

Saeculum–Ecclesia–Caliphate: An Eternal Golden Braid¹

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My title contains three terms of art, and I'll begin by defining them.

First, *saeculum*. This is a Latin word that by the fifth century in the Latin-using West had come to mean the time that begins with creation and ends with the general resurrection.² The adjectival form, *saecularis*, 'secular' in English, therefore means anything, good, bad, or indifferent, belonging to that temporal period. I'll use the adjective to refer to the politics of any state whose laws, norms, and practices limit themselves to the *saeculum* by prescinding from any explicit reference beyond the this-worldly, and thus also from any reference to the god of Abraham.³ Such politics are secular, and such a state is a secular state. It's a form of political association defined by an absence; the only explicit presence in its authoritative sources and its making and enforcement of laws is reference to what belongs to the spatio-temporal manifold.

The second term is 'ecclesia' a Latin (and Greek) word that denotes the church understood as the community of those who've been called out from the world and incorporated into the god of Abraham by way of baptism in the triune name of Father, Son, and Spirit. The church is a form of association during the *saeculum*, but one not solely secular; its primary explicit love is for the god of Abraham. That god does not belong to the *saeculum*; rather, the world of time and creatures is itself a creature, brought into being out of nothing by that god – who is, according to Jewish, Christian, and Islamic understanding, the only god there is and, thus, the only bearer of a nonsecular name. The church, then, is explicitly and definitively a nonsecular association, even if one located in the *saeculum*, at least for the time being.⁴

The third term is 'caliphate.' This is an English word, derived from Arabic, and I'll take it to denote an Islamic polity ordered by sharia and administered by a single successor to Muhammad. It's an association of those who submit to (what they take to be) the revealed political will of the god of Abraham. That revealed will, together with its authoritative interpretation and development, is, for caliphates, determinative of politics. If the identification of Muhammad's god with the god of Abraham is accepted, and I'll argue below that Christians should entertain that identification with deep speculative seriousness, then a caliphate (there've been many), too, is explicitly and definitively a nonsecular association, although one that, unlike the church, recognizes no sovereignty other than its own.

Each of these three forms of association – the secular state, the church, the caliphate – is in its own way aspirationally universal; each can easily be divided into subkinds; and there are tensions among the political principles of each, often sufficiently deep that the polities formed by them cannot easily co-exist.

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Catholic political theology at least since Leo XIII, who died in 1903, and arguably for much longer than that, has understood the church to be a form of association in some respects subsidiary to and dependent on the state, whether or not that state is secular. This entails that the state has responsibilities and purposes other than those of the church; it entails, too, that the church has no ambition to exercise sovereignty in all matters that have to do with the common good. Some of those matters properly fall under state sovereignty, and others under the sovereignty of non-ecclesial associations and non-state associations – families, unions, guilds,

political parties, professional associations, sports teams, and the like. The state's essential purpose, on this Catholic view, is to nurture the common good, sometimes by what its own agents and functionaries do, and sometimes by supporting, or at least not obstructing, subsidiary associations, including the church, which themselves nurture the common good in particular ways.⁵

The church, however, is also, and indeed primarily, a trans-national association. This means that it lives now, as usually in the past, as an association locally subsidiary to states of many different kinds: late-capitalist democracies; expansionist empires-in-the-making of many stripes (post-Stalinist, post-Maoist, post-Fordist); small-scale dictatorships; Islamic monarchies; trans-national federations; and so on. Few of these forms of political order, perhaps none, take very seriously what the church would like them to think is their reason for being, which is the nurture of the common good; each of them in one way or another, directly and explicitly offends in its laws and actions against what from a Catholic viewpoint are non-negotiable elements of a properly-ordered commitment to the common good. This state of affairs makes tense the relation between the church and any particular state; it also provides a partial explanation of the ambivalence about the state, and especially the secular state, evident in the church's political theology and in its relations with particular states.⁶ The state, is always, for the church, a lamentable necessity, in much the same way as the monarchy was for ancient Israel; and the late-modern nation state provides occasions for lament of a peculiarly intense kind.

There are 185 or so states in the world at the moment, and evident among them are half-a-dozen or so deeply, and sometimes violently, incompatible understandings of how the common life of citizens ought be ordered. These facts provide Catholic political theology with some things to think about additional to tensions between what the church understands to be the

common good of citizens and the norms and laws of particular states. I have two such topics in mind. The first is the fact that there is a variety of understandings of political order and sovereignty evident among the world's states. Has Catholic political theology anything to say about this? Is this variety, by itself, a good, perhaps a contribution to the common good of humanity? Or is it something to be criticized and, if possible, abrogated? The second is about the possibility of ranking or ordering particular forms of political order as more or less supportive of the common good. Has Catholic political theology anything to say about that? Should, for instance, Catholic political theologians advocate constitutional democracy as a form of political order more conducive to the common good than, say, sharia-ordered oligarchy? Answers, however speculative, to these two questions bear on one another. If, for example, it is possible to rank forms of political order, does this mean that less-good polities ought be abolished in favor of better ones? If recalcitrant political variety is itself a political good, then the possibility of ranking may not yield the conclusion that the less-good should be abrogated or erased in favor of the better.

I don't intend to answer these questions. Instead, I'll engage them by way of two broadly Augustinian axioms, and by doing that present a trajectory of Catholic political theology about them. I intend what I write as stimulus and provocation rather than as conclusion – that, after all, is the main purpose of speculative theology, which is the genre to which this essay belongs.

The first broadly Augustinian axiom is that there are political goods – goods that serve the common good, that is – proper to the active and continued presence in the world of states that embody and advocate rival forms of political order. Variety on this matter is itself a good. The second such axiom is that among the principal indicators of service to the common good on the part of a particular state's laws, policies, and norms is that they explicitly honor and respond to

the god of Abraham. Versions of these axioms are to be found explicitly in Augustine; and versions of them are also to be found in the long Augustinian and more broadly Catholic tradition. What might they mean for our questions?

Let's take the first axiom first. It claims that global political pluralism is a good because it conduces to the common good; and that its reduction to a political monism in which there is at play in the world a single understanding of political order and, therefore, a single form of the state, loses that good. Suppose, for example, that the world were to contain among its states only constitutional democracies; and, to make the thought-experiment clearer yet, that there were just one of these – that the world's democracies have coalesced into one, the United States of the World. Or, suppose that the only state in the world were a global caliphate, administered by an accredited successor of Muhammad and ordered by Sharia – that ISIS's current ambitions for a local caliphate stretching from Pakistan to Morocco have successfully become global. What political good would be lost by these monisms, or by any other political monism you care to imagine?

This isn't a question about the degree to which these, or any other, particular understandings of the *polis* serve the common good. It's a question, rather, about how active political differences embodying rival understandings of the common good in fact serve the common good. It's also a question about why the imperial drive toward establishing, worldwide, a single political form and a single political understanding – the global export of state socialism or late-capitalist democracy, for example – loses something of deep importance to the (political) common good.

Catholic political theology has something to say to these questions. States, particular local political forms, are always, in a devastated world like the one produced by the fall from grace that ejected us from Eden, characterized by a passion for domination. They always want, though not always with the same degree of intensity and certainly not always with the same likelihood of success, to extend their power until they have no rivals. This is among their defining characteristics, and the passion in question (Augustine calls it *libido dominandi*) becomes more evident and more active as the power of a particular state grows. On this understanding, every particular state is aspirationally a universal empire, and acts on this aspiration to the degree that local variables make such action possible. This characteristic of states is formally and functionally like the passion for sin evident in all human creatures. Just as we, individually, inevitably seek the lack that is sin's goal, so states seek the emptiness that political power without rivals provides. Both gestures are solipsistic: they want to extinguish everything other than themselves, and that is exactly the characteristic feature of the sin of Satan, and thereby of all sin. Pride and envy, among the sins, show this fundamental feature of sin with particular clarity; and *libido dominandi* is pride and envy intertwined in the sphere of politics.⁷

That's the first move. What follows from it at once is a characterization of the way in which the continued existence of genuine political rivalries serves the common (political) good. It does so by restraining and constraining the desire for political power whose end is the extinction of all political difference, all political rivalry. All states are aspirationally universal; were any to achieve its goal in this respect, by Europeanizing the earth, as the British Empire once wanted to, or by Americanizing the earth, as the American Empire now does, or by Islamizing the earth, as some versions of the caliphate now may, it would thereby subsume

whatever political and common goods it had sought and served into the service of itself. It would have become a LORD – a *dominus* – to itself, and would therefore be, politically speaking, strictly autonomous, a law to itself. That is, it would no longer be a political entity, no longer capable of serving the common good, but capable only of self-contemplation. States, on this view, require the recalcitrance of rivals in much the same way that human persons require the recalcitrance of others. The degree to which states erase this recalcitrance is the degree, in a fallen world, to which they cease to be cities and become places in which political lament is impossible because political ambition has been realized.⁸

Augustine's instance of this point is a principled objection to Rome's extinction of its major rival, which was, in the republican period, the Carthaginian state; he objects to this not because he values the political norms of Carthage or excoriates those of republican Rome; he objects to it because Carthage's extinction makes Rome effectively politically unrivalled and thus a global arena for the exercise of self-serving political violence.⁹ Similarly, in some important respects, the United States seeks now the erasure of its principal political rivals, which include the nascent caliphate. *Carthago delenda est* was the refrain repeated in session after session of the Roman senate by Cato the Elder as the Punic Wars approached their end. We have our equivalents: Democrats and Republicans in the United States are almost equally excitable and almost equally repetitive about the importance of destroying our political rivals, especially ISIS because we especially don't like it; Catholic political theology has the tools for a potent critique of this position.

The critique amounts to this. Any state, whether secular in the sense earlier given or not, should understand itself as subject to, indeed in part defined by, an ambition for universality that involves the erasure of its political rivals, and should understand this ambition as a failure of

politics. It should enshrine these understandings in its laws and norms, and should encourage its functionaries and representatives to remember them frequently. It should remind its citizens of them, too, and will most effectively do so by instituting public liturgies of lament for the state's inevitable failure to constrain its ambitions in this direction, and by finding all possible means to remind its citizens of the goods present in polities external to itself, however deep the failings of those polities may also be. The burden of proof for the desirability of extra-territorial adventures aimed at erasure of rivals should be made very heavy, almost too heavy to bear. That is because the damage to which all states are subject is deep: however heavy the burden of proof is made and however frequent the public liturgies of lament for the state's failures to restrain itself, the state will try to find a way to do what states do, which is attempt to erase its rivals and universalize itself. Catholic political theology can at most offer a reminder and a warning about these things; but it's a warning worth attending to.

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For Catholics who are also citizens of the United States, one aspect of the reminder and the warning would have to do with ISIS. It, among the polities at the moment active in the world and (from some perspectives) threatening to the United States, is at the moment the principal object of actions aimed at its extinction by the US and its allies. It is also the principal object of political rhetoric that advocates its erasure. Representatives and functionaries of ISIS reciprocate some of this, but to a lesser degree; they are more concerned with the establishment of a caliphate unsullied by US and European economic norms, military power, and social habits, than with the erasure of rivals; their violent excursions into rival territory – New York, London, Madrid, Paris,

Istanbul, and so on – aren't intended to erase those rivals, but, rather, to persuade them that they can't maintain colonial dominance without cost, and ought to abandon the attempt.¹⁰

Considerable violence has been done by both sides in this conflict, with more, and worse, on the horizon; but the violence is unequally distributed. In body-count, which ought always be the first (though not the last or the only) measure in matters of violent conflict among states, the United States and its allies are the worse offenders. But I'm less concerned with assessing the degree and kind of violence at play in this conflict than with thinking about the aspiration to erase political rivals; and even in that matter, largely with the Catholic-theological view that there are political goods proper to the active presence in the world of rival understandings of how states ought be governed and the common life of their citizens ordered. From that angle, the recommendation is clear. Catholic Christians in the United States should certainly lament all violence done in the conflict between the United States and ISIS's version of the caliphate; but they should also resist, publicly and with vigor, advocacy of erasure and policies aimed at that end. That's the yield of the first Augustinian axiom. It commends a stance to the church in the United States, one that, so far as I can tell, is being advocated by almost no one.

The second Augustinian axiom is that among the indicators of service to the common good on the part of a particular state is that its laws, policies, and norms explicitly honor and respond to the god of Abraham. Nonsecular polities, that's to say, incarnate and represent a political good that secular ones lack. Why should this be true? For the broadly Augustinian tradition it is true because political order is most fundamentally a matter of love. There are properly political loves, and all states necessarily have them: every body of law and every set of norms shows its loves. The scope and directedness of political loves is evident, more or less, in laws, norms, and policies – in, that is, the public documents and effective practices of states. A

state whose political loves are explicit in naming the god of Abraham as the one for whose glory and in whose service it nurtures the common good, and is also explicit in articulating the ways in which its particular laws respond to the god of Abraham's desire for human flourishing, has, from a Christian point of view, a political advantage that secular states, and others whose laws don't explicitly respond to the god of Abraham's name, lack. It is the advantage of knowing the god of Abraham as the source and goal of the common good, and of knowing something, at least, of the particular history of that god with the peoples of the earth, and of what that history means, politically. This isn't to say that there are no political goods evident in secular states; neither is it to say that nonsecular states have nothing to learn about the common good from secular ones; neither is to say that nonsecular states should always be ranked above secular ones in a putative hierarchy of political goodness. But it is to say that nonsecular states have a first-blush advantage over secular ones because they incarnate and represent a political good that secular states lack. And this advantage provides a provisional and partial answer to the second of the questions I began with, which was about the possibility of ranking particular forms of political order as more or less supportive of the common good.

The United States is a secular state in the sense given to that term at the beginning of these remarks. It makes a constitutional virtue of prescinding from explicit response to the god of Abraham. The god present in its founding documents, while arguably the god of Abraham, is largely offstage, and is used, even when onstage, as a distant guarantor of what reason can show. The laws and norms of the nation aren't arrived at by way of engagement with the revealed will of that god, and much less by way of exegesis of and commentary upon texts taken to reveal that god's political will. The caliphate, whether the one represented by ISIS or some other, is, by contrast, exactly a nonsecular state. Its laws, norms, and policies are explicit in their response to

the god of Abraham, and the particulars of those laws are frequently and typically articulated with the particular history of that god with the Muslim people, and, by extension, with the Jewish and Christian peoples. On this matter, then, Catholic Christians in the United States should judge that the caliphate has a first-blush political advantage over secular states such as the United States.

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But even this modest suggestion might be wrong. Suppose, for example, that the god Muslims worship, the one whom the architects of the caliphate and the regents and successors of Muhammad advert to in their making and administration of laws, isn't the god of Abraham, but, rather, some other. Some Catholic theologians argue this line, as do many other Christians in the United States, Protestant and Orthodox.¹¹ This is a large question, and one on which, for Catholic Christians, there is no determinative magisterial teaching. There is, however, some that suggests the possibility, even the likelihood, of an identification of the god of Islam with the god of Abraham;¹² and there is much in the texts and traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that shows deep affinity in identifying and thinking about Abraham's god. It's also true that there's much disagreement among Christians and Muslims about what that god is like and wants of us, politically and otherwise; but such disagreement, while important, is entirely compatible with the view that Catholic Christians and Muslims are together thinking about and responding to the god of Abraham. This is because giving a different sense to an expression, even a significantly different one, doesn't by itself force the conclusion that what's being referred to is also, and thereby, different. We call the same planetary body the morning star and the evening star, thus

using two expressions with different sense that refer to the same thing. Discerning difference in sense (in, perhaps, the list of predicates that Muslims and Christians use of the god of Abraham) requires, by itself, no conclusions about whether the same god is being referred to.¹³ My own speculative view, not without magisterial support, is that Catholic Christians should adopt as a working hypothesis the view that Muslims and Christians are responding to and thinking about the same god. If that position is adopted, then this objection to the thesis that the caliphate has a significant first-blush advantage as a political order over secular states stands to one side.

But, even if it's true that ISIS's version of the caliphate orders its laws in explicit response to the god of Abraham, might it not yet be the case that those laws and norms and policies, in their particularity, are deeply and horrifyingly mistaken about the common good. Might it not yet be the case that the caliphate's laws deform rather than serve the common good? Might it not yet be the case that these deformations render null the first-blush political advantage of explicit service of and response to the god of Abraham?

It might. But the case that it is remains unmade. It's certainly the case that the caliphate, in its nascent form as ISIS, sponsors in its laws and practices many things that, from a Catholic Christian viewpoint, oppose rather than serve the common good. There's execution and bodily mutilation of criminals; there's suicide bombing; there's the refusal of education to women and the practice of sexual violence upon them; there's extra-territorial assassination; there's wanton destruction of historical monuments; and there's deep and systematic violence practised upon those who aren't Muslim, including Jews and Christians. These are all terrible things. Every drop of blood shed in these ways and every act of violence performed in these ways should be mourned by Christians. But, the United States and other secular states are in the same case. We too, and I write now as an American as well as a Catholic, execute some among our criminals;

we imprison a vastly higher proportion of our population than does ISIS; we abort our babies at a much higher rate; we probably have a higher civilian murder rate than in any ISIS-administered territory; we, like them, practice extra-territorial assassination, and on a considerably larger scale, and, by now, we celebrate, in public, the fact of it much as they do (the public and official celebrations surrounding the assassination of Osama bin Laden in 2011 marked an important transition on this matter); we are a direct military threat to their continued existence while they are not to ours; we are, as I write, actively engaged in the slaughter of people in their territories; and, we are, as a nation, founded upon genocide and fattened by slavery, a double legacy with the violent results of which we still live. Are we better than they, politically speaking? Are they worse than us? It's not easy to say.¹⁴ It's certainly much less easy to say than our President and the two now competing to replace him think. All states do terrible things. The caliphate does. Secular states do. The United States does. That the caliphate does can't serve, then, as an easy way to overcome the first-blush political advantage they have over us, which is that their laws explicitly respond to the god of Abraham while ours do not.

Catholic political theology affirms that renunciation by states of the ambition to erase political rivals is a properly political good. It's the good of the continued presence of political rivalry as a check upon the otherwise unrestrained tendency of states to seek, solipsistically, to make their preferred form of political order be the only one available. Catholic political theology also affirms that explicit responsiveness to the god of Abraham in the making and administration of laws is a political good, which is at least to say that states that do it are to be preferred, at first blush, to those that don't. Catholic Christians in the United States ought take these affirmations seriously, as might, I hope, other Christians. Were we to do so, the form and content of public

witness by Christians in the United States to our present difficulties would be deeply, and encouragingly, different from what it is.

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A final speculative point. Some forms of Islamic polity are especially damaging at the moment to Christians and Jews, so much so that there is a real possibility that large areas of the Middle East in which there have for long been communities of Christians and Jews might before long be emptied of them.¹⁵ This is something Christians should lament and protest; it is also something that does, or should, create a bond between Jews and Christians. But it isn't something that should bring into being any special animus on the part of Christians toward Muslims in general or advocates of the re-establishment of a caliphate in particular. Nor, even, should it yield the conclusion that an Islamic caliphate should be avoided by Christians. The church's presence in the world is geographically uneven, now as it has always been; regions once substantially Christian now aren't, and regions once largely empty of Christians are now replete with them. This fluidity is an ordinary part of life in the devastation, and nostalgia for a particular geographic distribution of the visible church's presence is not a Christian virtue. It may be that Christians in some Islamic polities will find martyrdom at a higher rate, at the moment, than is the case for Christians elsewhere. What should be said about that is what should always be said about martyrdoms: they are dreadful; they are artifacts of the fall; they are to be lamented; and, at the same time, they are to be celebrated as witness to the power and presence of the triune LORD in the world, participatory in and dimly reflective of the death of Jesus on the cross.

NOTES

¹ This is a revised and expanded version of a talk given under the same title at a conference on tradition, secularization, and fundamentalism at Fordham University on 24 June 2016. The conference was sponsored by Fordham University's Orthodox Christian Studies Center, and I'm grateful to Aristotle Papanikalaou and George Demacopoulos for the invitation, and for the lively discussion the talk received on the day. I'm grateful, too, for comments on an early draft of the piece to Lauren Winner, Carole Baker, Philip Porter, and Brendan Case. More distantly, I've learned a good deal about political theology from Chuck Mathewes, Eric Gregory, James Wetzel, Stanley Hauerwas, and John Milbank. Most of them would, I'm fairly sure, cordially disagree with the line here taken.

² This, for example, is Augustine's preferred usage. For discussion, see my "Secularity and the Saeculum," in James Wetzel (ed), *Augustine's City of God: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 33-54. See also: Robert A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (2d. ed.. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); idem, *Christianity and the Secular* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006). There are, of course, many and lively debates about the proper use of 'secular' and cognates not here accounted for – the definition offered here is stipulative.

³ By 'the god of Abraham', I mean the triune LORD who calls Abraham, makes beloved the people of Israel, becomes incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth, and inspires the church. This is a Christian mode of identification. It assumes, as a dogmatic commitment, that the god the people of Israel are covenanted to is the same as the god the church worships. It leaves open the

question of whether the god who spoke to Muhammad is also the same. More on this below, and, for a different perspective, see Rémi Brague, *Du dieu des chrétiens* (Paris, Flammarion, 2009).

⁴ In using this phrase have in mind W. H. Auden's *For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio*, for a recent edition of which, with an excellent introductory study of the poem, see Alan Jacobs, ed., *For the Time Being* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

⁵ This trajectory of thought is among the principal facets of the idea of subsidiarity, which has become a central commitment of Catholic social doctrine in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and can be clearly seen at work in papal teachings from Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891) to Francis I's *Laudato Si'* (2015). It is especially clear in Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate* (2009) because it is applied there with great clarity to particular forms of association and particular matters of public policy.

⁶ On this ambivalence (perhaps a stronger word is necessary) see Russell Hittinger, "Toward an Adequate Anthropology: Social Aspects of *Imago Dei* in Catholic Theology," in Thomas Albert Howard, ed., *Imago Dei: Human Dignity in Ecumenical Perspective* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 39-78. Among Hittinger's concerns in this essay is the ways in which corporate rather than individual entities may be taken to image the LORD. He is clear that the modern state has a strong tendency to usurp all such imaging for itself, and thus to reduce other forms of association to nothing. Ideal-typically, the modern state understands the entities that count in the world to be only itself and individuals, with the existence of the latter predicated exclusively on the existence of the former. For a structurally similar line of thought, though with quite different antecedents, see Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, transl. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); idem, *The Time That Remains: A*

Commentary on the Letter to the Romans, transl. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); idem, *The Church and the Kingdom*, transl. Leland de la Durantaye (London & Calcutta: Seagull, 2012).

⁷ I borrow here, gratefully, from Jean-Luc Marion. See, notably, *Prolégomènes à la charité* (2d. ed. Paris: La Différence, 1991), 12-42; also, *Au lieu de soi: l'approche de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008), passim.

⁸ On the importance of lament to the proper constitution and ordering of the state, see Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Rose is, in my judgment, among the more important political theorists of the twentieth century (she died in 1995).

⁹ See Augustine, *De civitate dei*, 1.30.

¹⁰ ISIS is, beyond reasonable argument, an aspirational caliphate motivated principally by opposition to the violent presence of the United States and its allies in various parts of the Middle East. On this, in the instance of ISIS's presence in Gaza, see, helpfully, Sarah Helm, "Isis in Gaza," *New York Review of Books* 63/1 (2016), 18-20. On the longer history behind ISIS see William McCants, *The Isis Apocalypse* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015). See also Jessica Stern & J. M. Berger, *Isis: The State of Terror* (New York: Ecco, 2015); Joby Warwick, *Black Flags: The Rise of Isis* (New York: Doubleday, 2015). The theorists of al-Quaeda, including Osama bin Laden (see the speeches collected in Bruce Lawrence, ed, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden* [New York: Verso, 2006]), as well as those of ISIS, such as Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and Haji Bakr, and those belonging to other Islamic groups, differ in the

emphasis they place on freeing the Islamic world from western influence, on the one hand, and destroying their (perceived) opponents, on the other. But the weight generally lies on the former.

¹¹ See, again, Brague, *Du dieu des chrétiens*.

¹² See, among many instances, the following: "... the plan of salvation also embraces those who acknowledge the creator (*qui creatorem agnoscunt*), and among these the Muslims are first; they profess to hold the faith of Abraham (*fidem Abrahae se tenere profitentes*) and along with us they worship one merciful God (*nobiscum Deum adorant unicum*) ..." (*Lumen Gentium*, from no.16). See also: "They [Muslims] worship one God (*unicum Deum adorant*), living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to humanity and to whose decrees, even the hidden ones, they seek to submit themselves whole-heartedly (*toto animo se submitteres student*), just as Abraham, to whom the Islamic faith readily relates itself (*ad quem fides islamica libenter sese refert*), submitted to God." (*Nostra Aetate*, from no.3).

¹³ It's Catholic dogma that the god the people of Israel worship is the triune LORD. This provides a splendid illustration of the sense-reference distinction. Jews and Christians do not agree about how the LORD should be identified and described, and some of those disagreements reach the level of prima facie contradiction (e.g., the LORD is incarnate / the LORD cannot be incarnate). But these differences do not require the conclusion that the god the Jews identify and worship is distinct from the one Christians identify and worship. So, perhaps, *mutatis mutandis*, for the god of Jesus Christ and the god of Muhammad.

¹⁴ The indices of flourishing just mentioned are partly drawn from and have a deep affinity with those developed by Amartya Sen, in, e.g., *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University

Press, 1999), and Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011). There are some significant theoretical problems with the Sen/Nussbaum approach to capability; but its fundamental intuitions, that there are conditions necessary for humans to flourish of a general and widely-agreed kind, and that these are largely amenable to empirical measurement (per capita/per annum rates of death by violence, of imprisonment, of death from hunger and thirst and treatable sickness, for instance, can relatively easily be so measured), appear to me both right and important. Assessing states by applying these measures does not yield the conclusion that any particular form of political order is demonstrably better than any other.

¹⁵ On this, see Jonathan Sacks' 2013 Erasmus Lecture, published in *First Things* (January 2014) as "On Creative Minorities." See also his *Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence* (New York: Schocken, 2015).