



Assumption
University

Digital Commons @ Assumption University

Political Science Department Faculty Works

Political Science Department

2016

Political Action and the Primacy of the Good: The Theological- Political Reflection of Pierre Manent

Daniel J. Mahoney

Assumption College, dmahoney@assumption.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.assumption.edu/political-science-faculty>



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mahoney, Daniel J. "Political Action and the Primacy of the Good: The Theological-Political Reflection of Pierre Manent." *City Journal* (January 29, 2016). <https://www.city-journal.org/html/political-action-and-primacy-good-14167.html>.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Political Science Department at Digital Commons @ Assumption University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Political Science Department Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Assumption University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@assumption.edu.

Political Action and the Primacy of the Good

The theological-political reflection of Pierre Manent

Daniel J. Mahoney

January 29, 2016

Contemporary Europe is wracked by a crisis of self-understanding. For a generation or more, the European political class has placed its hopes in the “construction” of a Europe increasingly estranged from the nations that compose it—and from the moral and spiritual contents that gave rise to the European adventure in the first place. Indeed, today’s “Europe” defines itself in opposition to the old nations and the old religion that gave it life for the last millennium. Losing their political moorings and shorn of real spiritual substance, Europeans look weak in the face of Islam’s self-assertion.

What Europeans need is the kind of humane, principled, scrupulous, and penetrating analysis that is all too rare today in an intellectual world tempted by the abdication of political and moral responsibility. The French political philosopher Pierre Manent is particularly well equipped to address Europe’s crisis of self-confidence in a manner faithful to her best traditions. I will begin with a discussion of his intellectual contribution as a whole and then turn to a detailed analysis of his response to the depoliticization and de-Christianization of contemporary France and Europe. I will also highlight his firm but measured response to the Islamic challenge and his striking assessment of the strengths and limits of secularism.

Pierre Manent, born in Toulouse, France in 1949, is perhaps the most thoughtful political philosopher writing today, in no small part because he appreciates the essential and enduring links between politics, philosophy, and religion. His work avoids the theoretical abstractions preferred by a social science that strives to be even more “scientific” than the phenomena it studies allow. In the venerable tradition of Aristotle and Alexis de Tocqueville, Manent aims to see “not differently but further than the

parties.” He writes with clarity and grace in accord with an approach that aims to speak to the concerns of responsible citizens and statesmen. Raised in a Communist family in postwar France, he converted to Catholicism before heading off to the prestigious *École normale supérieure* on the eve of May 1968. No partisan of the anarchism and revolutionary politics that informed that immense social eruption, Manent turned to the sober prudence of social thinker Raymond Aron, who became his inspiration and teacher. As Aron’s assistant at the Collège de France for a decade, Manent played a crucial role in the founding of the distinguished center-right quarterly *Commentaire*, a journal of Aronian inspiration. As Manent observes in his autobiographical *Seeing Things Politically*, Aron showed him that there is something *to know* in politics, that political reflection requires both information and the cultivation of high prudence (a virtue jettisoned by those who put their blind faith in revolutionary transformation). Allergic to what Tocqueville called “literary politics,” Aron embodied Aristotelian *phronesis* and spoke “with authority and competence and eloquence about public affairs.”

The author of *The Opium of the Intellectuals* also helped inoculate Manent against any form of the totalitarian temptation. Aron saw through the combination of preening moralism and political irresponsibility that was Sartrean “commitment” and the empty gestures at the heart of the “revolutionary psychodrama” of 1968. Aron provided a protective framework for Manent to pursue intellectual work centered around political reflection, philosophical inquiry, and the pursuit of religious truth. From Aron, too, he learned that philosophy should reject the “idolatry of History” and do justice instead to human action in all its amplitude. If Manent later turned to Aristotle and the German-American political philosopher Leo Strauss, he remained permanently indebted to Aron’s prudentialism, which he understood in an essentially Aristotelian way. From Strauss, he learned to think deeply about the vicissitudes of the modern project and to resist the regnant historicist dogma that thought is always a reflection of its historical context. Strauss was thus a second humane and liberating presence in Manent’s intellectual itinerary. But Manent has never been attracted to that wing of Straussianism that turns the “philosopher” into a human god, immune to the quarrels of the forum, and that arbitrarily and radically separates the intellectual from the moral virtues. For Manent, political philosophy must speak to the whole human being and bow before what transcends the human will. Manent offers a preeminent example of the bon usage of Leo Strauss.

Manent’s engagement with Tocqueville is a particularly rich component of his work. In *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy* (1982), he more or less endorsed Tocqueville’s

analysis of the democratic world, wrestling with the relationship between “democratic man” and man tout court, and taking seriously, indeed, Tocqueville’s concerns that democracy, however just, might gradually erode the higher manifestations of the human soul. In later writings, Manent acknowledges Tocqueville’s spiritual acuity and intellectual prescience but concludes that the great French writer exaggerated the extent of the democratic transformation of the human soul.

In subsequent works like *An Intellectual History of Liberalism* (1987) and his great work of political philosophy, *The City of Man* (1994), Manent traces the historical and intellectual trajectory of modern liberalism and modern philosophy. He is particularly sensitive to the “modern difference,” even as he affirms the enduring character of the human condition. This sensitivity to the tension between what does not change across time and the remarkable transformations that characterize modernity lies at the heart of Manent’s *Metamorphoses of the City* (2010), which focuses on the Greek city, particularly Athens, as the birthplace of politics. The polis, Manent argues, was the engine that propelled Western political development. He investigates the West’s variety of political forms—[city, empire, Church, and nation](#)—and contemplates and deplores late modernity’s flight from politics. Rejecting the nation—the political form of democratic self-government par excellence—Western elites dream of an “unmediated” human existence where humanitarian “values” are somehow sufficient to build a political community. They imagine two realities: the individual with his or her rights, and the “world,” where “humanity” fully comes to sight. Without knowing it, the elites are disciples of August Comte, adherents of a “religion of humanity” that seeks to replace politics with bureaucratic administration and philosophy and religion with a smug affirmation of human self-sufficiency.

In his latest book, *Situation de la France* (to appear in English this year as *Beyond Radical Secularism: How France and the Christian West Should Confront the Islamic Challenge*), Manent brings together his considerable theoretical and practical concerns with rare spiritual depth. He reveals the failure of Europe’s humanitarian civil religion and pleads for a restoration of prudent judgment, rooted in a searching exploration of the theological-political problem. He reveals just where the depoliticization and de-Christianization of Europe has led the continent and his native France. Refusing to despair, and not content with literary politics and facile criticism, Manent lays out a practical philosophy that shows Europe and the West that deliberation and action remain as available to us as they were to Pericles and St. Paul.

This focus on practical philosophy—on deliberation and action—has become increasingly central to Manent’s work. He rejects a social science rooted in the fact-value distinction as estranged from the deliberations and choices that confront acting man. Contemporary discourses about “values” are remarkably vacuous, he maintains, since they ignore the structure of human action and render human choice arbitrary or groundless—in Max Weber’s famous formulation, men choose their gods, who may turn out to be demons. Behind soft democratic relativism, with its endless evocation of arbitrary “values,” lies an inexorable “war of the gods,” a neo-Nietzschean metaphysic that destroys the moral integrity of liberal democracy. Manent’s thought points in a more truthful and salutary direction.

Manent’s most complete and satisfying discussion of the practical philosophy of action can be found in a remarkable address on “Knowledge and Politics,” which he delivered at the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* upon his retirement from that institution in June 2014. (The text appears as an “Appendix” to *Seeing Things Politically*.) Manent roots deliberation and action in the cardinal virtues of courage, moderation, justice, and prudence. It is in good action—what Aristotle calls “the rational activity of the soul”—that the human being’s specific operation or task (*ergon*) is achieved. Modern philosophy, in contrast, essentially transforms human beings into “spectators,” who view themselves and their actions as wholly determined by external forces or by that inexorable necessity known as History—as in the “Historical Process” or in “being on the right side of history.”

This understanding of causality has done away with the human element. As Manent shows in *The City of Man*, modern political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke replaced action with a deterministic “flight from evil”—there is not only no *summum bonum*, or highest good, but also the full range of goods is replaced by evils (i.e., hunger, pain, and even death) to be avoided. Modern liberalism is, at heart, a philosophy of comfortable self-preservation that estranges men and women from the moral contents of life. True philosophy—Aristotelian philosophy, for Manent—recognizes that human things depend upon practical deliberation that “actualizes” the goods of life. And political life, political forms and regimes, depends upon an active “putting of reasons and actions in common.” The common good is thus never an *a priori* Platonic Idea. For Manent, there can be no definitive or final separation of political and moral philosophy. As Aristotle famously puts it in chapter three of the third book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, political action first and foremost involves “deliberation about means”—the means of actualizing the fixed ends of the cardinal virtues, the goodness of which is not the product of deliberation. That is, the cardinal virtues are not “values”

that we valorize through arbitrary or “demonic” choice à la Weber. They are non-reducible goods—ends, which acting man attempts to actualize in the city and the soul. Manent makes this point emphatically in “Knowledge and Politics”: “Whenever human beings act, the search for means proceeds by determining the appropriate proportions of courage, temperance or moderation, justice and prudence.”

As an observant student of human things, Manent acknowledges “the diversity of human things, their infinite variety.” Yet compared with the “strength and stability” of the basic structure of deliberation and action, these differences turn out to be paltry. Human beings, philosophers, social scientists, citizens—all can speak confidently of a common human nature, of an enduring human condition, precisely because the “pattern of practical virtues” allows us to recognize a courageous, prudent, or just person “in the human being born in the most distant and apparently different latitude.”

I have noted the tendency of modern philosophy and social science to view human beings as “spectators,” incapable of true deliberation and action. Our neuroscientists work to explain consciousness away (and take great pride in that dehumanizing task), and our social scientists too often proceed as if human action did not depend on thinking and acting man. There is no place left for the freely deliberating and acting human being in the chain of social-science causality. Philosophies of history presuppose that grand historical forces “have made the choice for us.” “Things were decided by no one,” even as the “spectator,” in the form of the philosopher and social scientist, incoherently exempts himself from the chain of causality.

Manent insists that there is no evidence for this view, at once reductive and historicist, that excludes human beings from the order of human things. In truth, action is coextensive with the human condition. In a powerfully lapidary formulation, Manent observes that “action stood before Pericles, it stood before Paul of Tarsus, and it still stands before us.” The stance of the helpless spectator distorts human consciousness and undermines thoughtful action. But the fundamental question of human action endures: “the question is to know how we can put the city’s reasons to work, and thus what is our courage, what is our moderation, what is our justice, what is our prudence.”

Manent suggests that Christianity “complicated” the structure of human action by raising the great evangelical imperative to love our enemies. Is modern man still capable of hearing that commandment and acting upon it? The indifference to action that characterizes theoretical modernity—its succumbing to the allure of inexorable necessity and a causality without acting men—is really an argument for moral and political

abdication. Under the influence of modern theoretical currents, contemporary men and women resign themselves to a spiritually flaccid condition, neither fighting nor loving our enemies. Manent pleads against this disarmament of the human soul.

ACatholic Christian, Manent is acutely aware of the tensions between the political and the evangelical virtues. In a critique of the Christian thinker René Girard's work in *Seeing Things Politically*, Manent worries that Girard's anthropological account of the structure of human violence erases the crucial moral and political differences among men and regimes. Violence, for Girard, becomes undifferentiated—an indiscriminate assault on the innocent victim. The truth of the human condition, in this view, Manent argues, is a "reciprocal violence in which we are all *the same*." It becomes impossible to suggest that one side is better, however marginally, and that some regimes are more in accord with human decency, dignity, and liberty, than others. Girard's work, moreover, encourages what Manent calls the "political vice" of Christianity: the "perverse preference for the enemy whom we have been commanded to love as we love ourselves." The perfectly truthful Christian claim that we are all sinners before God gets transformed "into a political proposition destructive of all political morality: ultimately, among human causes, there is no difference in justice, no difference in honor."

Manent argues that the great French Catholic poet and philosopher Charles Pegúy (1873-1914) would surely "fulminate" against Girard's transformation of the commandment to love. In the name of an ostensibly profound anthropological principle, Girard risks stripping the human virtues, the cardinal virtues, of all meaning. Manent, for his part, wants to keep the cardinal virtues and the theological virtues together without in any way denying the tensions between them. Like Péguy, he believes that Christians must meet the best of paganism on its own plane—on the plane of the natural virtues. Christians must love their neighbors (which should not be confused with pacifism or pusillanimity) even as they strive to be honorable, prudent, and just.

In his early writings, Manent explores the intellectual foundations and the political architecture of liberalism and the liberal state, emphasizing the self-conscious efforts of the philosophical founders of liberal modernity to separate power and opinion, and religion and politics. The "modern project," to cite Leo Strauss's suggestive formulation, began in a frontal assault on what Thomas Hobbes called "Aristotelity," the fusion of classical philosophy and Christian wisdom that hitherto had been the lifeblood of the Christian West. The liberal state, which took its bearings from a project at once philosophical and polemical, was deeply informed by the "anti-theological ire" of modern political philosophy. Taking aim at religious fanaticism and the specter of

theocratic tyranny, liberal philosophers and statesmen sought to build a “neutral and agnostic state.” This is a crucial moment in the modern “organization of separations,” in Manent’s term, a development that also includes the separation of powers and the division of labor. Of course, the modern separation of religion and politics occurred within nations that largely remained Christian. For centuries, modern agnosticism about the good life coexisted with traditional philosophical and religious affirmations. The modern world is, then, much more than an epiphenomenal expression of early modern political philosophy. The creation a secular state need not entail a systematic effort to erase what Manent calls the “Christian mark” of Western nations—in fact, there is something “tyrannical,” he insists, about that more radical understanding of secularism.

Manent has followed this intuition about the radicalization of modern secularism in his most recent work. Rather than emphasizing “separation,” though, Manent stresses the necessity to think religion and politics together. As he put it in *La raison des nations* (2006), “The separation of religion and politics . . . becomes ruinous if we make it the rule of our thought. Politics and religion are never entirely separate or separable. One cannot understand either, therefore, unless one takes them together.” As he stresses in *Beyond Radical Secularism*, the enduring “principle of human life” is “unity” and not the forced separation of religion and politics, liberty and morality.

This rethinking has not occurred in a vacuum. On the contrary, it has been occasioned, in part, by Manent’s recognition that contemporary Europe has largely lost the capacity for collective deliberation and the action that flows from it. Europeans have tried to leave the political form of the nation behind without building “an unprecedented political form” to take its place. Rather than constructing a politically effective Europe, they have repudiated the nation and have succumbed to depoliticization. As *Beyond Radical Secularism* has it, Europeans have confused the political nation and the spiritual communion that informed it with the nation that repudiates the biblical God and embraces “the exclusive valorization of one’s people.” They do not appreciate the profound difference between the community of “blood and soil,” which culminated in National Socialist nihilism, and the nation of a Christian mark with no “homicidal aversion for people from elsewhere.” Europeans are convinced of the unique culpability of Western civilization; faced with a false choice between autochthony and rootlessness, they choose rootlessness “out of horror of a *volkisch* autochthony.” The European [nation](#), properly understood, is equidistant from both.

The principle of European history, which is ultimately stronger than the abstractions of modernity, was the effort “to govern oneself in a certain relation to the Christian proposition,”

Manent contends. The new political form of the nation, so distinct from the classical city and the endless extension of empire, “allowed human beings with free will and conscience to gather in political communities at once smaller in extent and more open to divine initiative.” Europeans learned to govern themselves “by the guidance of one’s reason and with attention to grace.” The task of the nation of the Christian mark is “to find a place for the collaboration of human prudence and divine Providence.” Manent observes that the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas provides the principles for this collaboration, even if it does not show “the way to put them concretely into practice.”

The political form of the nation was crucial to this unprecedented collaboration between the pride of the acting citizen and the humility of the Christian. In *Beyond Radical Secularism*, Manent suggests that the intimate *union*, not *separation*, of religion and politics is the key to the European adventure. Of course, Christianity is no mere instrument of the political order: it is ultimately independent of every human order. This intimate union can readily coexist with the institutional separation of Church and state, and it makes possible the mixing of Roman virtues, such as courage and prudence, “with a faith in a God who is a friend to every person.” Europeans learned to pursue “the most unfettered human action and the most intimate union with God.” If in *The City of Man* Manent accented the ultimate inability of European man to live the tension—or even contradiction—between magnanimity and humility, in his most recent work, he emphasizes that the coming together of self-government and religious faith, of the cardinal virtues (courage, moderation, prudence, and justice) and the theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity), allowed for the “common action of grace and freedom” and the “covenant between communion and freedom.” The Manentian category of “communion” is at once theological and political. It suggests the sacredness inherent in every effort to “put reasons and actions in common,” to articulate and sustain the common good in a way that points *beyond* the political itself. It suggests that action and deliberation are sustained by hope—by what Manent does not hesitate to call the “primacy of the Good.”

As Manent has stressed for 25 years now, the depoliticization of Europe has gone hand in hand with its de-Christianization. Europeans have lost faith in self-government at the same time that they “have lost faith in Providence, in the benevolence and protection of the Most High.” Self-government ultimately depends upon an Aristotelian confidence in the human capacity for action and deliberation about the means to find our courage, our prudence, our justice, our moderation. But that Aristotelian confidence is powerfully sustained by faith in the primacy of the Good. Christian hope sustains action and gives us confidence in ourselves because of the benevolence of God (what the Bible calls the

promises of God). Manent, then, is a partisan of both Aristotle and Christianity, since action and hope are inseparable. The nation is the crucial framework of self-government, but it should never forget its “Christian mark.”

Beyond Radical Secularism contains beautiful reflections on the Jewish Covenant (l’Alliance in French). Manent pleads with contemporary Jews not to take their bearings from the ultimate crime—the *Shoah* or Holocaust—but rather to remain confident in the promises of God. It was the Jews who first brought divine friendship to nations, and we in the West must bow before this idea of the Covenant, which is not exactly rational but is not simply irrational, either. To restore the credibility of the Covenant, one must recover a sense of the dignity of the human association, the nation, “that bore the Covenant until the European arc was broken.” Now that Jews have reassembled in a great, self-governing nation, Europeans can repudiate the nation only by “fatally wounding the legitimacy of Israel.” That would be an affront to an admirable national effort of self-government and to whatever trust is left in the friendship of God.

Manent is a sharp critic of the radicalization of French *laïcité*, which demands much more than the separation of Church and state as formalized in the 1905 law. What it seeks is nothing less than the *neutralization* of religion in society. The old *laïcité* largely respected the Christian past of the French nation and of European civilization. French republicanism accommodated itself to a religious society, even as it affirmed a “transcendent” dimension to citizenship. The “sacred nation” and a Christian society coexisted with a lay or neutral state. These political and spiritual elements were never wholly separate, as one saw in the *l’union sacrée* that brought Catholic and secular Frenchmen together in defense of the nation during World War I. The wounds of the Dreyfus Affair were partly healed in this great *rassemblement* of the French people. The French state also never reduced itself to the single desideratum of protecting (ever-expanding) individual rights. Under Charles de Gaulle, the state embodied the dignity of France, even its “grandeur.” As a statesman, de Gaulle strove to overcome divisions—partisan, religious, and ideological, Left and Right—and defended the independence of the state. The Cultural Revolution embodied by May 1968 challenged the vision of the “man of June 18th, 1940.” Authority, in every aspect of state and society, came under assault, and society began to undo its bonds. The rights of man were increasingly understood in contradistinction to the rights of the citizen. Individualism went hand in hand with a theoretical and practical antinomianism. Public institutions found themselves redefined as “docile instruments” at the service of a conception of rights that made no serious moral or civic demands.

Manent is convinced of the “vacuity” of the commonplace assumption that *laïcité* will do today with Islam “what it accomplished yesterday with Catholicism.” Islam is too strong, too committed to religious truth and to religious mores, to fall prey to such individualist fantasies. Further, an epistemological error can be found at the heart of the new individualism and the new *laïcité*. Once the principle of legitimacy in Europe became an apolitical conception of human rights, in which the “individual” and “humanity” constitute the twin poles of human existence, human associations such as nations and churches cease to have an ontological or political reality. They become “pretended realities that are only invoked to block newcomers”—in other words, to make Muslims and others feel unwelcome. In this new ideological vulgate, the intermediate communities in which human beings really live “have no legitimacy of their own.”

In contrast, Manent believes Europe can only be revived if it takes a chance on “the old nations and the old religion.” As he put it in *Seeing Things Politically*, these are “inestimable resources” for giving new life to the French and European souls. At the same time, Manent in no way repudiates the secular state, which is wholly legitimate in its own sphere. He thinks that the Catholic Church—and French Catholics—have a special role to play in recovering the link between the liberal state and the nation of a Christian mark. French Catholics have valiantly struggled to take the two cities—of Man and God—seriously. They have combined patriotism with loyalty to a universal city and communion. Of the five “great spiritual masses” in the West today—Judaism, Islam, evangelical Protestantism, the Catholic Church, and the ideology of human rights—the Church alone, Manent believes, has “the calmness and equilibrium” to reach out to these other religions and “spiritual masses.” “The Catholic Church is the only spiritual force that approaches matters in such a way as to take into account the views of others in a deliberate and thematic way.” That wasn’t always the case, as Jews certainly know. But it has been at the essence of the Church’s mission in the contemporary world. Manent encourages French Catholics to reenter French political life simultaneously as Catholics *and* as French citizens.

The most controversial parts of *Beyond Radical Secularism* deal with French Muslims. It should be remembered that the book was written after the January 2015 [terror attacks](#) on *Charlie Hebdo* and published just two months before the even more devastating terror attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015. Upon publication, it took the country by storm. As the editors of *Commentaire* pointed out in their preface to excerpts from the book that appeared in the journal’s Winter 2015–2016 edition, Manent has been accused of everything from Islamophobia to defeatism before the emerging threat of an Islamic caliphate. In truth, Manent’s is a tough-minded treatment that acknowledges a *state of*

war between France and radical Islam. France, in particular, and the West, in general, must prudently navigate a “high and great politics” that touches on matters of both domestic and international concern. Manent favors all the necessary political and military means to defeat the West’s Islamist enemies. At the same time, he believes that France will need a *defensive politics*, since millions of Muslims already inhabit a nation of a Christian mark. It needs a *politics of the possible* that rejects every form of defeatism as well as the deceptive promises of the new *laïcité*. French Muslims will not readily become Western individualists and secularists as the partisans of the new *laïcité* falsely claim. Their way of life and moral practices are too robust, too substantial, to be dissolved by the acids of modernity. French Muslims will remain Muslims and not just individuals with rights. These are *facts* that responsible citizens and statesmen must accept and which must form the basis of a new action to form a unitary nation.

Manent thus proposes a “social contract” with French Muslims that accepts them as they are, along with their moral practices, with two notable and crucial exceptions. He argues that the burqa is inadmissible because “it prevents the exchange of signs by which a human being recognizes another human being.” Europeans have never covered their faces. This “lugubrious servitude” is incompatible with a free society. France has the “right and duty to impose the most absolute prohibition on this manner of dress.” The second prohibition is that of polygamy. The family, with one husband and one wife, is the building block of civil society and an indispensable pillar of a free society.

Manent recognizes that the increase in open acceptance of Muslim ways (e.g., dietary restrictions in schools, separation of boys and girls in certain social activities) comes with certain risks. Those risks can be compensated for by active efforts to preserve or reinforce the “ancient constitution” of France. To begin with, Muslims must accept that they live in a nation of a Christian mark with a strong and enduring Jewish presence. They must break with the *umma*, a universal Islamic empire, and proclaim their loyalty to France. They must wean themselves of reliance on foreign funding and repudiate extremism of every kind. Most of all, they must stop hiding behind accusations of Islamophobia. In practice, the reflexive evocation of Islamophobia has led to serious restrictions on the ability of Europeans to think, write, and speak as they please. It undermines even the minimal capacity for self-criticism in the Arab-Islamic world and among Muslims in Western countries. French Muslims accordingly see themselves as victims and involve themselves in the civic forum only to express grievances.

Muslims must learn to live in a secular state that is in no way hostile to religion. This judicious mix of secularism with religious liberty means moving beyond the stultifying

orthodoxies of the new *laïcité*. French Muslims must accept the fact that political rule is rigorously separated from religious commandments. Additionally, they must be welcomed into the national community *as* Muslims. By becoming active citizens, they will learn the arts of criticism and self-criticism. The compromise that Manent proposes to French Muslims grants them some of their customs and moral practices in order to invite participation in a true political body—one that is home to action and deliberation. In return, they must show that they belong to the French nation. Only a revived nation, one that doesn't hide its Christian mark, can provide Muslims with a decent civic life. They will not find it in the *umma* or in the Arab-Islamic Middle East.

The antinomian cultural and political enterprise that flowed from May 1968 has played itself out. Frenchmen of every stripe and religious affiliation need a “common life.” Bonds cannot be endlessly undone. The human associations—nations and churches—in which human beings actually live must receive their due. Let us cite the elegant words that conclude *Beyond Radical Secularism*: “The future of the nation of a Christian mark is a cause that brings us all together.”

Pierre Manent thus provides a powerful and persuasive defense of “practical philosophy” against the regnant European civil religion and other intellectual currents that deny reasonable choice. His is a signal contribution to the human sciences. He allows us to think religion and politics together without forgetting the legitimate contribution of the secular state within its own sphere. His scholarship shows that a West that forgets classical wisdom and Christian hope, the Roman virtues and the Christian confidence in Providence that jointly animated the Western soul, is destined to succumb to lethargy or worse when confronting the challenges of the late modern world. Refusing despair, he points to the still ample moral and political resources that are capable of reinvigorating the West.

Daniel J. Mahoney holds the Augustine Chair in Distinguished Scholarship at Assumption College in Worcester, Mass. He is the author, most recently, of [The Other Solzhenitsyn: Telling the Truth about a Misunderstood Writer and Thinker](#) (St. Augustine's Press, 2014).

Photo: European Solidarity Centre, Warsaw