come" (p. 179). The struggle is for control of society, for power to direct the great technological machine. "The truth is that our freedom in the age of organization is a question of the responsible control and exercise of power—vast, towering, unprecedented power" (p. 174).

Cox puts himself on the side of the technicians, the intellectuals. He seems to expect their victory: "We are entering an era in which power is based not on property but on technical knowledge and intellectual skills." But then nothing is achieved in the struggle: "If and when this kind of new elite gains mastery over the organization, there is no assurance whatever that they will use it more responsibly than their predecessors" (p. 180). What, then, is this "titanic struggle," one should ask, but the successors of Hamilton and Jefferson competing in the familiar pattern of American party politics? "Responsible control of power" is an ideal neither side takes seriously, except when a great President arises in time of crisis.[5] For a continuing control supposes the exercise of sovereign power, and this offends one party no less than the other. Cox's revolution is not intended to go so far.

The ever-unrealized revolution, the "secular city" which is descending from Heaven but is never established on earth—this (we find) is the city of Mr. Cox's "pragmatic and profane" man. It turns out to be established only inwardly in the belief of those who are always beyond what is at any time achieved, who are directed to the future, the heralds of the continuing revolution. So Cox defines the place of the Church in American society. The Church (he does not disguise the fact) corresponds to the Party under Communism. An exacter comparison than is possible in Cox's language is most instructive. The secular Church has no doctrine, no truth of its own; out of the Bible it fashions effective symbols which enable "technopolis" to look beyond its divided and conflicting interests to a distant common good. The Party, on the other hand, has a doctrine, a highest science, by which it imposes on the technicians a common good assumed to be solidly established on earth.

The Church in "technopolis," having no creed or dogma, speaks "not in the form of general propositions but in the language of specific announcements about where the work of liberation is now proceeding and concrete invitations to join in the struggle" (p. 128). Thus theology for Cox becomes a kind of politics: ". . . in secular society politics does what metaphysics once did. It brings unity and meaning to human life and thought. In today's world we unify the various scholarly and scientific specialties by focusing them on specific human issues" (p. 254). The Church, like the Communist Party, is expected to show where the revolutionary path leads from day to day. But the Church as the voice of the American revolution is at a great disadvantage: who is the Church? The Party has power, can obtain agreement and give effect to its directives. In America this higher, responsible politics falls to private groups who try to gain influence on the parties or exert pressure on them.

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[5] Cox shows himself acutely aware of this weakness in his laudation of President Kennedy (pp. 62–70). He praises Kennedy for bringing the revolution to earth without becoming a tyrant. Cox fails to observe that in the American system this is only possible with the highest political virtuosity.

Cox passes over these weaknesses. Nor does he face the crucial difficulty for one style of revolutionary politics as for the other: how does one distinguish false prophecies from true? "Wherever cogent and tangible demonstrations of the reality of the City of Man appear today, there are signs of the Kingdom" (p. 146). This means for Cox that the destruction of all racial, social, economic barriers—all work towards human equality—is God's work and the revolution's. But where American society is also a system of solidly established private rights and privileges, the achievement of this liberal ideal, we must observe, is as remote as the end of the world for an earlier age. One might fairly conclude that the preaching of the revolution can save the society from stagnation but does not change its structure; and that the revolutionary vanguard has little or no part in what is done from day to day.

## II

It is Cox's great merit that he knows his society, believes in it, describes its religion as it really is. He sees well what society preserves of the Christian traditions; what is lost he sees less well or hardly at all. Worshipping God in the form of the useful, the means, that through which intention becomes reality, Americans have attained power not unreasonably. Their weakness is that they do not know for what they have power: for immediate enjoyment? For the endless extension of power? For a higher good? But if for the last, how is this good more than a remote ideal or an empty abstraction? Because these questions are unanswered, and unanswerable, in the language of the "pragmatic and profane," there are certain inevitable and pervasive evils in American society. Mr. Cox is aware of these evils, very sensitive to them, but can say nothing sufficient about them.

How is sex to be understood in "profane and pragmatic" terms? Surely either as serving one's immediate satisfaction or as useful in the context of one's wider interests. As being properly a total relation of two persons, however, sex cannot be contained within these limits. Pragmatic society is only a partial return to nature from Puritan austerity. Nature is to be used for human purposes, but nature as such—what nature is—remains beyond the vision of the pragmatic. The relation of body and soul, man as the unity of body and soul—this is an incomprehensible mystery to pragmatic thought and in practice an unattainable end. Hence the American obsession with sex. Since nature is not understood, it asserts itself as an absolute. The Christian belief in the unity of nature and reason hovers as an unattainable ideal. It mediates between the warring extremes of Puritanism and naturalism by obliterating the Law in the name of the Gospel. The Law is made relative and useful—but to what end? Altogether there is the unrest of a society that feels in all institutions, family no less than state, an affront to personal autonomy, and would make them serve individual interests, personal development.

In these phenomena Cox, however, can find only survivals of "tribal" and "town" society which secular man for all his maturity has not outgrown; he records the facts and hopes for better things. "Perhaps one day we in America will put away childish things and become mature men and women who do not have to rely on the male and female deities of the mass media to tell us who to be" (p. 216). To this one must object that that day will not arrive until pragmatic man knows the natural by a deeper reason than that which controls and exploits.

A flaw no less fatal to the pragmatic society is its inability to find a balance between work and leisure. Cox even gives his countrymen the desperate advice of imitating the Latin nations! No doubt they have in higher measure the art of enjoying life, but precisely because their first attitude to nature is not to use and control. One cannot borrow the virtues of other nations without their philosophy. Cox would make work less sacred that leisure might be less separate from it, less the debauched, passive pleasure of the consumer.

But this is to begin at the wrong point. It is the strength, not the weakness, of pragmatic society that it exalts work, expects everyone to win his bread by his labour, teaches its members that in work they are not slaves but attain human dignity. By these virtues America has attained wealth and power, and is a lesson to all the world on how poverty and other natural evils can eventually be overcome. But America has grown so productive that there is more labour than enough, and many do little for their bread. And with automation and cybernation more and more will be deprived of the dignity of labour. What way out is possible for a society that knows its good in work, not in leisure?

Another cure also suggests itself to Cox: that work be socialized, that men work not for the necessities of life (which they will receive anyway) but freely for others, for the common good. But socialism, it must be objected, is no less inimical to the pragmatic spirit than is a Latin acceptance of nature. Socialism requires that the revolution and human freedom be not a hoped-for ideal but an established fact, that the competitive, economic aspect of life, therefore, be given a subordinate place in the structure of society. But it is the genius of pragmatic society to have concentrated attention on this competitive aspect, to have seen reality in the process of production (where each has his separate task), not in the common end attained. A new philosophy must precede this cure. Within "technopolis" a growing idle class will be unable to find self-respect, will sink into a life of "bread and circuses." This is a structural and incurable evil.

Mr. Cox gives a chapter also to "The Church and the Secular University."

Here again is an incurable weakness to which he devotes many words without effect. "The current cleavage between the two is wider and more impassable than ever, precisely because we now stand at the end of the epoch of the Church's dominance in Western culture" (p. 219). The Church "limps along with a theology still not extricated from the metaphysical baggage to which it was firmly lashed during the opening centuries of the era, and with an egoistic notion of its own importance acquired during its years as the official source of the ideology of an empire" (p. 220). Cox shows clearly how futile are the various efforts of the Church to maintain some place in the life of the university. "The 'organizational church' has no role. It should stay out" (p. 236). Christians within the university, who accept it on its own terms, should be foremost in urging it to live up to its social responsibilities. That is all Cox finds for them to do. "Theology," said the Archbishop of Canterbury recently, "is not the mother of sciences; far more modestly I would describe her as the servant of all the sciences."[6] But the sciences do not ask for her service. The Church in fact is deprived even of this modest role.

To remind the secular university of its own philosophy, to recall it to the serious worldly concern of the pragmatic spirit, would be a modest role. In fact even this is denied to the Church, once theology and philosophy have abandoned their claim to supremacy, their claim to possess the total view of which the sciences (natural, social, humane) are the fragmented parts. If, as Cox thinks, the age of unified world-views is past and one must live with the fragments, how does the pragmatic man himself retain the unity of his vision? He retains it only as an unreasoned faith which one will have and another not. As Mr. Cox knows, "secular man" has antecedents. But pragmatic faith recognizes as its own from the past only what it can think to be anticipations of itself. The philosophical culture of the Greeks and of Christendom is for it a bad and superseded past. But only from this rejected past could it save itself as a unified view. Pragmatic faith has first to learn from more rational ages how there can be world-views at all—philosophies, theologies, or the negation thereof which is pragmatism.

Scepticism, paralysis of the will, idle curiosity, and ambition—these are the endemic and incurable diseases of the "multiversity." Again Cox recognizes the presence of these evils but not that they are structural, part of the system. He takes them for residual immaturities. But in fact the secularized Church is of no avail because, abandoning its truth, it knows no way out of the dividedness of the secular sciences.

Another and even more prevalent sign that "technopolis," whatever its other virtues, cannot contain the free human spirit is the revolt of "beatniks," of those who seek Nirvana through LSD, of Black Muslims, etc. Cox, though noticing it occasionally, makes no attempt to come to terms with this total revolt. It is obvious that he cannot: "secular man," having boundless possibilities open to him, can only turn from them out of some immaturity; to rebel is not to have grown to the responsibilities of human freedom. "The beats . . . are the well-fed court jesters of modern society. But they know how long their leash is and they instinctively bark within its limits" (p. 179). But are the rebels, as he thinks, a fringe phenomenon, a passing accident of "technopolis" newly founded? Or have they also a necessary role in American society?

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[6] The Most Rev. A. M. Ramsey, address at the University of King's College, Halifax, August, 1966.

The rebels are not outsiders, but have understood "technopolis" too well. They live at its limit. The good technopolitan is turned to the future. He must not look back, as God on the Sabbath, upon his work and enjoy it. For what is completed is only a means towards what remains to be done. The divine and infinite is only experienced as one is always letting the past merge with the future. But another may ask where lies the truth of this process: in endless progress? or in the nothingness of everything finite? The answer is that the truth is in one or the other, according as one is engaged in the process or stands back and is open to it as a totality. Through the rebels, religion reasserts it claims on "secular man." And their religion is that of the "secular city": God is the negation of everything finite—Nothing. Their religion is neither more nor less Christian than that of the secularized Church. But since it has no sacraments to aid them, they are left to what they can learn from the Orient or the discoveries of chemistry.

In its rebels, American society can know itself, that it is the worship of the "unknown God." Cox is both aware of this and wholly unaware. "Paul had little patience with the religious quester after the unknown God he ran across in Athens. 'This unknown God,' he said, 'I declare unto you.' In Jesus of Nazareth the religious quest is ended for good and man is freed to serve and love his neighbor" (p. 265). But Cox writes also that "in Jesus God does not stop being hidden" (p. 258). For Cox, not to know God is for man to be free as man. The rebels bear witness to their neighbours that man cannot live in the finite. They seek God in their fashion, and refuse to be satisfied with the stone pragmatic theology gives them in place of bread.

## III

We have looked at the theology of the "Great Society" both as it understands itself—as the theology of human freedom— and in some characteristic and inescapable failures. It was not our intention to praise or blame. In the "secular city" we need see neither the perfection of human freedom nor, as some fear, the end of Western culture. Pragmatic man has shown how to cope with limited problems using limited methods. In doing so he has forgotten other forms of reason. He has extended immeasurably the means to human freedom, and has forgotten freedom itself. It is not possible to live humanly in "technopolis." But neither is it necessary to abandon it. Instead technology can be overcome and contained within human freedom.

The theology of the "Great Society" teaches that God is hidden and inaccessible to man; that man is hidden and inaccessible to himself. Man has power over nature and his own history, but a power ever partial and incomplete. In reality he is rather controlled by nature and his own creations than in control of them. Man is free but his freedom is never realized. In fact he is led by his passions, desires, ambitions; and where they lead he knows not.

One may attend either to the ideal freedom in the "Great Society" or to its unreality—to the endless possible progress or to its unfailing imperfection. One may say: God is present and invites men to freedom. Or one may say: God is dead. As Heraclitus said long ago: Hades and Dionysus are one and the same.

The theology of the Councils, the teachings of the Fathers and of the medieval doctors, the theology of the Reformers—all that one is accustomed to call Christian—lie beyond the horizon of Cox and his "pragmatic and profane" man. The Scriptures yield only the knowledge that God is unknowable; the revelation they were thought to contain is that nothing is revealed. The Scriptures, it is discovered, are about history, about the transient, not about the eternal appearing in history. Philosophy and theology, which found a rational knowledge of God and man in the Scriptures, are pagan inventions. Pragmatic scholars have at last purified the Scriptures of Greek metaphysics. Now we know that the Scriptures teach no truth, only the endless, unsatisfied quest for it. Cox's theology leads to this result.

However negative the conclusions of pragmatic theology may seem, to flee from them nostalgically to the ampler belief of former times is only to confirm them. Rather one should acknowledge that Cox has done a valuable work in separating what his modern man (which means the typical adherent to Anglo-American culture) can actually believe and what survives with him as dead ritual or myth. Cox is right that modern man measures the credible by a secular standard. The Anglo-American measures his faith by the standard of empirical science. No longer is this measure available only to the few; through technology the multitude can apply it also. Cox is right that a return to former priorities should not be expected.

For two centuries and more the Church has feared secularization, that is, that men would become sufficient to themselves in their world and forget the divine. Secularization has now taken place. Opposition or fear or regret are now irrelevant attitudes. There is room only to understand what secularization is. Men have become conscious of their freedom, have proved their freedom by their works—by their sciences and technical arts. Should the Church see this freedom as divine or as demonic? Or is it rather a mixture of both spirits? Cox sees the empirical or pragmatic spirit as the true and adequate form of Christian freedom. Its evils, and above all its incapacity to master itself, he passes over lightly. Would it not be better said that the pragmatic spirit is indeed an expression of Christian freedom but neither the only nor the highest?

Christians have always believed that man is capable of the highest freedom. Why then fear it if man proves himself free? The more deeply man knows himself free, the more surely he has confirmed the Christian teaching. There should be no quarrel with Cox when he says that Christians should not oppose secularization but support or nourish it. But what they should support is not one form of secular freedom as though it were freedom itself. As Christians believe that in Christ are united all powers, all knowledge, so in the secular they should not acquiesce in partial freedoms. Secular freedom has assumed diverse forms in these revolutionary centuries. Christians should seek to discover in each something of the perfect freedom they believe to be man's destiny.

It seems obvious and indisputable to those within the assumptions of the "Great Society" that the technological revolution is the completion of earlier revolutions and will replace all traditional cultures. Communists believe the same no less certainly about themselves. The bourgeois revolution aimed at world conquest in Hitler and Napoleon; vanquished, Europe would still make itself a third force. Christianity secularized has appeared in these various forms. None has worse claims than another to be thought the successor to Christendom. Each takes itself alone to be the authentic heir.

Americans believe themselves the least warlike of peoples. They are preoccupied with the technical and economic and with private life. But they are also consciously bearers of a world culture. They cannot be indifferent to its successes and failures. Between President Johnson and the Liberal critics of his Vietnam policy the difference is only of means—when and where to resist Communism, whether by war or by peaceful emulation. The necessity of defending their secular faith against an equally unyielding faith constitutes the danger of war. Peace is inconceivable to Americans save as a "pax Americana." So also with the Communists. Cox never comes to terms with this confrontation.

Americans persuade themselves that Communist societies, as they lose their revolutionary fervour, must return to liberal freedom. Whenever the Soviet Union concedes that economic freedom has some place in a Communist society or indulges farther the demand of its citizens for more consumer goods, this is interpreted as a return towards capitalism. Another myth, which Cox repeats, is that socialist freedom is less advanced than the American because it still values the Puritan virtue of work. More generally, the discipline of Soviet life, the suppression of private freedom in the general interest, seems to Americans a relic of the past. To which socialists would reply that American freedom is, rather, slavery to an economic system which itself has not been made the servant of human freedom.

European culture Cox sees in typically American fashion as the remnant of an educated middle class "who once discarded the aristocratic tradition of Throne and Altar and substituted their own prestigious combination of property and education. They ran Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Their monument can be found in the opera houses, museums, and educational institutions which still delight tourists" (p. 251). But their culture has yielded to that of the "technician and scientist, the social planner and political revolutionary" (p. 251). "Humiliated by their own loss of prestige . . . they concluded that a monumental decline of the whole culture had set in" (pp. 251f.). Their humiliation is expressed in existentialism, "the last child of a cultural epoch, born in its mother's senility" (p. 252).

These puerilities hardly need reply. It is sufficient to observe that this European culture has overcome the dispersion of pragmatic man in the external; has attained the concept of an infinite human subjectivity; therefore does not rely on external power to maintain itself.

But the forms of secular culture derived from Christendom are irreducible one to another. Whoever is confined within one in his thinking cannot discover the spirit of the others. Inevitably they appear as distortions of his own culture. This is most plainly seen in their philosophies. Between the empirical-pragmatic philosophy of Anglo-American culture and the rational tradition of European philosophy there is no dialogue. The successors of Locke and Hume find no common language with phenomenologists and existentialists, who trace their ancestry to Descartes and Kant. Marxism, which has its hidden roots in Hegel, is for both a foreign and indecipherable language.

The dividedness of secular Christendom must be of the highest concern to Christians in an ecumenical age. Is the reunion of churches caused by a common fear of secularism? Is it from the erosion of differences, the loss of distinguishing doctrines, of definite doctrine altogether? Does reunion express the triumph of secularism or its defeat? The answers are too obvious. To overcome secularism on its own terms, it is first necessary that Christians learn to transcend a secular provincialism. For Anglo-Americans this means that we must learn to break through the barriers of "pragmatic and profane" culture. We need not oppose or value lightly our devotion to the technical and economic and the concern for individual welfare that attends it. But a culture for which theological truth, a scientific theology, a theological exegesis of Scripture, is inconceivable, cannot by itself be sufficient for Christians.

The task of modern theology is to show that the divided and warring fragments of Christendom—the secular cultures—are united in their source. Historians recognize that the secular cultures are derived from Christianity; they explain them in terms of their common origin. Sociologists point to the presence of a Christian past in contemporary society, but as a persisting immaturity. It is for the theologian to give meaning to this despairing adherence to a religious past. This is accomplished in the knowledge that secular freedom in the unity of its forms reflects the unity of the ancient Christian faith. The theology of the ancient Councils is not disproved by the secular sciences, by secular culture. Christian truth is lost to Christians because they no longer believe in its power but accept particular sciences and particular social forms as absolute.

It should not be expected that Anglo-American society will abandon its "pragmatic and profane" culture. For those who live easily in its priorities Mr. Cox has described the appropriate theology. It is the theology of the active, for whom it is sufficient to strive for limited goals—for whom thought, truth, beauty, enjoyment, everything ultimate is pursued only in subjective and unreal form. Within this dominant environment it is with great difficulty that the Church will regain a knowledge of its truth. The attitudes and priorities of pragmatic society prevail among the clergy as in other classes. Theological education is intensely practical; consciously or not, it is founded on the philosophy of the secular culture and does not evade its limits.

A larger consciousness is also present, however, in our culture, both within and outside the Church. Anglo-American society is "pragmatic and profane." But it is also part of Christendom. The more sharply Cox and others define the special theology of our culture, the more others will be moved to save the unity of Anglo-Americans with other Christians. But it is the weakness of our ecumenists that they are without philosophical culture. It is not possible to fight the "pragmatic and profane" with traditional weapons. A self-conscious secular culture which knows its limits and assumptions—which is a philosophy, if only the negation of philosophy—can only be fought with philosophical weapons. How can a philosophical culture take root and grow in Anglo-American society? A beginning would be made if Christians could emulate the patient intellectual labour of the secular scientists, if knowledge of the divine seemed worth more labour than finite knowledge, and if action without knowledge of the end seemed less meritorious.