On Religion and Cultural Policy: Notes on the Roman Catholic Church

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Abstract

This paper argues that religious institutions have largely been neglected within the study of cultural policy. This is attributed to the inherently secular tendency of most modern social sciences. Despite the predominance of the 'secularisation paradigm', the paper notes that religion continues to promote powerful attachments and denunciations. Arguments between the 'new atheists', in particular, Richard Dawkins, and their opponents are discussed, as is Habermas's conciliatory encounter with Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI). The paper then moves to a consideration of the Roman Catholic Church as an agent of cultural policy, whose overriding aim is the promotion of 'Christian consciousness'. Discussion focuses on the contested meanings of this, with reference to (1) the deliberations of Vatican II and (2) the exercise of theological and cultural authority by the Pope and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). It is argued that these doctrinal disputes intersect with secular notions of social and cultural policy and warrant attention outside the specialist realm of theological discourse.

Keywords: cultural policy, secularism, religion, Roman Catholic Church, Vatican II

Introduction

The study of cultural policy has come a long way from its initial preoccupation with the arts and heritage policies of governmental organisations. These still retain a central position in the field, largely because of the volume of research that is commissioned by the institutions that make these policies. But in recent years, there has been a significant broadening of the field. This, in part, is a reflection of shifts in practice, notably the governmental championing of the 'creative industries' and the foregrounding of culture in projects of urban regeneration.

In Britain, this is often said to have begun in the 1980s with the attempts of the Greater London Council to engage with the powerful industries of modern popular culture. At the time, Geoff Mulgan and Ken Worpole had famously declared that 'while the state concentrates on a fairly limited opera repertoire and a Shakespearean

heritage for the tourists, the corporate planners and strategy executives of the multinationals are only too keen to write the real cultural policies for themselves' (1986, 10). Similar shifts could be seen in France around the same time, where Jack Lang, François Mitterand's Minister of Culture, moved from a traditional socialist disdain of commercial culture to a celebration of its democratic credentials and capacity for economic regeneration.

So, just as the practice of cultural policy broadened from a preoccupation with the arts, traditionally defined, to an engagement with the wider world of commercial culture, so did the developing field of cultural policy studies. Of course, this is not to suggest that academic research simply 'followed' the world of practice. Indeed, researchers from both within the academy and outside have been strongly implicated in the policy shifts referred to above. Nick Garnham, for example, then Professor of Communications at the University of Westminster, played a key role in the development of the cultural industries' policies at the Greater London Council, to which he was seconded in the 1980s. Mulgan and Warpole, authors of the influential *Saturday Night or Sunday Morning*, from which the quotation above was taken, also worked with Garnham at the GLC, and Mulgan went on to found the think-tank Demos and to become Director of Policy for Prime Minister Tony Blair in 10 Downing Street. Years before Jack Lang made his *volte-face* over the cultural industries, the French Ministry of Culture's own head of research, Augustin Girard, was arguing that the democratisation of culture had been brought about far more comprehensively by industrial products in the market-place than by state cultural policies (1978, 102).

The history of cultural policy, therefore, as practised by governments and other public institutions, has been a gradual extension of what constitutes the cultural, according to changing political, economic and technological conditions. This has necessarily involved the recognition, though belatedly it must be said, that as agents of cultural policy, the state and the institutions it funds are not the only – nor necessarily the most significant - game in town. Researchers have been closely engaged in these adjustments, both as agents of change and as analysts of the new policy landscapes that have emerged. To some extent, the boundaries between the study of cultural policy, communications and media have now begun to overlap.

However, there exists another dimension of cultural policy research, which goes well beyond a preoccupation with the cultural industries and concerns itself with the less acknowledged but nevertheless powerful forms of cultural action that are also deeply implicated in the shaping of attitudes and behaviours. In the Anglophone world, Raymond Williams was one of the first to think of cultural policy in this way, when he suggested that displays of state power, such as Britain's state opening of Parliament, were just as much a form of cultural policy, though not acknowledged as such, as any policy initiatives of a ministry of arts or culture (1986, 3). Williams never developed this further, although Jim McGuigan, in his *Rethinking Cultural Policy*, proposed an interesting extrapolation, drawing a distinction between cultural policy 'proper' and cultural policy as display, and using Britain's Millennium Dome as an example of the latter (2004, 61-91).

The discipline of cultural studies, whose existence, of course, owes much to Raymond Williams, has also contributed to these developments in cultural policy research. Indeed, the understanding of culture as 'a whole way of life', which has been widely adopted within cultural studies, has extended the notion of the cultural to the point of being almost indistinguishable from the social. When this gets applied to cultural policy, many other manifestations of culture come into the frame. In Lewis's & Miller's notion of 'critical cultural policy studies', for example, these include the policing of shopping malls, the location of American baseball teams and the cleaning up of New York's sexual underworld (2003). However, as I have argued elsewhere (xxxx, 2004, 237-242), this notion of cultural policy research, which is specifically constructed as a 'reformist project' with a very particular agenda, is quite narrowly constrained by its own ideological preferences.

It is in Jeremy Ahearne's account of Régis Debray's reflections on French cultural policy that we find the most coherent theorising of an extended notion of cultural policy (2004, 112-136). Exploring certain tensions in Debray's work, Ahearne argues that, whilst cultural policy, as an autonomous area of public sector action, was not invented in France until the founding of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs under André Malraux in 1959, in actual fact, cultural policy 'represents a transhistorical imperative for all political orders' (114). By this he means that since all political orders need,

through the transmission of culture, to maintain their symbolic legitimacy, cultural policies have *de facto* been in operation for as long as political power itself. In this view, a state is not a visible object, but a set of relations, and unless these relations are maintained (the role of culture), then the state will break down. Cultural policy thus becomes 'any political strategy that looks to work on the culture of the territory over which it presides (or on that of its adversary)' (114). As in Williams's formulation, it can take the form of display (coronation ceremonies, military parades, state openings of Parliament, etc.); or it can be seen as the sum total of a government's action on a nation's culture, including educational, media, industrial and foreign policy. Ahearne usefully characterises these forms of cultural policy as 'implicit' or 'effective', in contrast to 'explicit' or 'nominal' cultural policy, which he uses to denote any policy that a government explicitly labels as cultural.

Ahearne's notion of implicit cultural policy, transhistorical and comprehensive as it is, is nevertheless primarily focused on the action of national governments or, as in Debray's example of the resurgent Carolingian dynasty of the 8th century, the action of imperial powers (Ahearne, 113). However, in the modern, or should we say postmodern, world, it is possible to extend Ahearne's notion further. If we take as the defining characteristic of a cultural policy *the deliberate intention to work on the culture of a people*, regardless of whether it is explicitly acknowledged, we can find ourselves looking not only at governments and multinational entertainment corporations (Mulgan and Worpole), but also at a very much more diverse set of agents and agencies, all of which can be seen to be in the business of cultural propagation. These can include individuals, such as public intellectuals and cultural critics,[1] and all those organisations, ranging from the religious to the criminal (think of the mafia[2], for example), that set out to promote a particular set of cultural values or practices. This is, in fact, the understanding of cultural policy that has informed the aims of both the International Conference on Cultural Policy Research (ICCPR) and this Journal.[3]

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[1] See, for example, Ahearne, J. & Bennett, O., eds. (2007) *Intellectuals and Cultural Policy*, Routledge, London
[2] See Belfiore, E., (2009), forthcoming
[3] In both the ICCPR and the IJCP, cultural policy is understood as 'the promotion or prohibition of cultural practices and values by governments, corporations, other institutions and individuals. Such policies may be explicit, in that their objectives are openly described as cultural, or implicit, in that their cultural objectives are concealed or described in other terms'.

The Secularisation Paradigm

Robert Shellady has observed that international relations scholars have lagged behind in incorporating religion and religious organisations into their analyses (2004, 159). The same can be said of cultural policy scholars, who, notwithstanding the moves towards implicit cultural policy outlined above, have remained largely silent on the subject.[4] Shellady suggests that, within the study of international relations, this neglect can be explained by the inherent secular tendency of most modern social sciences (159). This tendency can itself be seen as part of a broader secularisation paradigm, which has been articulated and developed by sociologists from Max Weber onwards. Of course, this is not to suggest that, as an object of study, religion has disappeared from the social sciences. Weber himself can be seen as one of the founders of a still active sociology of religion; and within cultural anthropology, interest in religion has never declined. But these examples notwithstanding, Shellady's observation resonates strongly within the fields of both cultural policy and cultural studies.

A contemporary exponent of the secularisation paradigm, Steve Bruce, puts forward the basic proposition that it is modernisation that creates problems for religion. Modernisation is seen as a multi-faceted development, which encompasses 'the industrialization of work; the shift from villages to towns and cities; the replacement of the small community by the society; the rise of individualism; the rise of egalitarianism; and the rationalization both of thought and of social organization' (2002, 2). These developments foster a plurality of competing ideas, which, in the relativism that such plurality promotes, challenges the cultural authority on which religious institutions depend for their legitimacy. At the same time, rational procedures become embodied in bureaucratic organisations, creating the underlying impression of inhabiting an orderly world, which reduces the scope of religion. There thus develops a decline in both the social standing of religious roles and institutions

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[4] The only references, in English, to religious institutions as agents of cultural policy that I have been able to find are Jeannine Siat's brief profile of the Holy See in the Council of Europe's Compendium of Cultural Policies in Europe (2006) and Ahearne's references to Debray's account of the Roman Catholic Church's use of culture to secure its position throughout its long history (2004). There are references to religious institutions in some of the Council of Europe's national cultural policy reviews (see, for example, Gordon, 2004, 26-28), but the primary purpose of these reviews is to focus on the explicit cultural policies of national governments rather than the implicit policies of other agencies.

and in their importance for non-religious institutions, such as the state and the economy (3). Religion becomes increasingly privatised and, without the social interaction and social organisation that are needed to provide a constant background affirmation of beliefs, the numbers of people interested in religion decline (240).

Religion is usefully defined as 'beliefs, actions and institutions predicated on the existence of entities with powers of agency (that is, gods) or impersonal powers possessed of moral purposes (the Hindu notion of Karma, for example), which can set the conditions of, or intervene in, human affairs' (2). The emphasis on the existence of a god or gods endowed with moral purpose usefully distinguishes religion from the eclectic mix of beliefs associated with New Age spirituality (such as aromatherapy, meditation, astrology or quigong), which, as Terence Copley has pointed out, is more about an exaltation of the self than an engagement with religion (2005, 103).

Bruce's formulation also differentiates religion from the sense of awe that many people experience, including natural scientists, when they confront the frontiers of what is known. Albert Einstein is perhaps the most well-known example of this, along with the celebrated atheistic biologist, Richard Dawkins. 'What I see in Nature', wrote Einstein, 'is a magnificent structure that must fill a thinking person with a feeling of humility. This is a genuinely religious feeling that has nothing to do with mysticism' (Dawkins, 2006). Dawkins makes the distinction between 'Einsteinian religion', a kind of pantheistic reverence for the magnificent but impersonal laws of the universe, which Dawkins himself shares, and the supernatural gods of organised religion that hear prayers and intervene in human affairs. Carl Sagan makes a similar distinction: 'if by "God" one means a set of physical laws that govern the universe, then clearly there is such a God. This God is emotionally unsatisfying…it does not make much sense to pray to the law of gravity' (Dawkins, 41).

Bruce foresees a long-term decline in the power, popularity and prestige of religious beliefs and rituals. Taking Britain as an example, and basing his conclusion on trends in data that have been consistent for the last 50 to 100 years, he considers that organized Christianity may well fall below the critical mass required to reproduce itself. He expects the Methodist Church to fold by around 2031 and the Church of England to be reduced to 'a trivial voluntary organisation associated with a large

portfolio of heritage property' (74). The secularisation paradigm does not suggest the worldwide disappearance of religion, or even a rapid and dramatic decline: it suggests, rather, a growing indifference to religious ideas and the gradual reduction of those that are seriously religious to a small minority. It does not even imply that people give up religion because they think it is *false:* it just ceases to be that important (235). Bruce is careful not to claim a universalism for this paradigm, or to suggest that the progress of secularisation will be even. However, he concludes that wherever the principles of individualism, diversity and egalitarianism become embedded in a context of liberal democracy, then secularisation will never be far behind (30, 241).

Bruce's conclusions find affirmation from an unexpected quarter. Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, acknowledged both the accelerating growth of secularisation in Europe and the United States and the rise in cultural and intellectual relativism that could be seen as a consequence of it (Ratzinger & Pera, 2006). It is a theme that he has returned to on many occasions. For example, in a homily delivered on the eve of his election to the Papacy, he specifically referred to the challenge posed by the growth of relativism to the authority of his church:

> Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labelled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be "tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine", seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definite and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's ego and desires (Ratzinger, 2005)

As we shall see, Ratzinger, first as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the arm of the Roman Catholic Church charged with safeguarding its doctrine on faith and morals) and then as Pope, has taken an uncompromising line towards deviations from orthodox Catholic teaching, even when this has alienated many within the Catholic community itself. What he has never countenanced, despite the shrinking number of priests, practising Catholics and Catholic institutions[5] in many parts of the world, is the adoption of more liberal measures that might arrest this decline. Indeed, Robert Royal, President of the Faith and Reason Institute in

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[5] For example, between 1965 and 2002, the number of priests in the US declined by 22% to 45,000, the number of ordinations by 71% to 450 and the number of Catholic high schools by 49% to 786 (Jones, 2003).

Washington, has observed that 'the idea of a smaller Church is one of the hallmarks of his career' (Miner, 61).

If the history of religion is one of declining significance, to the extent that even the Pope acknowledges that religion in the West is a casualty of modernisation, then it is understandable why it has not been a major preoccupation amongst analysts of contemporary culture – let alone those concerned with cultural policy. Yet there are good reasons for not consigning religion to the margins of culture just yet. First, and most obviously, despite modernisation, religious belief plays some part in the life of a very large number of people. For example, commitment to Catholicism may be declining in the United States and parts of Europe, but there are nevertheless still estimated to be around 1.15 billion Catholics in the world. This is forecast to rise to around 1.6 billion by 2050, the majority of new Catholics coming from the developing world, and, in particular, Africa (Saenz, 2008).

Estimates of the number of Muslims in the world vary considerably, but the Vatican recently announced that Muslims now outnumbered Catholics by around 200 million (Catholic World News, 2008). Be that as it may, and modernisation not withstanding, it is very difficult to imagine Islam moving to the sidelines of culture and society in the foreseeable future. Indeed, Feisal Abdul Rauf, a well-known Egyptian Sufi imam, has suggested that Islam is embedded in the social and cultural life of its adherents to a manifestly greater degree than Roman Catholicism. It is this recognition, he maintains, that lay behind Pope Benedict's controversial speech at Regensburg in 2006.[6] 'The real enemy for the Pope', according to Rauf, 'isn't Islam. It's the secular West. He sees that, in the West, religion is banished from the boardroom of society – that it has no place at the table of public debate on how to build 'the good society, the ideal society.' And he sees that in Islam religion is not only at the table; it's in some ways at the head of the table. He's jealous' (Kramer, 2007).

Secondly, whether or not secularisation continues to advance according to the paradigm discussed above, for the time being religion indisputably retains a strong

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[6] In the course of a scholarly refutation of the so-called Kantian fallacy, Benedict quoted, without disputing them, derogatory remarks about Muhammed made by a fourteenth century Byzantine emperor. This caused outrage in the Muslim world, resulting in violent demonstrations, riots and protests.

cultural presence in modern societies. It may no longer be accurate to describe culture, in T.S. Eliot's famous phrase, as 'the incarnation of the religion of a people' (Eliot, 1948, 28), but the culture of religion continues to promote attachments and denunciations in almost equal measure. These relate not just to the events that capture the global headlines, such as 9/11 or the sexual abuse crisis within the American Catholic Church, but to the social impact of religion itself. Indeed, at times, it can seem as if we are so far from Bruce's notion of religion 'ceasing to be that important' that we are re-running some of the impassioned debates of the eighteenth century Enlightenment.

In the vanguard of those who see the need to attack religion in all its manifestations is Richard Dawkins, whose bestseller, *The God Delusion*, castigates religion for everything from its theological constructions to its moral distortions.[7] With unrelenting rationalism, Dawkins examines all the major versions of what he calls the 'God hypothesis' and finds each one deficient. The existence of God cannot (at least not yet) be conclusively disproved, but, in Dawkins's view, God has as much chance of existing as Bertrand Russell's celestial teapot.[8] To those, like Stephen Jay Gould, who argue that theological questions are beyond the province of science, Dawkins replies that the central narratives from which religions draw their legitimacy are very much matters of science. For example, in Christianity, Jesus Christ's status as the Son of God is integrally tied up with the Virgin Birth, his capacity to perform miracles, such as the raising of Lazarus from the dead, and his own resurrection. The question of whether or not these things actually happened, which is a strictly scientific question that concerns a suspension of the laws of the universe, is therefore highly significant, even though it can never be conclusively answered (barring an unexpected discovery of DNA samples) (Dawkins, 2007, 82-83).

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[7] See also Harris (2006), Harris (2007) and Hitchens (2007)

[8] 'If I were to suggest that between the Earth and Mars there is a china teapot revolving about the sun in an elliptical orbit, nobody would be able to disprove my assertion provided I were careful to add that the teapot is too small to be revealed even by our most powerful telescopes. But if I were to go on to say that, since my assertion cannot be disproved, it is intolerable presumption on the part of human reason to doubt it, I should rightly be thought to be talking nonsense. If, however, the existence of such a teapot were affirmed in ancient books, taught as the sacred truth every Sunday, and instilled into the minds of children at school, hesitation to believe in its existence would become a mark of eccentricity and entitle the doubter to the attentions of the psychiatrist in an enlightened age or of the Inquisitor in an earlier time.' (Russell, 1952)

For Dawkins, then, religious institutions are engaged in the propagation of a gigantic delusion. What makes this worse is the fact that the delusion is perpetuated by a sophisticated system of childhood indoctrination. According to Dawkins, this has resulted, and continues to result, not in the development of superior moral qualities or virtues, but the elevation of faith over reason and of obedience over critical thinking. Dawkins sees faith as a dangerous weapon, which encourages an in-group mentality, demonises all those outside the group and inspires all manners of atrocities in the name of revealed truth. No clear distinction can be drawn between 'moderate' religion and extremism, because irrationality lies at the heart of all religions and thus provides the climate in which fanaticism can flourish. It is a view shared by Sam Harris, another of the 'new atheists', who argues that 'religion raises the stakes of human conflict much higher… as it is the only in-group/out-group thinking that casts the difference between people in terms of eternal rewards and punishments' (2007, 80).

The response to Dawkins's book reveals how contested the arena of religion continues to be. Support for the secularisation paradigm comes from the physicist, Steven Weinberg, who, although largely sympathetic to Dawkins's view, criticises him for not realising 'the extent to which his side has won' (2007). However, Terry Eagleton argues that Dawkins has come up with only a vulgar caricature of religious faith, which displays a dogmatism of its own both in its failure to concede *any* human benefit that has flowed from religion and in its wholly uncritical embrace of technology and science. In Eagleton's view, critics of 'the richest, most enduring form of popular culture in human history' have a moral obligation to confront its achievements as well as its failures (2007). For Alistair McGrath, former molecular biologist turned Christian theologian, Dawkins is representative of a new breed of aggressive, secular fundamentalist, committed to an obsolete warfare model of science and religion. Far from conceding that Dawkins's side has 'won', McGrath sees his atheistical fundamentalism as a sign of panic. Belief in God has not simply ceased to matter or to die out altogether, as secularists have expected it to, but on the contrary has acquired a stronger presence in both the private and public spheres. Dawkins's aggressive reduction of religion to an unambiguous social malady, or, to use Eagleton's phrase, his 'lunging, flailing and mispunching', is seen as evidence of this panic in the face of mounting threats to the atheistic worldview (McGrath, 2007, 63-64).

A more measured reflection on the relations between secularism and religion can be found in the record of an encounter in 2004 between Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger (prior to his election as Pope), subsequently published as *The Dialectics of Secularization: On reason and religion*. Both men had been invited to speak at the Catholic Academy of Bavaria on the subject of 'the pre-political moral foundations of a free state'. The Director of the Academy has written of the surprise, even bewilderment, generated by this encounter between the personification of liberal, individual, secular thinking and the Cardinal who came to prominence as the enforcer of doctrinal orthodoxy throughout the Catholic Church (Habermas & Ratzinger, 2006, 15). However, as Edward Skidelsky has pointed out, there is a long tradition of *kulturprotestantismus* in Germany – 'a diffuse, non-denominational religiosity [that] guarantees the churches widespread respect, if not attendance'. Unlike the caustic scepticism of British philosophers, such as Hume and Russell, German philosophers have mostly tended to take religion seriously. Skidelsky sees Habermas as being part of this tradition, willing to 'disentangle religion's ethical vision from its dogmatic claims' (Skidelsky, 2005).

This is not the place for an extended discussion of the intricacies of the Habermas/Ratzinger debate. For the purposes of this paper, it is sufficient to comment only on the conciliatory tone of the encounter and the degree of common ground that both protagonists managed to find. Habermas is well-known for his notion of 'constitutional patriotism', through which the democratic process generates its own grounds of allegiance, without recourse to any pre-political ethnic or religious solidarity. 'In the constitutional state', he says, 'there is no ruling authority derived from something antecedent to the law' (2006, 27). He gives no ground on this in his dialogue with Ratzinger, but he does concede the possibility of the secularization of society 'going off the rails', with the sources of the solidarity of citizens, on which liberal societal structures depend, drying up altogether (22). What is more, he sees this solidarity already being fractured by the dynamics of the global economy and the continuing colonisation of both the public and private spheres by a market mentality. In the process of modernisation, of which these conditions are a part, Habermas acknowledges that religious communities have preserved intact 'something that has been lost elsewhere' (41). The secular world should treat this with the greatest respect

and 'deal carefully with all the cultural sources that nourish its citizens' consciousness of norms and their solidarity'. Indeed, because religious culture can contribute in this way, and because it continues to hold its own in an increasingly secular world, Habermas considers it more appropriate to describe modern societies as 'postsecular' rather than 'secular' (46). Moreover, the continued existence of religion should not simply be seen as a 'societal fact' but should be taken seriously 'from within' (38).

On his part, Ratzinger acknowledges the part that secular rationality can play in taming what he calls the 'pathologies in religion'. He confronts the relation between religion and fanaticism head-on:

> If one of the sources of terrorism is religious fanaticism – and this is in fact the case – *is then religion a healing and saving force? Or is it not rather an archaic and dangerous force* that builds up false universalisms, thereby leading to intolerance and acts of terrorism? Must not religion, therefore, be placed under the guardianship of reason, and its boundaries carefully marked off?...Ought we to consider the gradual abolishment of religion, the overcoming of religion, to be necessary progress on the part of mankind, so that it may find the path to freedom and to universal tolerance? (64-67)

Of course, for Ratzinger, the abolition of religion would achieve no such thing, because, just as there are pathologies in religion, there are also pathologies of reason. These have produced the atomic bomb (and all the other weapons of mass destruction) and are now in the process, through the application of genetic technology, of turning mankind into just another 'product'. Ratzinger concedes that 'religion must continually allow itself to be purified and structured by reason' (77). But at the same time, reason needs to keep within its proper limits and learn to listen to 'the great religious traditions of mankind' (78). Ratzinger's reference to traditions in the plural is not made lightly. He does contend that the complementarity of Christian faith and Western secular rationality has produced a uniquely powerful cultural force. But, emphatically disavowing both Eurocentrism and Western hubris, he declares his commitment to a 'polyphonic relatedness', in which all cultures are involved in a 'universal process of purifications' (79).

The purpose of this brief account of some of the current debates around secularisation and religion has been to illustrate how contested the secularisation paradigm has

become. In contrast to those who maintain that, as a consequence of modernisation, religion is simply ceasing to matter that much, we find those such as Richard Dawkins, who see the need to denounce religion in all its manifestations. Such denunciations provoke responses, from believers and non-believers alike, which proclaim the continuing resilience and significance of religious culture in modern societies. Within a less confrontational intellectual tradition, the *kulturprotestantismus* of Germany, we find one of the world's leading leftist philosophers advocating an alliance with religion in the struggle against the fragmenting and alienating forces unleashed by global capitalism. It is a struggle to which Ratzinger, now in his new incarnation as Pope Benedict XVI, appears equally committed, as he prepares to publish a new papal encyclical on capitalism and society (Hutton, 2008).

Given this context, it seems timely to bring religious institutions more centrally into the field of cultural policy studies and to investigate both the meaning of the culture they promote and the means, either explicit or implicit, through which they attempt to promote it. It is, of course, a gigantic task, which to some extent overlaps with well-established studies of religion and religious institutions, within the fields of history, anthropology, theology, sociology and psychology. However, there is perhaps some merit in focusing specifically on the religious institution as an agent of cultural policy, whose actions and values can be compared to all those other agents that seek to work on the culture of a people or a group. This is the distinctive approach that a cultural policy perspective can bring.

Cultural Policy and the Roman Catholic Church

The remainder of this paper takes the Roman Catholic Church as a 'case study' and attempts to look at it through a cultural policy 'lens'. Other religious organisations would have made equally interesting case studies and thrown up different problematics. Islam, for example, has no central institutional authority, and a study of Islamic cultural policies would have needed to focus on the plurality of its mosques. The Roman Catholic Church, by contrast, is, at least nominally, governed by a

Supreme Pontiff, with the support of the Roman Curia,[9] based in the Vatican. As the largest of the Christian denominations, with a strongly centralised authority, it was an obvious choice for an investigation of this kind.

The paper does not seek to replicate Jeannine Siat's account of the Holy See[10], noted earlier, which focuses mainly on legal, financial and administrative measures. Instead, it sets out to explore, first, the culture promoted by the Catholic Church and, secondly, the exercise of cultural authority within the Church. There are, of course, many other perspectives that might also be usefully taken, but the central dynamics of any cultural policy can to some extent be said to revolve around these two questions of meaning and authority.

At the most general level, it could be said that all policies of the Catholic Church are cultural and that their over-arching aim is the promotion of Christian consciousness. In this respect, though I would not want to push the analogy too far, the Church, or at least, the Holy See, shares some similarities with those governments that have sought to promote all-embracing ideologies that govern every aspect of their citizens' lives. For example, communist governments, in their promotion of 'socialist consciousness', have acted not unlike some religious institutions in their commitment to doctrinal orthodoxy and their evangelical zeal. However, the notion of 'Christian consciousness', like 'socialist consciousness', is both too general and too contested to be of any real analytical use. The existence of over 34,000 different Christian groupings (Allen, 2004, 20) is an indication of quite how contested both the notion, and the means of realising it, actually are. Also, as Jeff Pratt has said of Roman Catholicism, however much the church emphasises its eternal properties, 'we are not in fact dealing with a static culture but with a process' (1996, 130). This can be seen in the constant revisions to orthodox teaching that has characterised the Church's history. A relatively recent example can be found in relation to religious freedom. In 1832, facing the prospect of revolts in the Papal States, Pope Gregory XVI used his encyclical *Mirari Vos*, to denounce freedom of conscience and religion as a

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[9] The Roman Curia is the collective term for the administrative and legal offices, based in the Vatican, through which the Pope governs the Catholic Church.
[10] The Holy See and the Vatican are often used interchangeably. However, they refer to two different entities. The Holy See is a non-territorial legal entity that governs the Catholic Church, enters into treaties with other states and sends out diplomatic representatives. The Vatican, by contrast, is a 108-acre territory in Rome, which provides a physical base for the Holy See.

'derangement' and a 'pestilential error'. This was reinforced in much the same language by Gregory's successor, Pius IX, in his 1864 *Syllabus of Errors*. Yet, one hundred years later, in Vatican II's *Declaration on Religious Liberty*, religious freedom was said to be founded 'in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself' (Collins, 2002, 191).

If we are to try and understand the culture that the Catholic Church now promotes, then Vatican II, the ecumenical council convened between 1962 and 1965, is a good place to start. Ecumenical councils are rare events. They can be called only by Popes and they involve the entire body of bishops, cardinals, heads of religious orders and theologians of the Church. Only three such councils have been called in the last five hundred years - the Council of Trent, which met between 1545 and 1563, primarily to respond to the challenge of the Protestant Reformation; Vatican I, called in 1869 to assert the doctrine of 'papal infallibility', but ending prematurely in 1870 as a result of the Franco-Prussian war; and Vatican II.

Vatican II was convened by Pope John XXIII with the intention of 'opening the windows of the Church' and bringing it into the modern world. In her study of the politics of Vatican II, Melissa Wilde shows how its 'overwhelmingly progressive outcome' was brought about through the capacity of activist bishops to organise themselves during the Council itself (2004). They were thus able to outmanoeuvre both the conservative minority amongst the bishops and the reactionary tendency within the Roman Curia. This resulted in a very significant cultural change within the Church, that included the renunciation of its claim to be 'the one true church', a greater openness towards other religions, a rapprochement with Eastern orthodox and Protestant Christians, and expressions of regret for Christianity's anti-semitic past. Episcopal collegiality was emphasised in opposition to heavily centralised Papal authority and, in a first step towards what was later referred to as 'indigenization' or 'contextualization', the use of the vernacular was encouraged in place of the Latin Mass (Angrosino, 1994, 825). The celebrated theologian, Hans Küng, saw Vatican II as an attempt to 'integrate two paradigm changes into the life of the Church that Catholicism had deliberately bypassed'. The first was the paradigm of the Reformation, with its call for vernacular language, attention to biblical studies and

greater involvement of the laity in the operation of the Church. The second was the paradigm of modernity and Enlightenment, which brought to the fore questions of freedom of conscience and religion (Collins, 2002, 196).

These cultural shifts were reflected in many of the documents that came out of Vatican II's deliberations, such as *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration On the Relation Of the Church to Non-Christian Religions) and *Dignitatis Humanae* (Declaration On Religious Liberty), referred to above. In addition, culture is explicitly addressed in one chapter of the final document to be promulgated by Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* (the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World). Here, in a definition that recalls Matthew Arnold's well-known idea of culture[11], culture is described as 'everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities' and which must be 'subordinated to the integral perfection of the human person, to the good of the community and the whole of society' (Holy See, 1965, paras 53 & 59).

'On the Proper Development of Culture', as this chapter is entitled, broadly displays the liberal spirit of Vatican II and reflects on a number of dilemmas. These include the relationship between cultural modernisation and tradition; the difficulties of maintaining an holistic vision in the face of an accelerating division of intellectual labour; and the challenges of democratising culture, when the culture of those 'who are more competent' is becoming more complex and refined. Of particular note is the acceptance of artistic freedom and the affirmation of 'the legitimate autonomy of human culture and especially the sciences', although this is qualified by the supposition that such freedom must be 'within the limits of morality and the common utility' (para 59). Also, the authors of the document are keen to assert that 'the autonomy of culture should not be encouraged to generate 'a notion of humanism which is merely terrestrial, and even contrary to religion itself' (para 56). As we shall see, such reservations allowed room for reinterpretations of Vatican II and for what many have seen as strongly revisionist tendencies.

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[11] 'Culture, which is the study of perfection, leads us…to conceive of true human perfection as a **harmonious** perfection, developing all sides of our humanity; and as a **general** perfection, developing all parts of our society' (Arnold, 1981, 11)

One should also be careful of overstating the extent to which the culture of Catholicism was transformed by Vatican II. Hans Küng, the youngest theologian to have participated in the Council, recalls that the overwhelmingly progressive thrust of the deliberations was constantly held back and even obstructed by the Roman Curia. In Küng's view, had the Council had its way, many other policy changes would have been introduced, including the ending of the prohibitions on both priestly celibacy and birth control. Instead, in the years following the Council, these prohibitions were emphatically reaffirmed in the papal encyclicals *Sacerdotalis caelibatus* (1967) and *Humanae Vitae* (1968). Küng also maintains that, during Vatican II, the Roman Curia were active in thwarting the attempts of the Council to alter the power structure of the Church. In particular, the Council had been seeking to remove the Pope's exclusive power to appoint bishops, introducing instead an electoral system that was more representative of the Church; and to change the system of electing Popes, so that responsibility lay not with College of Cardinals, who were themselves appointed by Popes, but by the wider community of bishops (Sheahan, 2004).

Although Küng and others have argued that the reforms of Vatican II did not go far enough, conservatives within both the Church and the laity have argued that they should never have been introduced in the first place. Notable opponents have been the French Archbishop, Marcel Lefebvre, who strongly rejected the notion of religious freedom, and, more recently, the former US Republican Presidential candidate, Pat Buchanan, who blames Vatican II for all that has subsequently gone wrong with the Catholic Church. Buchanan has argued that all those who thought that Catholicism could be reconciled with modernity were 'naïve and foolish' (Buchanan, 2005?).[12] According to Lawrence Cunningham, Vatican II has produced more internal disruptions in the Church than anything since the Protestant Reformation (2007).

There is some evidence to suggest that, in the decades following Vatican II, the conservative tendencies within the Church have been in the ascendancy. For Küng, it was the compromises and ambiguities of the Vatican II declarations, for which he holds the Roman Curia responsible, that allowed this to happen, enabling reactionary

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[12] In a review of statistics that showed declining numbers of priests, ordinations, nuns and catholic schools in the US, Buchanan declared that '[w]hen Pope John XXIII threw open the windows of the church, all the poisonous vapors of modernity entered, along with the Devil himself' (2005?)

forces within the Church to interpret Vatican II 'backwards'. As a consequence, he sees the Church gradually returning to the mediaeval, Counter-reformation, anti-modern paradigm that Vatican II set out to leave behind. Küng maintains that elements of contemporary Catholic culture, such as the assertion of the absolute primacy of the Pope, the law of celibacy and the subordination of laity to the clergy, are not essentially Catholic at all but reflections of mediaeval culture and social structure. (Collins, 197).

These tendencies are, of course, to a very large extent determined by the Pope himself, who presides over what can be seen as the oldest continuing absolute monarchy in the world. As noted above, the doctrine of papal infallibility was adopted at Vatican I in 1869, together with the complementary doctrine of papal supremacy. These twin doctrines, which belong to the tradition of ultramontanism, ascribed to the Pope the capacity to define dogmas free from error and gave him supreme power in the government of the Church. The evident fallibility of Papal judgements notwithstanding (illustrated by the history of their reversals), and despite the greater emphasis on episcopal collegiality, the infallibility of the Pope was not rescinded by Vatican II. According to John Allen, it is important to understand that in the traditional Catholic theological framework, power is not seen as corrupting but ennobling, 'because it flows from the sacramental grace of Holy Orders'. Within the Roman Curia, therefore, accountability does not flow downwards but upwards to the Pope and ultimately to God (Allen, 176)

If we are looking for the source of cultural authority in the Catholic Church, then the road inevitably leads to the Pope. Although, since Vatican II, there has been an expectation that the bishops and the Pope would normally work together to exercise supreme power over the church 'in one apostolic college', this has not prevented Popes from exercising power according to their own judgement in the face of significant opposition. For example, Pope Paul VI rejected the advice of the commission on birth control that his predecessor had set up and, if Küng is correct, issued *Humanae Vitae* against the wishes of the majority of bishops at the time. More recently, in 2008, sixty Catholic groups from around the world called in an open letter for an ending of the Church's opposition to birth control, on the grounds that it endangered women's lives and exposed millions of people to the risk of contracting

AIDS. Pope Benedict XVI rejected this call and, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of *Humananae Vitae,* took the opportunity to reaffirm its principles.

However, the Pope does not, of course work alone, and, as we have seen, governs the Church through the Roman Curia, within which are a number of different offices, known as 'dicasteries'. The oldest and, along with the Secretariat of State, most powerful of these is the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF)[13]. The CDF is the direct descendent of the Roman Inquisition[14], which was founded at the same time as the *Index of Forbidden Books* in 1542, with the primary aim of saving Italy from the Protestant Reformation (Collins, 2002, 2). The role of both the *Index* and the Inquisition was to stamp out heresy and to protect the status of Catholic orthodoxy. Although the *Index* was abolished in 1966, the Roman Inquisition has continued, with some interruptions and under different names, until the present day. According to *Pastor Bonus,* the 1988 apostolic constitution on the Roman Curia, the function of the CDF is 'to promote and safeguard the doctrine on faith and morals throughout the catholic world: for this reason everything which in any way touches on such matters falls within its competence' (Collins, 2002, 3). By virtue of this brief the CDF is thus invested with considerable theological and cultural authority and can be seen to have a key role in the determination of what constitutes Christian consciousness and how it should be promoted. Its judgements are always approved by the Pope and, as such, cannot be referred to the Holy See's Court of Appeal, the Apostolic Signatura.

Space does not permit an extensive discussion of the CDF, but some brief references to two important cases will serve to illustrate how, since Vatican II, it has exercised its authority in the promotion of those conservative tendencies referred to by Hans Küng above.[15] Both of these cases took place whilst Ratzinger was 'prefect' of the

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[13] The CDF is a committee made up of cardinals and bishops, supported by thirty to forty paid members of staff. It is chaired by its 'prefect', who is himself appointed by the Pope.

[14] Its full name was 'The Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition', sometimes known as 'The Holy Office'. This should not be confused with the mediaeval versions of the Inquisition, such as the 'Spanish Inquisition', whose practices were considerably more violent. According to John Tadeschi, a leading scholar of the Roman Inquisition, its own forms of punishment were in fact relatively mild (Tadeschi, 151).

[15] For the following account, I draw largely on Paul Collins's book, *The Modern Inquisition: Seven prominent Catholics and their struggles with the Vatican.* Collins was an Australian priest and church

CDF, an office he held for twenty-four years prior to his election as Pope in 2005. The first concerns the 'silencing' of the Brazilian Franciscan theologian and architect of 'liberation theology', Leonardo Boff; the second, the excommunication of the Sri Lankan theologian, Tissa Balasuriya, an advocate of a radical form of Asian theology. Both of these were arguably targeted by the CDF as symbols of popular movements seen to be threatening to established Catholic orthodoxies.

It was the publication of Boff's book, *Church, Charism and Power*, that triggered the CDF action against him. Boff was charged with a number of offences, including an excessively 'ideological' interpretation of faith and the heretical suggestion that the Roman Catholic Church, as constituted, was not the only model that could be derived from Christ's teachings. Boff had also offended the CDF with his highly polemical attack on the Church's abuse of power. In common with other proponents of liberation theology, such as the Peruvian Gustavo Gutierrez, Boff had argued that theology should be developed out of the lived experience of the poor rather than the dogma of church teaching. This was closely allied to the development of thousands of Christian 'base communities' (*communidad de base*) across South America, which brought together groups of mainly poor people to reflect on their experience of life in the light of Christian teaching. For the CDF, this came close to a kind of quasi-Marxist reduction of the Kingdom of God to a secular programme. A CDF 'Instruction' in 1984 accused liberation theology of using 'concepts borrowed from various currents of Marxist thought…[and of] containing errors which directly threaten the truths of faith regarding the eternal destiny of individual persons' (Collins, 2002, 26).

According to Collins, the struggle over liberation theology was above all about history. For liberationists, such as Boff, the Church is rooted in historical process and only finds its meaning in relation to particular cultural realities. For the CDF on the other hand, under Ratzinger's direction, the Church transcends history and its universal qualities must be protected. The struggle therefore went much further than the issue of who controlled the Church. It was seen by Ratzinger as a challenge to the very meaning of Catholicism itself. Boff himself was forbidden to publish or to accept

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historian, who was himself investigated by the CDF for doctrinal 'errors'. He has now resigned from the priesthood, though remains a member of the Catholic Church.

speaking engagements for a year and subsequently subjected to a number of other restrictions. He has now left the Franciscan religious order and no longer practises as a priest. Collins notes that gradually the 'episcopates of Latin America have been transformed by the appointment of conservative bishops, and the grassroots communities driven to the edge of the Church'. Liberation theology has thus been effectively marginalised (Collins, 2002, 23-28).

Tissa Balasuriya is described by John Allen as an obscure Sri Lankan theologian, who became known throughout the world as a result of the actions taken against him by the CDF (Allen, 2004, 107). Balasuriya's offence was to take issue in his book, *Mary and Human Liberation*, with the traditional Catholic view that only the Church and the mediation of Jesus Christ offered the means to personal salvation. For Balasuriya, a Roman Catholic priest working in a largely Buddhist country, such a view implied that the vast majority of the people of Asia could not be saved. This represented a kind of ecclesiastical colonialism, which denied other religious traditions, such as Buddhism, the capacity to offer their own forms of salvation. Moreover, in Balasuriya's view, this was a distortion of Christ's teachings and did not represent the true spirit of Catholicism. For the CDF, Balasuriya's religious pluralism came dangerously close to the relativism so deplored by Ratzinger (see p6), which would put all religions and philosophies on the same footing. After a series of negotiations between the CDF and Balasuriya, which produced no theological resolution, Balasuriya was asked to sign a 'Profession of Faith' under threat of excommunication. As this Profession required Balasuriya to retract the views he had previously expressed, he refused to sign and was duly excommunicated.

Like Boff's engagement with the poor in Brazil, Balasuriya was also engaged in adapting Catholic teaching to a specific social and cultural context. This can be seen as a theological counterpart to the secular project of cultural democracy that had been advocated in Europe since the late 1960s. Both Boff and Balasuriya saw their work as a direct continuation of the modernising thrust of Vatican II. However, as indicated above, the Vatican II documents were sufficiently ambiguous to permit widely different interpretations. This was an issue confronted head on by Ratzinger in his later incarnation as Pope Benedict XVI in an address to the Roman Curia on December 22 2005.

Using the 40th anniversary of Vatican II as a pretext for reflecting on its significance, Benedict argued that the true meaning of the Council all depended 'on its proper hermeneutics'. He then went on to contrast 'a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture' with a 'hermeneutic of reform'. In what seems like a direct reference to the position of Küng, Boff and others, Benedict represents the 'hermeneutic of discontinuity' as a desire to disregard the actual compromises contained in the texts of Vatican II and to construct instead a projection of what the Council really intended. In this way, he goes on to argue, 'a vast margin was left open for the question of how this spirit [of the Council] should subsequently be defined and room was consequently made for every whim'. The 'hermeneutic of reform', by contrast, whilst acknowledging the necessity of innovation, at the same time affirms the principles of fidelity and continuity. By this he means that the Church, in its ongoing processes of development, should nevertheless remain faithful to its 'essential constitution' and not be seduced into error by passing intellectual fashions. Of course, what 'the essential constitution' of the Church turns out to be is itself dependent on its proper hermeneutics. However, according to Benedict, this is not to be determined by a mandate from the wider Catholic community or by the people the Church serves, because, just as the original Church Fathers had no mandate, the 'essential constitution of the Church comes from the Lord'. Benedict thus invokes divine authority, as vested in the Church hierarchy, to legitimise his own interpretive approach to the deliberations of Vatican II. There could be no clearer illustration of Allen's observation, mentioned earlier, that within the traditional Catholic framework, accountability flows upwards.

Conclusion

To those (including the author of this paper) who consider themselves to be, in Weber's phrase, 'religiously unmusical', these debates about Catholic doctrine may seem somewhat arcane. However, it is clear that they intersect with secular notions of social and cultural policy and that their outcomes affect the lives of millions of people around the world. They thus deserve attention outside the specialist realm of theological discourse. This paper has therefore tried to look at the Catholic Church through a cultural policy 'lens' and, at the same time, following Habermas, to take it seriously 'from within'.

At the most general level, it has been suggested that all Catholic policy is cultural policy and that its aim is the creation of Christian consciousness. However, disputes over the nature of Christian consciousness and over the means through which it can be attained have, of course, been central to the history of Christianity itself. The existence of 34,000 different Christian groupings in the world today is the legacy of these disputes. This paper has focused on the struggles within Catholicism, and, in particular, those concerning the meanings generated by Vatican II.

The conflicts over Vatican II can to some extent be characterised as a struggle between those who see the Church as a transcendent institution standing outside history and those who see it as rooted in historical process, only acquiring its proper meaning within particular cultural realities (Collins, 2002, 26-27). To paraphrase Pope Benedict XVI, it is all a question of hermeneutics - which, he might have added, can only be resolved through reference to theological or cultural authority. Within the Catholic Church, by virtue of the doctrine of Papal infallibility, this authority is invested in the Pope. However, he is assisted in these doctrinal responsibilities by a specific agency within the Roman Curia, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). The paper has considered the exercise of CDF authority with reference to two cases, those of Leonardo Boff and Tissa Balasuriya. These cases can be seen as symptomatic of the tensions between the traditional Catholicism of Europe, centred on Rome, and the popular Catholic movements within Latin America and Asia.

It is hoped that this brief attempt to see the Catholic Church as an agent of cultural policy will be followed by further investigations, both into other aspects of the Catholic Church and into the institutions of other denominations. The secularisation paradigm notwithstanding, religious institutions remain powerful sources of implicit and explicit cultural policy. Within a field whose *raison d'être* is a serious engagement with all those forces that shape our cultures, these institutions should clearly not be neglected.

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