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TRANSLATING ACROSS FAITH CULTURES: RADICAL HOSPITALITY

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I

Arguably one of the most interesting philosophical contributions to the contemporary debate on the role of religion and secularity is that made by Jürgen Habermas in his debates with figures like Derrida and Ratzinger (Pope Benedict). Interestingly, both Habermas and Derrida agree on the central importance of 'hospitality' in our modern world. For Derrida it is the best alternative to the friend-foe distinction, made intellectually respectable by figures like Leo Strauss, Francis Fukayama and Samuel Huntington, and perilously enacted by political figures on both sides of the 'axis of evil'.¹ Faced with the Huntington thesis that 'we only know who we are... when we know whom we are against', the ethic of hospitality replies that the stranger is precisely the one who reminds us – not as enemy but as host – that the self is never an autonomous identity but a guest graciously hostaged to its host.² Thus, at a practical level, the ethics

¹ Habermas, Jürgen & Derrida, Jacques *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, ed. Giovanna Borradori. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, pp. 55f. See also Vries, Hent de & Sullivan, L. E. *Political Theologies, Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*. New York: Fordham UP, 2006; this volume which soberly demonstrates how excessive the political take on religion has become. I am grateful to Lovisa Bergdahl for several of these references.

² Huntington, Samuel *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003, p. 21. I am grateful to Donatien Cicura for this reference, *Identity and Historicity In African Philosophy*, pp. 75: 'According to Huntington, the process of creating enemies is an inherent component of the process of being a self, of acquiring or appropriating an identity. Identity is made of allies (those who belong to my group) and enemies (those with whom I complete either individually or as a member of a group). In this line of thought, Huntington's idea of identity is analogous to the interpretation Francis Fukuyama gave of Plato's *thumos* in *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Penguin, 2002). Human beings identify themselves in thymotic terms, that is, they need self-esteem, recognition and approbation. To this extent, conflict with an enemy reinforces the above qualities in a group, and procures comfort and a sense of gratification'. As Huntington himself puts it: 'The need of individuals for self-esteem leads them to believe that their group is better than other groups. Their sense of self rises and falls... with the extent to which other people are excluded from their group', Huntington, S. *Who are We? The Challenge to America's*

of hospitality opposes the apocalyptic dualism of pure/impure invoked by Bush and Bin Laden after 9/11 and by several other God-crazed leaders since. Hospitality opposes such Gnostic divides between friend and enemy, where God is always my ally and the Stranger forever my adversary.

For his part, Habermas cites an ethic of hospitality to overcome the state of nature on the basis of mutual respect.³ While Derrida acknowledges the deeply 'messianic' structure of hospitality as an affirmation of the 'impossible', Habermas prefers to sublimate and liquefy the religious roots of hospitality into a discourse ethics of rational norms and universalisable laws. He holds that religion, defined as a 'comprehensive world-view which claims to structure a life in its entirety', must be translatable into the language of secular society where it can be adjudicated and negotiated. But Habermas does concede that political liberalism goes too far if it maintains that *only* secular reason counts in the public sphere. Religious identity, he admits, is something *other* than socio-political-normative existence.⁴ 'The liberal state', he clarifies, 'must not transform the requisite *institutional* separation of religion and politics into an undue *mental* and *psychological* burden for those of its citizens who follow a faith'.⁵ And here Habermas introduces what he calls the 'institutional translation proviso' which allows religious believers, who accept that only 'secular reasons count beyond the institutional threshold', to express their beliefs in a specifically confessional language if they find 'secular translations for them'.⁶ Non-translatable religious convictions (what Habermas terms 'private reasons') may thus be admitted to the public sphere for functional and discursive purposes. This admission aims to avoid an unbridgeable chasm between private (religious faith) and public (political reason) and is accompanied, I repeat, with the proviso that religious beliefs remain open to possibilities of further translation and assimilation. Once admitted, under the guise of confessional language, it remains the task of a democratic liberal society to encourage the 'religious conscious-

National Identity. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004, p. 25. For recent critiques of this adversarial model of politics and of religion, see Sen, Amartya *Identity and Violence*. New York: Norton, 2007; Bhaba, Homi *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994; Nussbaum, Martha *For Love of Country*. Boston: Beacon, 2002; and Kearney, R. chapters 1, 3 and 5, 'Strangers and Scapegoats,' 'Aliens and Others,' and 'On Terror,' in *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, pp. 23-140.

³ Habermas, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁴ Habermas 'Religion in the Public Sphere,' in *The European Journal of Philosophy*, 14: 4, 2006, p. 6.

⁵ Habermas, *ibid.*, p. 55.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

ness to become reflective and the secular consciousness to transcend its limitation in a mutual learning process'.⁷

Now while this seems like a fair carve-up of responsibilities, I think it is really more a one-way street. Close reading shows that for Habermas the goal of such 'mutual' learning is for religion to become more and more translatable into the rational normative pedagogy process; not for secular reason to 'transcend its limitations'. The pedagogy process is surely admirable, but it should, I submit, work in *both* directions at once. Secularity should be humble enough, in other words, to acknowledge the possibility of a certain untranslatable remainder, a *surplus* of meaning that surpasses the limits of normative rationality. For Habermas, it becomes clear, the ultimate goal of a democratic society is to integrate a plurality of faiths and cultures into an institutionalized discourse of deliberative decision-making and generally accessible language.⁸ And here he explicitly cites Judeo-Christianity as a suitable candidate for such progressive pedagogy since many of its religious legacies have already been translated into core principles of democratic enlightenment. 'For the normative self-understanding of modernity', writes Habermas, 'Christianity has functioned as more than just a precursor or a catalyst. Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy... has been the object of a continual critical reappropriation and reinterpretation. Up to this very day there is no alternative to it. And in light of current challenges of a postnational constellation, we must draw sustenance now, as in the past, from this substance. Everything else is idle postmodern talk'.⁹

But the difficulty here (quite apart from the neglect of the Islamic legacy) is, I think, this: how do we react to the radically new and surprising? How do we respect the stranger without trying to translate him/her into our terms? How do we respond to what Derrida and Benjamin call the 'messianic'? In short, it would seem that for Habermas the final aim

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹ Habermas 'A Conversation about God and the World,' in *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God and Modernity*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000, pp. 148-149. On the need for a complementary rational dialogue between secular and religious citizens, see also Habermas, J. & Ratzinger, J. *The Dialectics of Secularisation*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006, pp. 43-47.

of philosophical and political reason is to 'completely assimilate, translate, rework and sublimate all desirable religious content'.¹⁰ But how then can the divine remain a transcendent Other who comes to us? A visitor from outside our home (*unheimlich*), opening doors to novel events and inviting us to epiphanies 'never dreamt of in the philosophies' of Horatio or Habermas? How, in a word, is secular reason to account for that aspect of alterity which – precisely as foreign and sacred – always remains partially unassimilable and inaccessible to our normative or normalizing grasp? Can Others only become our guests as *Gästarbeiter* tolerated in so far as they surrender their irreducible uniqueness and difference? It is not sure that Habermas's public sphere can really welcome strange gods. He does not seem, in my view, to have a host language to respond to what Benjamin calls the 'untranslatable kernel' at the heart of every guest language; namely, that inimitable transcendence which puts us into question, shatters our self-security and opens us to the incoming Other.¹¹

I think another difficulty with Habermas's telos of 'universal rational translatability' is that of responding to religions other than the European tradition of Judeo-Christian humanism. What of the religions of the East, or closer to home the religion of Islam both inside and outside the borders of the Western 'postnational constellation'? Are only those believers to be accepted whose translation from faith into reason has 'already occurred... in the political public sphere itself'?¹² On this score, I think that Lovisa Bergdahl is right to say that Habermas has a limited and somewhat Euro-centric notion of religious pluralism, one that prefers familiar religious neighbours to unfamiliar strangers. The real task of translation, as Benjamin and Bergdahl note, is to acknowledge the *double* call of the stranger: translate me/do not translate me! For the real challenge is to respect 'the unfathomable, the mysterious and the poetic' superfluity of meanings while making as much sense as we can.¹³ In short, the biggest

¹⁰ Habermas, cited Lovisa Bergdahl, 'Lost in Translation: On the Untranslatable and its Ethical Implications for Religious Pluralism', unpublished paper read at the SCPR Conference at Gordon College, Massachusetts, 2008, pp. 3-4. I am very grateful to Lovisa Bergdahl for bringing these arguments and texts to my attention.

¹¹ See Benjamin, Walter 'The Task of the Translator,' in *Illuminations*. New York: Harcourt, 1973, and Derrida, J. *The Ear of the Other. Otobiography, Transference, Translation*. New York: Schocken Books, 1985.

¹² Habermas, 'Religion in the Public Sphere,' in *European Journal of Philosophy*, pp. 10-12; also in *Between Naturalism and Religion*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006; cited and commented on by Lovisa Bergdahl, 'Lost in Translation,' p. 3.

¹³ Benjamin, 'Task of Translator,' p. 70. On the limits of interreligious translatability as both a possibility and impossibility of symmetrical dialogue, see Cornille, Catherine *The*

temptation for the translator – in politics no less than in poetics – is to conserve the state presiding in one's host language without allowing it be transformed by the foreignness of the guest tongue.¹⁴ To yield to such temptation is to close the door on the stranger. It is to decline interlinguistic and interconfessional hospitality.

II

If religion is to mean anything in the third millennium it should, I suggest, mean more than a set of common norms. Such norms are necessary but not sufficient. In searching for a shared 'essence' or 'universal structure' of religion, it would be folly to neglect what is most strange and different in each faith. Interconfessional hospitality means respecting the otherness of each other as much as acknowledging the same in all. For without the former there would be no guest to be invited and no host to receive. In other words, it is not enough to distil the overlapping moral elements of the great religions into one syncretist brew. It is also crucial to acknowledge the very distinct paths that each wisdom tradition takes to reach that shared ethical vision. Without this appreciation of deep confessional and cultural *differences*, there can be no real sense of hospitality at work between religions. For, I repeat, without the recognition of alterity there can be no experience of the stranger and so no opening to what is not ourselves.

But, I hasten to add, alterity is not always on the side of the angels. If religious difference bears the potential for welcoming aliens, it also bears the opposite potential to enclose, exclude and expel. The double plot of hospitality and hostility does not dissolve as one reaches the roots of diversity; it thickens.

Let me try to put this in another way: If all religions are reduced to the same, there is no way of recognizing the equiprimordial potential for both love and hate inherent in each religion. That is why every religion needs to carry on a radical autocritique of its own violent tendencies if it is to rescue what is genuinely tolerant and emancipatory at its core. In

Im-Possibility of Religious Dialogue. See also Edith Stein in *The Problem of Empathy* where she talks about our phenomenological encounter with the other as a 'primordial experience of the non-primordial', that is, as a direct sense of the indirectness and elusiveness of the 'stranger' within every person we encounter, be they familiar or foreign. On this theme, see also Scheler, Max *The Nature of Sympathy* and Derrida's discussion of Husserl's "Fifth Cartesian Meditation in 'Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility,'" in *Questioning Ethics*, ed. R. Kearney & Mark Dooley. London: Routledge, 1999, pp. 66-83.

¹⁴ Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', pp. 75, 81.

short, any faith must be prepared to purge itself of the inherent temptation to violently impose its own version of the 'Absolute' on others. For only then is it capable of acknowledging the multiple receptions of the Word in faiths not its own. As Anthony Steinbock puts it, obedience to a Word that surpasses human language is the source of both 'vertical' and 'idolatrous' interpretations.¹⁵ Hence the deep ambivalence of such religious terms as 'surrender', 'submission' and 'sacrifice'. There is always a hermeneutic wager. And if one opts to follow the path of hospitality, of listening to others, one must be open to the possibility of discovering in the other faith something which is not – or not yet adequately – discovered in one's own. Believers in the Bible, for example, may well discover in Buddhism a sense of unconditional compassion for 'all sentient beings' still dormant or undeveloped in the Abrahamic religions. Similarly, Buddhists may discover in biblical religion a greater attention to the realisation of a Kingdom of justice in history or to the emancipatory power of divine desire.¹⁶

One might also mention here how Hindu sages like Vivekananda, Tagore and Ramakrishna confessed that their understanding of the Vedantic religion was amplified by their exposure to Abrahamic faiths and practices. (See the example of Gandhi.) And this gesture of interconfessional exchange between East and West was reciprocated, in turn, by pioneering figures like Abhishiktanada, Bede Griffiths and Sarah Grant, who believed their Christian convictions were greatly deepened (and at times critically revised) by exposure to the Hindu tradition of Advaita.¹⁷

III

The distillation of all religions into a set of common denominators has its purpose. An impressive example of this is the project of the Parliament of World Religions, convened in 1992, to develop a global ethic of peace based on the 'golden rule' that we should treat all others as ourselves. The project echoed similar attempts to establish principles of interfaith dialogue, such as the Snowmass Conference of 1986, the Scorboro Interfaith movement of the 1990s and more recently the 'A Common Word'

¹⁵ Steinbock, Anthony *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, pp. 211f.

¹⁶ Ricœur, Paul 'Entretien Hans Küng-Paul Ricœur: autour du *Manifeste pour une éthique planétaire* (Éd. du Cerf) de Hans Küng. *Les religions, la violence et la paix. Pour une éthique planétaire*, Arte, 5 April, 1996; published in *Sens*, n° 5, 1998, pp. 211-230.

¹⁷ See our Introduction to *Interreligious Imagination*, entitled 'Journey to the Heart', pp. 3-33.

document of 2007 signed by 138 prominent Muslims reaching out to non-Muslims to come together on the basis of certain basic shared religious principles. These mark crucial steps in the reconciliation of competing and often warring religions in our world. Granted. But there is, I suggest, a further step to be taken which supplements the move towards universal principles. And this second step involves a radical descent into the specificities of each spiritual tradition – a descent into difference, in addition to the ascent towards oneness: a plunge which seeks, at the root of each religion, a silent, speechless openness to a Word which surpasses us. The hermeneutic wager of radical hospitality is, therefore, that in the deep belonging to a faith conviction unique to one's confession, there may arise the humility to counter the violence of exclusivity with a generosity of attention. For if it is true that all religions involve a special acoustic of obedience to a Word beyond our finite language, this may lead to a modest ability to listen to Otherness as much as to a claim that our religion alone has an absolute take on the absolute. Hosting the radical stranger means that verticality leads to latitude.

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I do not for a moment wish to deny that most religions have, at one time or another, invoked credal partisanship to prove their superiority over others. *In hic signo. We have God on our side. There is no God in all the earth apart from ours.* These are not catchcries of the past. One need only mention the on-going struggles between Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir, between Buddhist Singhalese and Hindu Tamils in Sri Lanka, between Muslims and Jews in Jerusalem, between Christians and Muslims in Kosovo – not to mention countless examples of intra-religious wars in places like Northern Ireland, Iraq and the Balkans. These are sorry truths; and there is no point pretending that our secular post-Enlightenment world has exorcised such atavistic passions. There is, it would seem, a tendency in the 'inaugural energy' of almost every religion (with possible exceptions like Buddhism and Jainism) towards some form of exclusivism, exceptionalism or absolutism.¹⁸ It is one side of the Janus-face of religion. But there is, I am arguing, another side: the ability of each confession to delve into its own hidden foundation and discover there, in a moment of bold autocritique, a countervailing drive towards hospitality and healing.

¹⁸ Ricœur 'Entretien Hans Küng-Paul Ricœur'.

That such healing hospitality emerges from each religion's unique depths rather than from a surpassing of these depths, may seem paradoxical. It marks a retrieval of what is best against the very worst that belief can offer: difference cuts both ways. And this is what I might call an ana-theist recovery of a religion *before* religion – a recovery stemming from a foundation without secure foundation, namely, a foundation founded on something *other* than itself. It is this mystical *fond sans fond*, I suggest, which ultimately invites our wager that the other – the foreigner – has more to offer us than we can ever find in ourselves alone. In this sense ana-theism may be said to come before as well as after religion.

IV

And so we return, finally, to the hermeneutic maxim that the shortest route from self to self is through the other. Just as in linguistic translation we discover something in the 'guest' language that has never been said in our 'host' tongue, so too in inter-confessional translation we may discover in another faith something not dreamt of in our own. Though, as we have just seen, we have to dwell deeply in our own faith to be able to recognize such disclosure as *new*, as basically *other* than our own. The discovery of the wisdom of the stranger presupposes that the self knows itself as different from the stranger. Thus certain messages in one's own faith – say, in the case of a Christian, the wise detachment preached in the Sermon on the Mount – may find confirmation of this otherwise 'impossible' message in the teaching of a very different tradition, e.g., the Buddhist notions of compassion, detachment and *sunyata* (the emptying of self). In fact, to pursue this example further, I would say that the Biblical messages of *kenosis* and *Zimzum* may actually *need* exposure to foreign teachings like the Heart Sutra ('Emptiness is form and form is emptiness') in order to properly understand themselves.

The ethics of radical hospitality suggests that religions can best recover their own unique secrets through reciprocal exposure to others. (Just think again of the illuminating readings of the Gospels by Thich Nhat Hanh or of Eastern texts or by Thomas Merton.) Reciprocity is the key here. In faith as in love: you discover your true self in the self revealed to you by the beloved. Self-discovery presupposes the discovery of one's other (and vice versa). This other may be a million miles away or in our very midst, or both: a paradox Camus poignantly captures when he writes of those moments when 'under the familiar face of a woman,

we see as a stranger her we had loved months or years ago, and perhaps come even to desire what suddenly leaves us so alone.'¹⁹

This is where ana-theist hospitality returns to the appreciation of not just others' theism but of atheism *tout court*. For in the otherness of the atheist who does not know (unlike the anti-theist who knows everything), we encounter an estranging and dispossessive challenge which a) compels auto-critique, and b) reveals our innermost convictions in a movement of response and recovery. So, rather than too rapidly renouncing our respective convictions – in the name of one global religion or morality – might it not be wise to equally acknowledge what differentiates us? For in thus recognizing the existence of otherness in each other we may mutually attest to a *surplus of meaning* which exceeds all our different beliefs. A surplus that is Other than every other. More strange than every stranger. This something 'more' is what enables humans to do the impossible, to break with conditioned patterns of thinking and behavior. (Any AA member will attest to this.) This discovery of something 'different', 'ulterior', 'more', is stronger, I suggest, when it is made from *inside* each confession than when imposed from *outside* by some abstract God's-eye view. In short, an ethics of radical hospitality proposes the challenging route of embracing complexity, diversity and ambiguity rather than prematurely endorsing a spiritual Esperanto of global norms. It holds that the universal can only be reached through singular others – that is, others that are other to each other.

If this is so, it means that the answer to religious conflict requires more than a sociology of comparative religions based on some common 'essence'. One also needs to take the internal journey to the silent, unspoken root of each religion. For we might then be in a better position to practice a hospitality of translation between different root convictions deeper than a set of universal principles, though in no way counter to it. The road to an ultimate reality preceding and exceeding our belief systems passes through each of these beliefs.

To return, then, to the hospitality wager, we might say that when we translate – interconfessionally – we export ourselves into strangers and import strangers into ourselves. And in daring to translate across borders we encounter the limits of translatability. This invariably implies risk, as aptly expressed in Antoine Berman's phrase '*l'épreuve de l'étranger*'. The process of interreligious hospitality I have been tracing,

¹⁹ Camus, Albert *The Myth of Sisyphus*, in Marino, Gordon (ed.) *Basic Writings in Existentialism*. New York: The Modern Library, 2004, pp. 441f.

summons us on a pilgrimage to the depths of the inaugural moments of different religions rather than to some super-theological summit adjudicating rival claims from On High. For it is in the depths, as Paul Ricœur insists, that we 'touch on something unsaid... a mystical ground (*un fond mystique*) of what is most fundamental in each religion and which is not easily translatable into language but rather borders on a common profound silence'.²⁰ In other words, the best way to tackle the violent tendency within religious conviction is to go all the way down to the source which that religion does not master and which refuses to be rendered into dogmatic formulae or ideological manifestos. Each religion will have its own unique access to this ineffable genesis-point: the work of illumination for the Buddhist, the prayer of Thanksgiving for the Christian, the learned meditation on scriptural texts for the Muslim or Jew, the practice of yoga for the Hindu. In each case, the specific way acknowledges a source which it does not initiate or control, but which it heeds with modest vigilance. And it is in this hearkening to a source beyond and beneath oneself, a superfluity that one does not possess or manipulate, that we may find new resources for non-violent resistance and peace.

*

The most effective antidote to fundamentalist perversions, therefore, may well be to attend to the 'deep ground' which no religion can ever appropriate or contain. Every religion is capable of taking this action against itself, brushing against its own dogmatic grain, purging itself of its pathologies so as to reach the silent source which not only surpasses but disarms it.²¹ This implies a conversion of the heart whereby each religion finds at the ineffable root of its belief the means to reverse the violent impulses which inform religious claims to master absolute truth. It involves a moment of critical and therapeutic self-retrieval (what Ricœur calls '*un mouvement de retournement contre la composante de violence d'une conviction*').²² Precisely here we discover a complementary partnership between an inner descent to ineffable mystery and an outer ascent to enlightened awareness. And it is at this ana-theist chiasmus, I would argue, that theism and atheism can become, once again, salutary allies.²³

²⁰ Ricœur, 'Entretien'.

²¹ Ricœur, *ibid.*: 'non seulement ce message me dépasse mais aussi il me désarme'.

²² Ricœur, *ibid.*

²³ Ricœur, *ibid.*: 'Je crois que nous avons besoin de la parole de l'*Aufklärung*. Et la grande chance du christianisme c'est d'avoir été confronté dès le début, grâce à la Grèce et à tout l'héritage du rationalisme, à ce conflit de ce que j'ai appelé le conflit de la con-

The autocritique of religious power is, I conclude, doubly assisted in this way – from both within and without. And this bilateral gesture is crucial for the critical self-surpassing of religion. In encountering strange Gods we are invited to discover hidden aspects of our own God (often congealed in convention); while the recovery of such hidden depths opens us further to stranger Gods. But this two-way encounter does not imply sublation into some all-embracing infinite. We are reminded here again of the necessary limits of translation. For at the root of every translation between self and stranger, within or without, there remains that ‘untranslatable kernel’, that irreducible alterity that resists complete assimilation into a home whose doors could finally be closed. This fundamental alterity is what makes translation between religions at once necessary and always inadequate. There is always something *more* to be said and understood, some inexhaustible remainder never to be known. And it is this ‘more’ – which many religions call ‘God’ – that allows the stranger to remain (in part at least) always strange to us. This is why every authentic religious experience is a *re-legere*, a returning again and again from surplus to signification to surplus. An on-going odyssey of reading that makes translation endless.²⁴

All great ethical teachings share a set of precepts – do not kill, tell the truth, be just, look after the weak. What religions, anatheistically retrieved, can add to such common principles, as inscribed in world charters of human justice, is a deep mystical appreciation of something Other than our finite, human being: some Other we can welcome as a stranger if we can overcome our natural response of fear and trauma. For beyond the indispensable provisions of juridical, ethical and political peace, there are deep spiritual resources which can bring an extra dimension to the peace table – the surprise of the stranger, the gracious surplus of faith, hope and *caritas*.²⁵

viction et de la critique. C'est dans la mesure où nous menons ce combat de l'intérieur de la conviction, et avec l'appui de ceux du dehors, et du dehors de toute religion, que nous avons besoin de l'athée, pour nous comprendre, nous croyants, et pour comprendre les autres croyants qui sont dans d'autres croyances que notre croyance'.

²⁴ Benjamin, Walter 'The Task of the Translator,' in *Illuminations*. New York: Harcourt, 1973. Contrast this with Jürgen Habermas's view of translation between religions as a process of mutual public exchange and exposure in 'Religion in the Public Sphere'. The anatheist approach seeks a middle route between the positions of Habermas and Benjamin.

²⁵ It is, however, crucial to distinguish sacramental politics from religious politics as such. And here we might usefully invoke Charles Taylor's argument in *The Secular Age* (New York: Harvard University Press, 2007) that after the sixteenth century, no religion

V

So let me try to sum up. If peace is ever achieved on our planet it will not, I suspect, be brokered solely by global politicians and constitutional lawyers. It will also be a peace brought about by what Karl Jaspers called a 'loving combat' (*liebender Kampf*) between different faiths and non-faiths. Radical hospitality is not about a facile consensus which ignores the reality of conflicting convictions. It is an effort to retrieve a unique hospitality towards the Stranger at the very root of each belief. In thus exposing ourselves to the Gods of other traditions we take the risk of dying unto our own. And in such instants of kenotic hospitality, where we exchange our God with others – sometimes not-knowing for a moment which is true – we open ourselves to the gracious possibility of receiving our own God back again; but as a gift from the other this time, as a God of life beyond death. In losing our faith we may gain it back again. First faith ceding to second faith, in the name of the stranger. That is the wager of anatheism. And the risk. For in surrendering our own God to a stranger God, no God may come back again. Or the God who comes back may come back in ways that surprise us.

has a right to impose itself on the political sphere. One of the most positive benefits of secularity is to prevent any further recourse to political theocracy. Christendom, as the conflation of divinity with emperors and nations, is gone. And this salutary separation of church and state (which Taylor calls 'secularism 1') should be honored. Further discriminations are required, however, as this secular space opens up different interpretations. On one hand, we have an 'exclusive humanism' which denies any meaning or transcendence beyond the immanent human order (what Taylor calls 'secularism 2'). On the other hand, we have a tolerant pluralism which fosters a pluralist co-existence of different views and beliefs, religious and otherwise (what Taylor calls 'secularism 3'). The sacramental politics of Dorothy Day presupposed the first secularism, defied the second and embraced the third. But most importantly, in my view, it bore witness to the message of divine incarnation in the least of these, fostering the bodily well-being of fellow humans in opposition to the growing tendency towards 'ex-carnation' in our world of neo-capitalist simulation. Day's commitment to sacramental action was a powerful reminder that contemporary materialism neglects the glory of matter.