PASCAL IN THE POST-CHRISTIAN WORLD

Ann Hartle

The contemporary "post-Christian" condition of the West is the scene of confrontation between Western civilization and militant Islam; between the West, which no longer sees itself as a universal civilization, and Islam, which sees itself as a universal religion; between secular Western society and a religion that makes no distinction between Church and State. How did we reach this point at which the West seems helpless and defenseless against the force that wants to destroy us? The seventeenth-century philosopher Blaise Pascal is uniquely suited to help us understand why things are the way they are, for us, in our own time.

Western civilization, we are told, has entered a post-Enlightenment, postmodern, and post-Christian era. The horrors of the twentieth century—totalitarianism, the Holocaust, two world wars—have destroyed every illusion about the ability of autonomous human reason to transform the world into the heavenly city of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophers. A post-Enlightenment era is a postmodern era because the origins of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment are to be found in the beginnings of modernity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Descartes is regarded as the founder of modern philosophy because he established the independence of human reason from faith and from the criterion of truth that had grounded philosophy from the time of Plato through the Middle Ages. Modern philosophy turned from the contemplation of reality to the Cartesian "subject," the "I think," and freed philosophy from its status as handmaiden to theology. By this time, the Reformation had destroyed the unity of Christendom, undermining the public authority of the Catholic Church and making faith a purely private matter. Descartes's radical break with the philosophical and theological tradition lead inevitably to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, which only brought modernity to its logical conclusion.

The unifying principle and defining

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trait of the Enlightenment is the idea of "the emancipation of man through man." The Enlightenment was an "emancipation project" intended to create a "new civilization" grounded in the autonomy of human reason and the centrality of man. First and foremost, then, the Enlightenment means emancipation from tradition, especially religious tradition, and the elimination of the transcendence of the divine in favor of an "entirely immanent [human] standpoint."[1] But the Enlightenment inevitably gave way to the realization that reason, freed from its dependence on truth, is only an instrument of domination. Reason is exposed as a mask for gaining power over others. It was Nietzsche who opened the way to the postmodern and post-Enlightenment era by unmasking the true face of human nature and its dominant instinct, the will to power, which had been concealed only by Enlightenment claims of the emancipation of man through reason.[2]

How does Pascal fit into this history of modern thought? Pascal was fourteen years old when Descartes's *Discourse on Method* was published in 1637. Like Descartes, Pascal was a great mathematician and scientist. At sixteen, he wrote an essay on conic sections, and later he worked out the foundation for the infinitesimal calculus, the integral calculus, and the calculus of probabilities, all in advance of the accomplishments of Newton and Leibniz. His study of atmospheric pressure resulted in what is known as Pascal's Law. He also built the first computer, a calculating machine, which is still on display in a Paris museum. You may remember a programming language that was named for him. So, he was very much a participant in the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century.

Pascal, like Descartes, believed that the medieval Scholastic approach to nature was gravely flawed.[3] In this respect, he accepted the Cartesian break with the tradition of scientific inquiry dating back to Aristotle and carried through the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. However, unlike Descartes, Pascal sees very clearly the limits of modern science and of the kind of knowledge that can be arrived at through the scientific method. For modern scientific reason, we do not know anything through a direct encounter between the mind and the world. Experience is not what is given to us by the world; it is structured by the categories of the mind and the rules of the scientific method. The center of philosophy shifts, then, from the contemplation of Being, including God, to the "I think" that is the first principle of Descartes's philosophy. In other words, modern reason is the reversal of the mind's relationship to the world and the transformation of the meaning of truth. Truth is made, not discovered, by the mind.

Pascal does break with the ancient and medieval approach to natural science. However, he does not accept this modern notion of experience and truth as dependent on the mind. But neither does he return to the standpoint of medieval theology in order to understand the human and the divine. In other words, Pascal does something new and unique: he rejects Aristotle, but he does not embrace modern reason; he breaks with medieval theology, but he does not separate philosophy from faith.

St. Thomas Aquinas and many other medieval theologians claim to prove the existence of God from nature, following Aristotle's metaphysics and natural philosophy (e.g., God as the Unmoved Mover, First Efficient Cause, etc.). Pascal does not try to prove the existence of God from nature. Indeed, he says, "it is a remarkable fact that no canonical [biblical] author has ever used nature to prove God" (463 [243]).[4] And he cautions the believer not to approach those

who doubt with proofs for the existence of God from nature (781 [242]). The scientist can study nature and can arrive at knowledge of nature, but God is a hidden God, and nature does not proclaim him unequivocally (429 [229]).

The God who can be proved from nature is the God of the philosophers, not the God of faith. He is the God of Descartes and Voltaire, the God of the Deists, who need God only to set the world in motion but then want him to disappear from the world, especially from the life of human beings. For Pascal, Deism is "almost as remote from the Christian religion as atheism" (449 [556]). In the outcry of his heart on the night that was to be a turning point in his thought, Pascal exclaims: "'God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob,' not of philosophers and scholars" (913). For Pascal, "we know God only through Jesus Christ" (189 [547]). Christ *is* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Scientific knowledge can grasp neither God nor man. Modern science can understand nature, but for Pascal, man does not "fit" in nature. Man is mysterious in a way that nature is not, especially on account of original sin. Pascal says of original sin: "But for this mystery, the most incomprehensible of all, we remain incomprehensible to ourselves. The knot of our condition was twisted and turned in that abyss" (131 [434]). Original sin is the source of our wretchedness but it is also the occasion for the greatest manifestation of God's love. "Wretchedness induces despair. Pride induces presumption. The Incarnation shows man the greatness of his wretchedness through the greatness of the remedy required" (352 [526]). Man cannot know himself through science, but only through Christ. "Not only do we only know God through Jesus Christ, but we only know ourselves through Jesus Christ" (417 [548]). "Let us learn our true nature from the uncreated and incarnate truth" (131 [434]). How do we know ourselves through Jesus Christ?

As Leszek Kołakowski puts it, for Pascal, "the whole of Christian philosophical, theological, and moral teaching is ultimately about a single question: how is the reality of our worldly experience related to the primordial, creative, infinite divine reality which in the realm of finite things is both manifested and concealed?"[5] In his essay on Pascal's *Pensees*, T. S. Eliot gives us a description of Pascal's way of answering that question. Pascal looks at the world, especially the moral world within: "he finds its character inexplicable by any non-religious theory: among religions he finds Christianity, and Catholic Christianity, to account most satisfactorily" for what he sees; "and thus, by . . . 'powerful and concurrent' reasons, he finds himself inexorably committed to the dogma of the Incarnation."[6] Pascal begins from the reality of experience and asks how we can make sense of this experience. The only thing that can make sense of the whole of human experience is the Incarnation, uncreated and incarnate truth.

Pascal says that "the greatest of Christian virtues [is] love of truth" (979 [945]). He finds that truth, uncreated and incarnate truth, in tradition: tradition, he says, is "the true source of truth" (865 [832]). And he finds that tradition carried down to us in the Church: "the overriding principle of tradition [is] the faith of the ancient Church" (285 [867]). "The history of the Church should properly be called the history of truth" (776 [858]).

What is the meaning of tradition if it is "the true source of truth"? As Josef Pieper argues: "there is in the last analysis only *one* traditional good that it is absolutely necessary to preserve unchanged, namely the gift that is received and handed on in the *sacred* tradition."[7] It is important, then,

to distinguish sacred tradition, which must be preserved unchanged, from traditions that can and sometimes should be changed. Sacred tradition for Pieper is not simply a customary way of doing things that is useful for the practices of everyday life. Rather, sacred tradition "concerns the center of the world and the core of [our] own existence."[8] Sacred tradition has this great power and authority because (as Yves Congar explains) tradition begins by a divine transmission.[9] Tradition is not a human invention or creation. It has a divine origin and the truth that it carries is uncreated truth.[10] The same *Logos* who is the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, and through whom all things were created, is the Redeemer who was always believed in, from Adam on: "The Messiah has always been believed in.... Thus with the fulfillment of all the prophecies the Messiah has been proved forever" (282 [616]). That is what gives tradition its ultimate authority. Tradition communicates and hands down not simply a set of beliefs but a reality, the entirety of the Christian mystery.[11] By finding truth in sacred tradition, Pascal shifts the center of philosophy from Descartes's "I think," the human Subject, to Christ, who is the uncreated and incarnate Truth communicated to us in tradition.

The distinction between sacred tradition and traditions, between the core of tradition and its historical accretions, makes change—even very considerable change—possible. As Pieper argues: "Certainly, a 'cultivation of tradition' that attaches itself to a historically accidental external image of what has been handed down becomes a positive hindrance to a real transmission of what is truly worth conserving, which perhaps can occur only under changed historical forms."[12] This distinction between the core of tradition and its nonessential historical expressions allows us better to assess Pascal's place in the history of the relationship between reason and faith. Pascal, as we have seen, breaks decisively with the tradition of premodern science grounded in Aristotle's understanding of nature. But does he break with the tradition of medieval theology or does he preserve the core of that tradition in some new form?

Medieval theology defines itself, in the terms of Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, as "faith seeking understanding." Theology begins from faith: its first principles are the articles of faith. It then uses philosophy as its handmaiden better to understand what is already believed and held through faith. Pascal, on the other hand, begins from experience, a philosophical beginning, not from faith. By looking unflinchingly at human life, he concludes that the only thing that can account for the human condition is Christianity. In a sense, then, he reverses the medieval formula from "faith seeking understanding" to "understanding seeking faith." Pascal's audience is neither those who have found God and serve him nor those who live without seeking or finding him, but those who seek him and have not found him. Such people, he says, are unhappy, but *reasonable* (160 [257]) and (405 [421]).

Pascal's arguments are intended, not to prove the existence of God in the mode of the scientist, but rather to break down barriers to belief by showing that "what is proposed to our faith is not impossible." And that is precisely the role of reason with respect to faith that Aquinas defends.[13] Pascal, then, carries forward the core of the tradition while eliminating the tradition's reliance on Aristotle.

In this dependence on tradition as the source of truth, Pascal is at odds with Descartes, whose entire project of refounding philosophy is based on the rejection of the authority of tradition. It also puts him at odds with the Protestant Reformation,

which rejects tradition as a source of truth, relying solely on Scripture for its knowledge of Revelation. Finally, it clearly puts him at odds with the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment modes of rationality, which see reason as separated from any truth that has a divine source and see reason's fundamental purpose as the creation or construction of reality by the mind itself.[14] For Pascal, "reason can only function properly when informed by the intuitions of the heart, nurtured by traditions of belief and practice."[15]

Just as Pascal breaks with the Aristotelian philosophical tradition in science, so he breaks with the Aristotelian tradition in political philosophy. In fact, in some respects, he sounds very much like Machiavelli and Hobbes, the founders of modern political philosophy. Aristotle claims that political activity is for the sake of the "common good." That expression is used very loosely now, but for Aristotle it has a precise meaning: it is not simply a good that we as individuals all want, but a good that can be attained only in common, for which we depend upon each other. The common good is justice, and the different political regimes can be judged as just or unjust according to whether rule is exercised for the common good or the good of the rulers. For Aristotle, human beings are such that they find their fulfillment and happiness in political life. Man, then, is *by his nature* intended to live in a political community.

Pascal, on the contrary, says: "All men naturally hate each other" (210 [451]). *By their nature*, men do not find happiness and fulfillment in living together and depending on each other. The political friendship that, for Aristotle, is the underlying bond among the members of a political community is an illusion. For Pascal, "each self is the enemy of all the others and would like to tyrannize them" (597 [455]). The common good is nothing more than a false image of charity (210 [451]).

Pascal's view of politics is indebted to St. Augustine. "St. Augustine had taught that all government on earth, all power of man over man is a consequence of original sin; without the injustice of the original sin, which had destroyed the natural peace and equality among men, there would be no need for . . . the counter-injustice of human power on earth."[16] Like Machiavelli and Hobbes, Pascal recognizes the necessity and legitimacy of the rule of men over each other, "but he is much more profoundly aware that this legitimacy is evil."[17]

What, then, is the purpose of political life? Modern political philosophy rejects the idea of the common good. Politics cannot secure the ultimate good for man. It cannot secure fulfillment and happiness. At best, it can keep men from killing each other. Here Pascal echoes Hobbes: with respect to politics, peace is the sovereign good (81 [299]) and "the greatest of evils is civil war" (94 [313]).

Pascal sounds just as "realistic" as Machiavelli when he discusses the relationship between power and justice. "Pascal cannot find the tiniest particle of justice in human institutions. . . . What poses as justice in human societies is but the mask of brute power."[18] As Pascal puts it: "Right without might is helpless, might without right is tyrannical. . . . We must therefore combine right and might, and to that end make right into might or might into right. . . . Being thus unable to make right into might, we have made might into right" (103 [298]).

To this point, then, Pascal seems perfectly in accord not only with modern political philosophy but also with a postmodern and post-Enlightenment view of politics. The Enlightenment promised the emancipation of man through man himself. It promised liberty, equality, and fraternity. The post-

Enlightenment Nietzschean view is that the Enlightenment claim that man can set himself free is really only a mask for domination. When it is unmasked, reason shows itself to be only the instrument by which the strong oppress the weak.

The essential difference between Pascal and other modern and Enlightenment philosophers is that, for Pascal, the State is not the ultimate authority over human communities or individuals. He insists on the independent and public authority of the Church. In order to ensure peace and stability, Hobbes subordinates religion to politics, the Church to the State. The ruler becomes the head of the Church, as in England, so that there is no possibility of conflict. The Protestant Reformation lent itself to the creation of such national churches. The Church, under these conditions, has no autonomy. Most Enlightenment philosophers did recognize the need for religion as a support for the social bond, but Christianity was to be replaced by a new natural religion that would be purely instrumental, serving the interests of the political realm. So, for example, Rousseau's civil religion has no doctrines except toleration and sociability. It is designed to support the "general will," not to create a community of worship of a transcendent God. For the Enlightenment, religious sentiment and belief must remain hidden in one's heart. With Kant, Christianity becomes a private matter never to appear in public life. Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, with its elimination of every trace of traditional Christianity, offers no possibility of real community.

Pascal shows us that a civil religion cannot be a real bond among men because the sacred cannot be a human invention and the natural divisions among men cannot be overcome by a mere idea of the brotherhood of man. If sacred tradition were merely a human invention, it could have no authority and no power to unite, to bind men to each other, beyond any other human convention. To bind men, it must be higher than any human convention or agreement.

The civil religion cannot replace the tradition that permeates everyday life with the sacred. Sacred tradition is not an idea or a system of ideas, but a fundamental orientation of the whole person, his beliefs, sensibilities, and sympathies. "Real unity among human beings has its roots in nothing else but the common possession of [sacred] tradition."[19] Tradition implies community, not just the union of those now living but those who have lived in the past and those who will live in the future. It binds the generations of men to each other in the transmission of truth.

Further, tradition, because it is shared and handed down, is public truth. What modernity and the Enlightenment effected, however, is the privatization of religion. This is our situation today. Each individual is free to practice the religion of his choice, or no religion at all. Increasingly, even the expression of religious belief in public is suppressed. Religion has become nothing more than private opinion, and the state has become increasingly secular. But Christianity cannot live in the privacy of the heart: it is the religion of publicness because it is the religion of truth.[20] This truth is accessible to all men, regardless of education and social class. That is why its publicness is essential to a strong social bond.

Eamon Duffy, in *The Stripping of the Altars*, shows in historical detail how the traditional religion of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries actually did form a very strong social bond. The sacraments of the Church brought about the interweaving of the sacred and the social that is the lived reality of sacred tradition. Duffy insists on "the social homogeneity of late medieval religion."[21] As

he demonstrates: "Rich and poor, simple and sophisticate could kneel side by side, using the same prayers and sharing the same hopes." In spite of the differences of sophistication about the faith, "they did not have a different religion."[22] The social bond of medieval Europe was not found in an idea but in worship, in the Eucharist. In that act of communion, the most brilliant theologian is at one with the least educated laborer. Natural and conventional differences are not erased but they become insignificant in the presence of the reality of the Incarnation. While the Aristotelian "common good" is the "false image of charity," the Church is the true bond of charity, but it is not a natural bond, and it must not be confused with the political union that is merely an enforced peace.

Pascal draws a sharp contrast between the political and religious spheres: while the political is necessarily the realm of injustice and force, the Church is the realm where "genuine justice exists without violence" (85 [878]). He holds this view in spite of the fact that he himself suffered greatly from conflict within the Church. Pascal was embroiled in the controversy between the Jansenists and the Jesuits. In fact, his highly polemical *Provincial Letters* is unsparing in its criticisms of some of the policies of the Church of his day. Nevertheless, he holds fast to the essential core of the meaning of the Church. The Church is the social bond because it is the locus of tradition, the tradition that is, as he says, the source of truth.

Pascal, then, is unique among modern political philosophers. He accepts the separation of Church and State, allowing the political realm its own legitimacy and authority, and he recognizes the necessary tension between Church and State. Indeed, the Church came into existence and continues to exist against the opposition of human power. Jesus Christ came to make all men into one holy Church: "He has come to bring into this Church heathen and Jews. . . . All men range themselves in opposition to this . . . above all the kings of the earth unite to abolish this religion at birth. . . . All the great ones on earth unite, scholars, sages, kings. They write, they condemn, they slay. And, despite opposition from all these quarters, these simple, powerless people resist all these powers and bring to their knees even the kings, scholars, sages, and sweep idolatry from the face of the earth" (433 [783]). Most tellingly, Jesus Christ wanted to be put to death at the hands of the legitimate power of Rome: "Jesus did not want to be killed without the forms of [human] justice, for it is much more ignominious to die at the hands of justice than in some unjust insurrection" (940 [790]).

So, while Pascal acknowledges the legitimacy of the political realm, he holds that the Church must be superior to the State in matters of morality and free to exercise its spiritual authority. As Rémi Brague puts it: "To say that what is Caesar's must be returned to him is not therefore to untie him from any obligation to justify himself before a jurisdiction that transcends him, to allow him to unfold according to a purely Machiavellian logic. . . . It is up to the spiritual power to remind the temporal of the absolute character of the ethical demand."[23]

In contrast to Christianity, Islam rejects the separation of Church and State. Because Islam is a Revealed Law, and a law that governs every aspect of human life, there can be no separation of religion and politics. Islam is both a "religion and political regime." In Islam, "the idea according to which God could leave a region of liberty to man, wait for man's choice, and respect this choice, is thus removed" (119). Muslim scholars note the refusal of Christianity to unite the religious and the political, and they attribute this to

the absence of both "holy war" and a politics that could be directly derived from Scripture (157). The New Testament entails "the radical exclusion of any Christian *shariah*" (159). The distinction between religion and politics is based on Christ's teaching: give to Caesar what is Caesar's. "The purely religious nature of what Christianity claimed to bring had as a consequence a refusal to charge the details of the rules governing inter-human relationships with the weight of the Absolute" (158).

Thomas Aquinas, in his discussion of the New Law of the Gospel, explains the area of freedom that is left to man: in addition to works of faith, "there are other works which are not necessarily in accordance with or contrary to faith working through love. Works of this kind are not enjoined or forbidden in the New Law . . . but they are left by the Lawgiver, Christ, to the individual, according to his responsibility for others. And so each individual is free as regards works of this kind to decide what is best for him to do or avoid doing; and each man in authority is free to make arrangements for his subjects in such matters as to what they should do or avoid doing. And so even in this respect the law of the Gospel is called the *law of freedom*."[24]

Recall Pascal's distinction between the political, which is the realm of force, and the Church, which exists without violence. Because it cannot separate the spheres of Church and State, Islam cannot separate violence from religion. In a remarkable fragment that does not mention Islam by name but seems clearly directed to it, Pascal says: "The way of God, who disposes all things with gentleness, is to instill religion into our minds with reasoned arguments and into our hearts with grace, but attempting to instill it into our hearts and minds with force and threats is to instill not religion but terror. *Terror rather than religion*" (172 [185]). "Christ did not subdue the nations by force of arms. . . . That is what makes me love him" (593 [760]).

In contrast to Christianity, Islam rejects the harmony of faith and reason. "The most direct and thorough [discussion] of religion and philosophy that has survived from medieval Islam" is Averroes's treatise *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*.[25] Averroes writes: "We, the Muslim community, hold that this divine religion of ours is true," and that for every Muslim the method of affirming this truth is the method that his temperament and nature require. "For the natures of men are on different levels with respect to their paths to assent" (49). He then identifies three modes of belief and three classes of believers: the demonstrative class consists of the philosophers, the dialectical class of the Islamic lawyers, and the rhetorical class consists of the masses. Of these three classes, the method of affirming belief of the philosophical class is "superior" (54). The demonstrations of philosophy are "the most perfect kind of reasoning and the most perfect kind of study" (45). Scripture is divided into apparent and inner meanings, and "the inner meaning is clear only to the [philosophical] class" (59). The inner meaning ought not to be learned by anyone who is not a man of learning in philosophy and who is incapable of understanding it (52). Therefore, the inner meaning should not be communicated to the dialectical and rhetorical classes. "As for the man who expresses these allegories to unqualified persons, he is an unbeliever on account of his summoning people to unbelief" (66).

Now, the study in which the philosophers are engaged is primarily the study of Plato and Aristotle. This means that the Islamic philosophers are concerned with the god of the philosophers, not the God of the Koran. As the Islamic scholar George Hourani

emphasizes, what Averroes establishes is that the Koran allows for a scientific, teleological study of the world, which is part of philosophy (21). Hourani asks: If philosophers can arrive at the truth directly, through philosophy, is Scripture, the Koran, unnecessary to them? His answer is, "Yes, [it is unnecessary and] this is a matter on which the Islamic philosophers were necessarily discreet" (26).

What this means is that there is no community of truth between the philosophers and the dialectical and rhetorical classes. In fact, in his *Commentary on Plato's Republic*, which was not for popular consumption, Averroes equates the allegories in Scripture with the "noble lie" of the *Republic*, that is, with untruths that are held to be necessary to preserve the community (33). The Muslim community is held together by the Koran, the revealed Law of God. If the philosopher wants to be part of that community, he must submit to the Law. But *intellectually* his only community is his fellow philosophers. Further, then, the dialectical and rhetorical classes are without any intellectual understanding of the Law for, because it is from God, it cannot be questioned, cannot be submitted to examination by reason. It is simply the Will of God.

In his classic work on the nature of religious experience, *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto reflects on the way in which Islam respects the holiness of God. In Islam,

> from its commencement onwards, the rational and specifically moral aspect of the idea of God was unable to acquire the firm and clear impress that it won, e.g., in Christianity or Judaism. In Allah the numinous [the otherness, mysteriousness, irrational] is absolutely preponderant over everything else. . . . The numinous in Allah . . . outweighs what is rational in him. And this will account for what is commonly called the 'fanatical' character of this religion. Strongly excited feeling of the numen, that runs to frenzy, untempered by the more rational elements of religious experience—that is everywhere the very essence of fanaticism.[26]

In 2006, Pope Benedict XVI returned to the university at Regensburg, where he had taught in the Faculty of Theology, to deliver an address on the harmony of faith and reason. In the course of that address, he mentioned a discussion that had taken place in 1391 between the Byzantine emperor and a Persian scholar. The pope quoted the emperor's statement concerning the relationship between religion and violence: "Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached." The emperor was affirming the harmony of faith and reason: God does not command us to do what our reason cannot accept. He proceeded to explain that violence in spreading the faith is "unreasonable" and is therefore contrary to God's nature. Reaction to news of the pope's address was marked by riots in Europe and the murder of an Italian nun in Africa.[27]

In contrast to Christianity, Islam does not accept the union of God and man. We often hear it said that Islam accepts the Old and New Testaments and recognizes the figures of both, such as Adam, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. "But in the Koran . . . these personages are cut off from the economy of salvation that gives them meaning for Jews and Christians. Jesus is presented without his death on the cross and resurrection," without the Incarnation, which for Christians means everything (Brague, 59).

Pascal says that "God made himself man

in order to unite himself with us" (381 [286]). The Incarnation overcomes the absolute separation between divine and human: God enters time and leads a temporal life, knowing suffering and death. "Christians even go so far as to say that God reveals himself nowhere else more divine than in this abasement" (Brague, 162). And nowhere is this abasement more manifest than in his death on the Cross. "The whole of Christianity is contained in the sign of the cross."[28] For Pascal, it is the Cross that shows the universality of Jesus: "Thus it is for Jesus to be universal. . . . Jesus offered that [sacrifice] of the Cross for all" (221 [774]). In the end, it is not miracles and prophecies that make people believe: "What makes them believe is the Cross" (842 [588]).

For Islam, as Rudolf Otto explained, the holiness of God is experienced in his absolute otherness, his separation from man. However, for Christianity, "the Cross becomes in an absolute sense" not simply the highest rational interpretation of the holy but the mirror of Holiness as such. "What makes Christ . . . the summary and climax of the course of antecedent religious evolution is pre-eminently this—that in His life, suffering, and death is repeated in classic and absolute form that most mystical of all the problems of the Old Covenant, the problem of *the guiltless suffering of the righteous*." Thus, "in applying to the Cross of Christ the category 'holy,' Christian religious feeling has given birth to a religious intuition profounder and more vital than any to be found in the whole history of religion."[29] The Cross shows the inseparability of the holiness of God from the goodness of God. In his discussion of "Sacrificial Love and the Sinlessness of Christ," Reinhold Niebuhr says of the Cross: "It is impossible to symbolize the divine goodness in history in any other way than by complete powerlessness, or rather by a consistent refusal to use power in the rivalries of history."[30]

We return, then, to the rivalries of history in our own day: the confrontation between Western civilization and militant Islam, between the West, which no longer sees itself as a universal civilization, and Islam, which sees itself as a universal religion, between secular Western society and a religion that makes no distinction between Church and State.

Christianity's harmonization of faith and reason makes its universality possible. As we see in Pascal, reason can break down barriers to faith, showing that what is proposed for our belief is not impossible or irrational, so that faith can be freely embraced. At the same time, the independence of religion from politics makes it possible to transmit Christianity to other cultures (Brague, 161). Because it is a universal sacred tradition, it is open to differences of culture. The Church is already a multicultural society and, arguably, the only possible multicultural society. Islam, on the other hand, understands itself as the universal religion but does not permit either the separation of politics and religion or the harmonization of faith and reason, and that is why it must be spread by the sword and impose itself by force. Pascal says that our sacred tradition is universal because Jesus died for all men. The Cross, then, stands as the contradiction to both Islam's use of force and Nietzsche's will to power.

Western civilization is no longer grounded in its origin, the harmony of faith and reason. Both the supremacy of the secular state and the suppression of the public truth of faith have cut us off from our inheritance of sacred tradition. Pascal helps us to understand how we have reached this place where, from the moral point of view, we have so little left to defend, and therefore so little to offer our

adversary in the confrontation with Islam. Perhaps he would see a kind of unimpeachable testimony to the truth of our Christian tradition in the strange fact that it is now only militant Islam that persists in referring to the West as "the land of the Cross." ✝

1 Vincenzo Ferrone, *The Enlightenment: History of an Idea*, trans. Elisabetta Tarantino (Princeton University Press, 2015), 14.
2 Ibid., 26.
3 John C. McCarthy, "Pascal on Certainty and Utility," in *Modern Enlightenment and the Rule of Reason*, ed. John C. McCarthy (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 98.
4 References to the *Pensées* are to Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Louis Lafuma, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin Books, 1966), and to *Pensées et opuscules*, ed. Léon Brunschvicg, rev. ed. (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1946). The first number within parentheses refers to the Lafuma edition; the second number (in square brackets) refers to the Brunschvicg edition.
5 Leszek Kołakowski, *God Owes Us Nothing: A Brief Remark on Pascal's Religion and on the Spirit of Jansenism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 182.
6 T. S. Eliot, "The *Pensées* of Pascal," in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1932), 360.
7 Josef Pieper, *Tradition: Concept and Claim*, trans. E. Christian Kopff (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2008), 35.
8 Ibid., 33.
9 Yves Congar, OP, *The Meaning of Tradition*, trans. A. N. Woodrow (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 10.
10 Ibid., 69.
11 Ibid., 13, 104, 135.
12 Pieper, *Tradition*, 43.
13 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II.2, Q. 1, Art. 5. See James R. Peters, *The Logic of the Heart: Augustine, Pascal, and the Rationality of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 190. Pascal's Wager is meant not to prove the existence of God but to break down barriers to faith.
14 Peters, *The Logic of the Heart*, 18.
15 Ibid., 16.
16 Erich Auerbach, "On the Political Theory of Pascal," in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature: Six Essays* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), 127.
17 Ibid., 127.
18 Paul Benichou, *Man and Ethics: Studies in French Classicism* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 135.
19 Pieper, *Tradition*, 68.
20 Francis Slade, "Was Ist Aufklärung? Notes on Maritain, Rorty, and Bloom with Thanks but No Apologies to Immanuel Kant," in *The Common Things: Essays on Thomism and Education*, ed. Daniel McInerny (American Maritain Association, 1999), 52.
21 Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1992), 265.
22 Ibid., 298.
23 Rémi Brague, *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization*, trans. Samuel Lester (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), 162. Further citations to this book will be given parenthetically in the text.
24 Aquinas, "Treatise on Law," *Summa Theologica*, Q. 108, Art, 1.
25 Averroes, *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, trans. George F. Hourani (London: Luzac & Co., 1961). Hourani's introduction, p. 6. Further citations of this book will be given parenthetically in the text.
26 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 90–91.
27 Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University," lecture given at the University of Regensburg, September 12, 2006.
28 Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition*, 74.
29 Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, 172–73.
30 Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 2, *Human Destiny* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 72.