

The Global Affect of Western Religion on Politics, Policy, and Government

Doctoral Dissertation

Author: Ali Rashad Richey

Scofield Graduate School and Theological Seminary

Trinity Graduate School

Author Note:

Research for this paper was done with great care and scholarly approach to explore the connections associated with politics, policy, government and religion

Professor Kenny Rhodes, PhD (Supervisor)

Class

August 5th, 2016

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
1. Introduction/Background.....	4
The Descriptive Angle	6
The Aspirational Angle	7
The Foreign Perspective	9
The Domestic Perspective.....	11
A Further Conceptual Clarification	13
The Map for the Present Paper.....	14
2. Theoretical Review and Analysis.....	16
The Marxist Perspective	16
The Rebuttal from Castoriadis	24
Case Study: Gay Marriage	32
Case Study: ISIS	40
Liberty and the Evangelical Mentality.....	48
Description versus Aspiration, Revisited.....	56
3. Methodology and Results	64
The Interview	66
Synopsis and Analysis	70
4. Findings and Discussion	72
Pushing Ideology	72
Capitalism as Religion	76
The Current Moment.....	80
A "Progressive" Nation	84
The Decline of Western Religion?.....	88
5. Conclusion	92
References.....	102

Executive Summary

The present paper investigates the effect of Western religion on governance, policies, and politics, within both the domestic and the global contexts. This question, however, leads into the need for deep ideological analysis. The paper thus defines the concept of Western religion, and then proceeds to show how Western religion is inseparable from Western civilization, including modern values which are often called secular but which, in fact, have ideological roots that can be traced to Western religion. Over the course of this analysis, an opposition emerges between Western religion on the one hand and secular progressivism on the other—the latter of which is both derived from and antagonistic toward Western religion. The contours of this ideological conflict and their implications are explored through the development of a comprehensive theoretical framework.

The independent research of the present paper consists of an interview with a selected congressman. The interview seeks to delve into the congressman's views regarding Western religion and its effects on governance, policies, and politics. This data is analyzed using a qualitative method.

Finally, the present paper analyzes and discusses the statements of the congressman in the interview in light of the previously developed theoretical framework. The main conclusion that is reached is that although the congressman is insightful in several respects, he seems to lack a general awareness of the nature of ideology, or the fact that secular progressivism is in ideological conflict with Western religion, even as the former cannot escape the influence of the latter. A key recommendation that emerges from this conclusion is that it is perhaps necessary for both politicians in particular and Americans in general to develop a deeper understanding of the nature of ideology, especially as this pertains to politics.

1. Introduction/Background

There is ongoing debate about whether the United States of America is a religious or a secular nation. On the one hand, it is true that the separation of church and state, along with the freedom of religious expression (including the right to not have a religion at all), are foundational elements of American governance. On the other hand, however, the fact stands that America was founded by Christian dissenters, and that almost all of the Founding Fathers were religious men in their own ways. Even when religious ideas are couched in more secular terms of morality, it would seem to be fairly clear that these ideas are almost always conceptually derived from the Judeo-Christian religious tradition.

This can be seen, for example, in George Washington's (1796) to his new nation, in which he affirms the following: "Of the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens" (para. 21). Washington is speaking of religion in general, here; but it would be fair to assume that Washington is probably not suggesting that all Americans should follow Buddhist precepts in order to ensure political prosperity. Rather, he is quite clearly referring to a kind of pragmatic Christianity, where the American people at the very least adhere to Christian ethics, if not to Christian metaphysics. The separation of church and state has thus never meant that America was not meant to be a religious nation. Much the opposite, the Founding Fathers seem to have always envisioned an America that is underpinned by religious-ethical principles, with variations of religious belief being at least somewhat bound by the general parameters of these principles.

In this context, it is worth asking the question of the ways in which Western religion affects politics, policy, and government, both within America itself and in America's relation to the broader world. There are two main avenues of inquiry when it comes to this question. The first is what could be called descriptive, whereas the second is what could be called aspirational. Descriptive refers to the state of affairs as they actually exist, whereas aspirational refers to the state of affairs as one believes they *should* exist. At the strictly descriptive level, the question is thus one of whether, and to what extent, Western religion does in fact affect politics. At the aspirational level, though, the question becomes of whether Western religion should rightly affect politics, or whether politics should run on much more secular terms.

Perhaps a conceptual definition of the term "Western religion" is in order here. The history of religions is very complex, with many important ideas of all religions cross-pollinating with each other, such that genealogically speaking, it would be difficult to identify religions strictly in terms of their geographical distribution. Nevertheless, the point stands that Christianity was a guiding force in the shaping of what has been called Western civilization, with America and the nations of Europe. Likewise, it is also clear that Hinduism is concentrated in India, that Buddhism is concentrated in the Eastern nations, and that Islam is concentrated in the region of the world known as the Middle East. Therefore, when the present paper speaks of Western religion, this term will refer primarily to the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. There are of course other ways to parse this matter: for example, Islam could perhaps be identified as a Western religion, due to the fact that it traces itself back to the patriarch Abraham. For present purposes, though, and for the sake of achieving a maximum of clarity, the term Western religion will refer specifically to Christianity and Judaism, and the term will not encompass Islam within the context of the present discussion.

The Descriptive Angle

From the descriptive point of view, it would seem to be fairly clear that many American policies in fact are and have been driven by Western religion, but that this influence of Western religion would now seem to be on the decline. To an extent, this would seem to break down politically in accordance with traditional party lines. For example, Pew Research Center (2017) has found that 56 percent of Evangelical Protestants had Republican sympathies, whereas only 28 percent had Democratic sympathies. This corresponds to the sorts of policies that Republicans and Democrats tend to support—which in turn suggests that adherence to Western religion, or lack thereof, is an important variable to consider when evaluating the platforms of the political parties.

Policies that oppose things such as abortion, gay marriage, and euthanasia, for example, are often explicitly based on religious grounds. Opposition to abortion is often premised on a dogmatic belief regarding the nature of the origins of life; opposition to gay marriage is often premised on a dogmatic belief regarding the nature of gender; and opposition to euthanasia is often premised on a dogmatic belief regarding free will and/or autonomy. It would be absurd to argue that these positions are not often inspired by religious beliefs derived from Western religion. It is, of course, possible to make arguments for any one of these positions that do not necessarily involve religious presuppositions. But the fact still remains that to a large extent, the policy positions are at the very least often originally inspired by religious presuppositions. Again, this is not a judgment on whether or not this should be the case. From the strictly descriptive angle, the important point to consider is that this usually is the case, and that this is part of what explains the correlations that exist between religious affiliations on the one hand and political affiliations on the other.

In this context, it is worth noting that different suppositions are relative to each other, and that there is perhaps no legitimate reason to think that the secular view on things is more "objective" than the religious one. For example, the notion that life does not begin at conception would seem to be just as dogmatic, in its own way, as the notion that life does in fact begin at conception. In this context, it may be worthwhile to expand the concept of "religion" into the concept of *ideology*; this will be discussed further below. The main idea here, though, would be that at the purely descriptive levels, just about every policy position is informed by some ideology or other: that is, it is informed by a coherent picture of how the world looks, on the basis of one's own moral values. In this sense, views that are "religious" in the narrow sense could just be understood as views that are ideological in their own ways, just like every other possible view on just about anything.

The Aspirational Angle

The aspirational angle is different from the descriptive angle because it is primarily concerned with not how the world actually looks at this moment but how it *should* look in the future, on the basis of the realization of moral values. This distinction can be seen, for example, in the Lord's Prayer in the Bible, which asks for the Kingdom of Heaven to come down to this Earth. If the Kingdom can be understood to be a set of values or ideals, then it could be understood in terms of an aspirational ideology: the point is to live and make decisions in accordance with those values, such as reality will be more and more colored and driven by those values as time goes on. From the descriptive angle, the Earth is just the Earth; nothing more can be said about it. From the aspirational angle, however, the key question consists of not what the Earth is at the present time, but rather what it could become in the future as a result of loyalty to ideological values.

A similar tension can also be seen between the American Constitution on the one hand and the Declaration of Independence on the other. The Constitution, of course, originally allowed for slavery. There was no real value judgment present here; the Constitution merely describes a system of law that must be followed, and the appropriate practices for changing those laws if desired. On the other hand, the soaring, aspirational rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence clearly does contain at least an implicit judgment against slavery: if all men are created equal, then it follows that slavery cannot possibly be a legitimate institution. There is a conflict, then, between the descriptive and aspirational angles: while Americans must live within the lawful parameters of the Constitution, there is also always an impulse to bring the system of laws itself into closer and closer alignment with the aspirations expressed by the Declaration. Ideology is always about not only what presently is, but also about what could in the future be.

In this sense, it is only logical that religion would have a strong effect on politics and policies. This is because every religious person would ultimately like to see his religion influence the world in a stronger and stronger way. There are questions of legitimate method that emerge, of course: for example, most Americans would agree that it is not legitimate to spread one's own religion through the use of terrorism. Nevertheless, the basic aspirational impulse will always be definitionally legitimate. This is because people are aspirational creatures, and there is essentially nothing wrong with wanting to make one's own values real within the world. Indeed, the Constitution, with its Bill of Rights and protections of religious expression, would seem to be explicitly responding to the question of how one can have a society in which people can have all kinds of different aspirations but nevertheless manage to coexist in peace. This is why within America, while religious expression is highly protected, such expression must nevertheless fall within legal parameters of equal rights for all.

The Foreign Perspective

Just about everyone knows that the present time is marked by strong ideological struggles. From the American standpoint, these struggles can be broken into two main perspectives: the foreign, and the domestic. At the foreign level, America and the rest of the West are engaged in struggles against terrorists who self-identify as Islamic and express hatred toward everything that Western civilization stands for. Yet, as a result of a naive understanding of the nature of ideology, many people seem to not take this threat with adequate seriousness, believing instead that the struggle is inspired by something other than ideology. The recent Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, for example, suggested that terrorism is primarily a result of the political economy of climate change, as opposed to anything that the terrorists themselves explicitly claim to believe in (Qiu, 2015). From the perspective of the present paper, this is naivety, rooted in a bad understanding of the nature of ideology and religious belief.

The present paper will instead follow Woods' (2017) perspective regarding phenomena such as the rise of ISIS. He has asserted the following: "The reality is that the Islamic State is Islamic. *Very* Islamic. Yes, it has attracted psychopaths and adventure seekers, drawn largely from the disaffected populations of the Middle East and Europe. But the religious preached by its most ardent followers derives from coherent and even learned interpretations of Islam" (para. 22). In other words, the effects of Western religion on global politics must be understood within the context of the general influence of ideology on global politics. The West—whether religious or not—is animated by ideologies that are different from the ideologies that animate the Islamic nations of the Middle East. Efforts to dismiss the realities of such ideological conflicts will always fall short of achieving deep and meaningful explanations of current events.

In truth, ideological analysis may reveal that Huntington's (2011) "clash of civilizations" narrative is not as extreme as it may at first seem. This is because every civilization is fundamentally defined by its own unique ideology or combination of ideologies. The West, for example, has historically been defined by the Judeo-Christian tradition; and even if it may seem that that tradition is on the wane in recent times, emerging ideologies nevertheless have distinctive connections to that tradition and cannot forswear this history in its entirety. In contrast, the Middle East never had a Judeo-Christian religion; that civilization primarily shifted from various forms of animism and polytheism toward the monotheistic religion of Islam. In short, then, the civilization of the Middle East is not the same as the civilization of the West, insofar there are basic ideological differences between the history of the one and the history of the other. This does not necessarily imply that conflict is inevitable, but this is at the very least a precondition for conflict to emerge.

In any event, one of the key problems of modern Western civilization failing to take stock of its own ideologies is that the West tends to naively assume that its own ideologies are universal, or at the very least universalizable: in other words, the West assumes that no other ideologies but Western ideologies can really exist, and that it is backwards to take any other ideologies with full seriousness. When terrorists blow people up in the name of Islam, the dominant Western response seems to be to blame extraneous political dynamics, such as capitalism or colonialism, for the violence. What is *not* common is to take the terrorists at their word and assume that their religion matters as much to them as Western religion matters to Western believers. This last point, though, calls attention to ideological schisms that are occurring with the context of the West itself, and within America in particular, between Western religion on the one hand and secularism on the other.

The Domestic Perspective

In a way, secularism itself could be defined as a form of Western religion. In any event, secularism emerged in the West and has thrived in the West, whereas this absolutely cannot be said about the Islamic world. It seems plausible that there are elements of Western religion itself that enables a distinction to be drawn between secular matters and sacred matters, as with Jesus himself saying that it is appropriate to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's. However, the important caveat would be that all ideology is always present, with even pure "pragmatism" being an ideology in and of itself. The Declaration of Independence begins with the proposition that all men are created equal. That itself is an ideological, even religious, claim that can in no way be reduced to mere pragmatism. Rather, pragmatism itself operates within a context of values: what is "pragmatic" is whatever is effective at preserving one's values and increasingly instantiating them within the context of the real world.

Modern liberalism and progressivism, for example, seem to have become a quasi-religious ideology all of their own. This can be seen every time a person affirms that he "believes" in science. As any actual scientist should know, science is a *method* and not a belief system, and to believe in science in an ideological would in fact be the antithesis of the scientific spirit itself (Popper, 1963). Likewise, progressive gender ideology would seem to have little to do with science itself—and in fact, it is telling that this gender ideology often neglects any reference to biology (an actual science) entirely. Progressivism would thus seem to be a new ideology that is cohering within the American context, filling a vacuum that has been left behind as traditional Western religion has lost its meaning and value for many people within the nation in particular and the West in general. This does not change the fact, however, that this ideology has emerged within a specifically Western context.

On the other hand, traditional Western religion also still exists within America, although it would seem to be getting increasingly marginalized over time. This perception of getting pushed to the margins is probably one of the key factors that drove Donald Trump to victory in the 2016 presidential election. According to Bailey (2016), an astonishing 80 percent of all White evangelicals voted for Trump in that election. The best explanation for this would be that these evangelicals saw Trump as their last chance to prevent the tide of secularism from drowning the traditional founders of Western religion within the nation. This is one of the only ways to explain why voters who are associated with respect for traditional values would cast their ballots for a man who has been married three times: it would seem that they simply decided that the ends justify the means.

This tension can be seen in a very clear way in current debates over gay marriage. From the perspective of believers in traditional Western religion, this Supreme Court decision could only be understood as an insult: marriage has a very long history of being defined as the union between a man and a woman. From the perspective of the ideology of progressivism, this is an outdated definition and value that offends against the human rights of homosexuals. From the perspective of traditional Western religion, however, the value cannot become outdated, and the new rules are affronts on the very foundations of Western society and civilization. This helps show the way in which ideological conflicts are becoming more extreme within the context of the West itself. The volatility of recent politics (as of mid-2017 within America) can only be understood in terms of ideological conflict. Considering Western religion in particular, a complex and tripartite conclusion must be drawn.

1. Western religion is on the decline within the West itself, in the face of the rising tides of secularism and progressivism.

2. Secularism and progressive themselves, however, are part of Western civilization, unique to Western civilization and not emerging in any other context; therefore, the enemies in the domestic context are in uneasy alliance in the global context.
3. Both Western religion and its heterodox offshoots are in actual conflict against the ideologies of the non-Western world.

A Further Conceptual Clarification

In this context, a relevant question that could be asked is: should secularism and/or progressivism themselves be classified as a form of Western religion? There would seem to be some logic in doing so. While they are not "religions" per se in the way that the term religion is commonly used, they have in fact become powerful ideologies that, for their adherents, fulfill a purpose similar to what traditional Western religion used to fulfill for its own believers. Therefore, to an extent, when this paper uses the term "Western religion" within the global context, it may sometimes include inferences to secularism and/or progressivism as well.

Within the domestic context, however, the term "Western religion" will refer almost exclusively to the Judeo-Christian tradition. This alteration is simply a matter of scope and scale. From the global perspective, it is quite clear that modern secularism is closely associated with both the West and the Judeo-Christian tradition; it did not emerge out of a vacuum, but rather from a very specific cultural and ideological context. From the domestic perspective, however, there are actual believers in traditional Western religion (i.e. the Judeo-Christian tradition), and there are others who have broken away from that tradition and are even actively hostile toward that tradition. In the global context, then, secularism will be included under the umbrella of Western religion, whereas within the domestic context it will not. Efforts will be made to clarify the specific usage in any given context where it may not be immediately clear.

The Map for the Present Paper

The present paper, then, will investigate the relationship between Western religion on the one hand and policy, politics, and governance on the other. A good bulk of this paper will consist of a theoretical review and analysis that delve into some of the main theoretical constructs and concepts that are important for understanding the subject under discussion here. This will involve further considerations of the nature of ideology along the lines of what has been introduced above, including the relationship between ideology on the one hand and politics on the other. From this analysis, it will become clear that even the basic principle of separation of church and state is itself part of one particular "church" (or ideology) and not something that it is universally shared across all cultures and ideologies.

The independent research portion of the present paper will consist of an interview with a selected U.S. congressman on the subject under consideration here. (The congressman requested anonymity as a condition for speaking openly about the subject, due to the volatile nature of the political climate in these times.) The actual responses of the congressman will be reported in verbatim in the present paper. After this has been done, the findings from the data will be analyzed in terms of the theoretical review and analysis previously developed in the paper. The main conclusion that will emerge here is that although traditional Western religion would seem to be on the decline, the West is still powerfully animated by ideologies that are unique to the West and not in fact universal to every culture on the planet. This produces a situation in which ideological conflict is almost inevitable, unless the particularity of all ideologies is accepted and a coherent framework developed for navigating ideological tensions. The present paper will thus seek to make a contribution in the area of political analysis of ideology, or the profound in which ideology will always shape our politics.

The specific research question of the present paper is: What is the governmental impact of Western religion on world affairs? In order to answer this question, however, it will become clear that what is needed is a broader analysis of the nature and impact of ideology in both domestic affairs and global affairs. Otherwise, the conclusions produced would be too narrow, appearing to address only one small set of effects that may, at the historical level, well already be on their way out. The question here is not simply that of the political effects of Judeo-Christian religion on global politics, but rather the general influence of ideology on global politics, Judeo-Christian religion being a subset of such ideology. In other words, Western religion can be understood as a small circle within the bigger circle of ideology. Not everything that is true of Western religion may be true of ideology in general; however, everything that is true of ideology in general *will* in fact be true of Western religion as well. This is the general method that will be used in order to approach and address the research question at hand.

In this context, the specific qualitative case study involving the selected congressman will be used as a sort of prism through which the broader, more theoretical considerations regarding ideology can be refracted. More specific information regarding methodology will be provided in the appropriate section of the present paper below. For present purposes, however, the key point is that the paper will develop an in-depth theoretical perspective regarding the nature of ideology in general, and this perspective will then be used in order to analyze the specific qualitative data regarding Western religion in particular. This approach should be able to not only shed light on the political effects of Western religion, but also on the more general dynamics of how ideology affects world affairs. This will also ameliorate the significance of the question of whether Western religion *should* affect global politics, since it will be clearly seen that ideology will *always* affect global politics.

2. Theoretical Review and Analysis

The Marxist Perspective

Most dismissals of the importance of ideology in world affairs tend to be influenced by the political theory of Karl Marx, whether they are consciously aware of that or not. A key idea of the Marxist perspective is that ideology is always a kind of projection, or bad faith, that conceals the realities that are actually going on at the level of the material ground (Marx & Engels, 1932). For example, a person who feels like a "loser" in this world may begin to imagine another world, or a Kingdom of Heaven, in which he will no longer feel that way. The implication would be that if that person became a "winner," then he would no longer have a need for such projections, since his actual material needs and desires would be satisfied. In this sense, ideology would always be understood as the symptom of some sort of psychological disorder. People begin to worship Nature, in order to conceal the fact that they are terrified of Nature; people begin to believe in Heaven, because their own lives in this world are awful; and so on. Achieving true and autonomous self-consciousness, then, would involve withdrawing the projections of ideology, such that one is then able to confront the world as it actually stands and fulfill one's needs and desires in real terms.

This perspective would seem to have a certain face-value plausibility. After all, most people probably know at least someone or another who does in fact behave very much in the way described above: a person who develops fantasies, out of an inability to deal with realities. This is undoubtedly a real dynamic of human psychology, which makes it difficult to dismiss this analysis out of hand entirely. The argument that will be made here, however, is that this is not a general description of ideology per se, but rather only a description of the pathological perversion of ideology.

In principle, adopting the Marxist perspective would prevent one from ever taking anyone else's convictions in good faith; it would force one to always dismiss those convictions as the result of nothing other than false consciousness. This is exactly the sort of thing that can be seen, for example, in Sanders' claim that Islamic terrorism is primarily caused by climate change (Qiu, 2015). This position assumes, as a matter of course, that the Islamic terrorists cannot possibly mean what they are saying—namely that they are positively inspired by their Islamic faith, and *not* driven from behind their backs by motives that they do not understand. The Marxist perspective requires one to assume that one has the intellectual and even metaphysical high ground, and that everyone else in the world is simply deluded about themselves and their own motives for doing just about anything in their lives.

This, for example, is also what is meant by the famous phrase that religion is the "opiate of the masses." The idea is that as a result of believing in religions, people get their attention diverted away from the real problems confronting them in the real world and instead invest all of their energy in an imaginary world—which would, of course, suit the powers that be of this world just fine, since they would be able to comfortably hold onto their power, as opposed to every getting challenged by those who are oppressed by them. This perspective, however, renders it impossible to imagine anyone ever having a genuine religious faith that is a positive value in and of itself and *not* just a reflex of resentment against the way that the real world is within the context of history. In other words, the logical structure of Marxism precludes the possibility of ever taking ideology in all seriousness. Rather, ideology is *tautologically defined* as delusion, with the project of consciousness thus implying the dispelling of all ideologies, so that people can actually face the real world on its own terms, without being lost in their own fantasies and imaginations.

Understood in these terms, it becomes clear that Marxism itself is a quasi-religious ideology, just like anything else that it purports to critique. Every Christian, of course, believes that salvation comes through Jesus Christ, and that anyone who denies Christ has not spiritually understood the truth of life. In the same way, Marxism alleges that anyone who *does* believe in Christ is wrapped in false consciousness, and that a thoroughly materialistic and disenchanting view of reality is the true one, which only those who believe in the "one true religion" know. These claims are structurally and epistemologically identical, once one gets past the duplicity of Marxism in calling it a science. From the perspective of a believer in any one ideology, all the other ideologies seem false as a matter of course. In this sense, Marxism is much like Christianity; but unlike Christianity, it does not have the good faith to identify itself as a religion or ideology, thinking of itself instead as an empirical science.

Indeed, the Communist utopia of the future posited by Marxism could easily be read as little more than a materialistic transposition of the concept of the Kingdom of Heaven from Christianity. Moreover, it is worth noting that Communism has the same prophetic element as the Kingdom: it is essentially an unfalsifiable claim, believed in through faith. This also reveals that the vision of Communism cannot be scientific in nature, given that a key hallmark of any scientific claim consists of nothing other than the fact that it is framed in falsifiable terms (Popper, 1963). A theory that can account for all of reality and integrate disparate elements into itself without getting hurt in the process is not a scientific hypothesis, but rather a religious ideology. This would seem to be the character of Marxism, just as it is the character of Christian faith. From a Christian perspective, of course, Marxism seems like a false religion; but by the same token, from the Marxist perspective, all other ideologies, including Christianity, seem delusional. In short, the sentiment is mutual.

There is ample historical evidence that Marxism, understood as a scientific theory, is a bad one. Among other things, the stages of history did not proceed in anything like the way that Marx expected. Communism was only supposed to take root in highly developed capitalist societies: when Marx talked about Communism, he saw it happening in England, not Russia or China. The fact that Russia and China shifted to a kind of Communism, straight from an almost feudal stage of development and without going through the stage of capitalist development, completely flies in the face of Marx's hypothesis. Likewise, the developed, capitalist nations of the world ended up not becoming Communist but rather forming a united global front against Communism. It would be difficult to imagine any fuller of a repudiation of the theory of history presented by Marx.

However, insofar as Marxism is understood as an ideology, any number of exegetical moves could be performed in order to preserve the core of his prophecy. It could be suggested, for example, that China wasn't "really" Communist in the sense that Marx meant the word, and that the modern capitalist world is in fact still on its way to true Communism. In a similar way, for believing Christians, there is pretty much nothing that could happen in this world that could get in the way of their faith in the Kingdom of Heaven: the early Christians tended to take the prophecy literally, but they soon revised their expectations, as they came to realize that Jesus probably was not going to return within their own lifetimes. It is worth noting here that there is nothing wrong with this kind of epistemology or this kind of faith. The only point here is that Marxism claims to debunk all ideologies in the name of a scientific view of reality, whereas in truth, Marxism has the *exact same structure* as any powerful ideology. This suggests that ideology is in fact a very powerful force in human affairs and politics, and that there is really no getting rid of it.

The Marxist perspective is an inversion of the dialectical view of history developed by the philosopher Hegel; and the ethos of this perspective can still be seen in the belief among progressives to this day that they live on the "right side" of History. To even consider making such a claim implies the ideological belief that History is a conscious and intentional agent that is progressing towards some end goal, and that it is possible for human beings to discern what that goal is, and thus to position themselves either in line with History or against it. Phrased in this way, it becomes clear that this is an extravagantly ideological and religious belief, with no basis whatsoever in empirical science. For believers in the proposition, though, the idea begins to seem self-evidently true—for this is the nature of the relationship between any ideology and the people who believe in it.

It is also worth noting that Marxism, and the progressivism descended from it, transpose religious concerns into the political realm, which actually results in politics becoming more and not less ideologically driven than ever before. From the perspective of Marxism, politics consists of the mechanisms that can be used in order to hasten the arrival of its own version of the Kingdom of Heaven. This means that political disagreements have the tendency to take on an increasingly passionate and intolerant cadence, due to the fact that from the perspective of Marxism and its progressive descendant, anyone who disagrees with the ideology is in fact standing in the way of the realization of full human perfection. What is at stake is not just good governance, but rather something akin to eternal life. This also means that a person who disagrees with Marxism or progressivism stands at risk of being cast more or less as a heretic or blasphemer. And the great irony is that all this happens without the Marxists or progressives even coming to a comprehension of how ideological they are behaving; they tend to think that they are just being "objective."

This analysis also reveals one of the ways in which modern secularism is in fact influenced by and even derived from Christianity. The notions that History has a telos and God has a plan for humankind are quintessentially Western ones that do not really appear in the vast majority of cultures that have ever existed in the world. The idea that God had a plan to save mankind through Christ and that History will culminate in the Second Coming: this is analogous to secular prophecies regarding the "end of History," whether through Communism or the inevitability of capitalism or whatever else (Fukayama, 2006). This kind of thinking is quite unique to the West. Other cultures, for example, have tended to imagine history in a circular fashion, and as having no "plan" of progressive in particular. Much of modern secularism can thus be read as a transposition of spiritual/mental realities into the domain of the physical and the political.

This is why in a certain sense, Marxism and progressivism *are in fact Western religions in their own rights*, and must be understood as such within the global context of ideologies. Within the domestic context, it is worth marking the distinction between the Judeo-Christian tradition on the one hand and modern secularism on the other. From a broader context, however, it becomes clear that both of these traditions have emerged from within a Western context and draw on similar ideological presuppositions. From the domestic perspective, they seem to be mortally at odds with each other; within America, for example, the "culture wars" are a very real thing. But from the global perspective, this must be understood as more or less a family feud. The Judeo-Christian tradition has more in common with modern secularism than either has with (for example) Buddhism. The implications drawn from the ideological premises may be very different, but those premises themselves—such as the meaningfulness and directionality of History—often prove to be quite similar.

For present purposes, then, it will be accepted as a *postulate* that the Marxist conception of ideology is fundamentally deficient. As has been discussed above, this deficiency stems primarily from the fact that Marxism itself refuses to consider itself an ideology, insisting instead that it is pure empirical science. This causes Marxism to almost criminally neglect the fundamental importance of ideology, since it keeps its own driving force as an ideology concealed. The simple fact is that an ideology doesn't *seem* like an ideology to someone who is actually immersed in that ideology: for a Christian, the Christian tradition is not an ideology but rather simply reality itself. But critical awareness requires one to realize and acknowledge the fact that everyone feels this way about whatever his/her own ideology may be. One can argue about whether some ideologies are truer than others, but the basic fact remains that all ideologies inherently have the same general structure.

The position that will be adopted here, then, is that ideologies can have *sincere* and not just bad-faith effects on global politics. This means that Western religion, as a specific form of ideology, can also have such effects on global politics. In other words, ideology is not just an overlay of false consciousness on top of what is "really" going on; rather, ideology itself *is* what is really going on. People will take actions in the defense of their values for the simple reason that they care about their values in a *direct* way, and not simply because those values are projections of somehow deeper material needs. In short, when people affirm that they are doing something in the name of an ideology, the baseline assumption here will be that such affirmations are in good faith, unless there is compelling reason to believe otherwise. The assumption will *not* be that such people must by definition be delusional liars. This in itself would be a biased and dishonest interpretation of reality that would get in the way of producing genuine insights.

Indeed, the history of Marxism itself clearly demonstrates that people are moved by powerful ideas over all else. The Communist transformations of China and Mao and Russia under Lenin would not seem to have fundamentally improved the material conditions of living for most of the people within those nations. Even Marx himself predicted that such experiments would end badly, given that from his perspective, highly developed capitalism is an essential prerequisite for the emergence of Communism. However, these ideas were clearly inspirational to the people of China and Russia, and they proceeded with carrying out their revolutions under their respective leaders.

The one caveat that could be included here is that ideology can always be used as a mask for power grabs, and that this can often be the case in an unconscious way. For example, modern progressives deeply insist on the value of social justice—and there is perhaps no reason to believe that they are being insincere per se. However, analysis tends to reveal that progressives are leveraging the concept of social justice in order to enhance their own political and cultural power within society (Goldberg, 2009). What is being suggested here is thus not that there is no such thing as hypocrisy, or that people may perhaps have ulterior motives for their ideologies that are invisible even to themselves. The point, however, would be that even if progressives were lying to themselves, then their true ideology would be not one of social justice, but rather one of using claims of social justice for the sake of achieving power. Either way, the point would still stand that there is in fact an ideology at the bottom of it all—because human beings are ideological creatures, to the point that a human being without at least an implicit ideology would be almost inconceivable. People have values, those values drive their actions, and those values answer not just to material reality but to the more holistic needs of being human. The Marxist perspective on ideology is thus grossly immature.

The Rebuttal from Castoriadis

In order to develop a positive understanding of ideology (as opposed to just critiquing the Marxist perspective), it is worth turning attention to the work of Cornelius Castoriadis. In his major work *The imaginary institution of society*, Castoriadis (1998) critiques the Marxist perspective on ideology and develops a more holistic vision of his own on the basis of a deeper comprehension of human psychology. The main idea here would be that people need their ideologies in order to answer to uniquely psychological needs that go beyond the merely material level, and that those psychological needs cannot be fully reduced to material needs—which also implies that ideology can never be fully reduced to political economy. Political economy may provide a context and parameters within which ideology can take shape, but political economy can never be understood as having an actually determining effect on ideology.

The English translation of Castoriadis's title may be a little misleading. Castoriadis is not suggesting that society is an "imaginary" institution in the sense of society being a matter of mere fantasy or make-believe. Rather, Castoriadis comprehends the imagination as a creative power that is responsible for *instituting* society, or making society real. This is antithetical to the Marxist notion that all that is real is the play of material forces, and that the imagination (with its ideologies) is merely a material epiphenomenon projected out of that play of material forces. Castoriadis instead understands the imagination as having a genuine reality of its own and in its own right, with the imagination being primarily responsible for dictating what is done with the material forces at the disposal of any given group of people. In other words, it is not political economy that determines the imagination and its ideologies, but rather the imagination and its ideologies that determine the structures of any given political economy, from a domain beyond political economy per se.

It is true that material forces exercise certain constraints on what ideologies may or may not be likely to develop. Paglia (1991), for example, has persuasively argued that nature worship emerged primarily out of the fear that primitive humans experienced in the face of the wildness surrounding them. It is not the case that the political economy (or lack of one) determined the specific beliefs that emerged; however, it would seem to be clear enough that the experiences that human beings have of their world will at the very least provide parameters for the sorts of ideologies that may or may not emerge. An ideology of the control of nature would not have been likely to emerge when people had very limited capabilities to control nature; the closest that they could get was a belief in magic.

Likewise, there seems to be a clear correlation, across almost all cultures, between the transition from a belief in the earth cults of the goddesses to the sky cults of the gods on the one hand, and the dawn of civilization on the other (Paglia, 1991). This could be understood in terms of people becoming increasingly aware of the power of thought (the sky) to master nature, which resulted in a shift away from a belief in the submission of the body (the earth) to nature. There are no one-to-one correlations here, but there is in fact a general parallelism of trends. The emergence of a particular kind of political economy does not *dictate* that a specific ideology must emerge; nor does political economy itself change without the influence of existing ideologies. But ideologies, insofar as they are developed by human beings who are living within the world, will surely be influenced by the realities that are experienced by those human beings. This influence is not deterministic in nature, but it is in fact a very real influence. It is a truism that people living in modern urban centers would tend to have ideologies that are substantially different from people who lived as hunter-gatherers, due to a fundamentally different experience of political economy.

From the perspective of Castoriadis, however, the material resources and political economy that are available within a given time and place must be understood as building blocks of sorts, which are to be assembled or configured by the creative imagination. In principle, two societies with the exist same material resources could end up getting structured in radically different ways, simply due to the influence of ideology. Moreover, the more prosperous a given society has become, the more room there may be for the imagination to have free sway in constructing society out of its own ideologies. America could plausibly be both capitalistic or socialistic, depending on the choices that America makes; whereas hunter-gatherer societies may have had considerably less freedom of imagination and ideology, given the empirical constraints of nature that they were up against.

The founding of America actually gives good indication of what is meant here. The notion that "all men are created equal" contains at least two radical ideological postulates within itself: on the one hand that there is a Creator, and on the other than he created all men equal. This declaration grew out of the context of Western civilization; however, the declaration itself was novel, and could not really be predicted in a deterministic way from the political economy of America in the late 1700s. Rather, it was a sovereign act of imagination that society would no longer be structured in terms of submission to the British crown, but that it would rather become structured as a free nation of free men. There were surely economic influences on this decision, such as the famous "no taxation without representation." But within the American case in particular, one gets the strong impression that the new ideology drove confrontation more than anything else. After all, there had been many colonies in history that had been treated much worse than America was at that time, and yet they did not respond in the same way that America responded.

Questions can also be raised regarding Marx's prophecy regarding the advent of Communism in highly developed nations such as England. Clearly, this never happened. But at the purely economic level, Marx's analysis was not exactly incorrect: that is, it makes sense that a nation like England could in fact transition into Communism—*if it wanted*. The simple truth would seem to be that there has never been an adequate ideology in England or America that supported the rise of Communism. This is not because the requisite political economy was not there; after all, according to Marx himself, the political economy *was* there, in spades. The only reasonable conclusion would be that although the potential for Communism exists, it has failed to instantiate, for primarily ideological and political economic reasons.

This situation itself suggests that Castoriadis is correct and Marx is wrong. If economic determinism were correct, then there would need to exist a one to one correlation between political economy on the one hand and social configuration on the other: if a society *can* become Communist, then it *must* become Communist. But all the evidence suggests that this is just not the case. Rather, what seems to happen is that the given society decides to pursue one configuration or another from the set of configurations available to it; and while those configurations may be bound by the parameters of the existing political economy, the political economy itself cannot independently predict which one or the other of the available configurations will in fact instantiate. Moreover, the possible number of configurations may be much greater than what one is given to actually imagine. After all, History has proven to be full of surprises: rebellions, breakdowns, and transformations often occur where one tends to least expect them, and it is up to historians to make sense of it all in retrospect, given that everyone fails to predict such changes ahead of time.

Again, it is worth pointing out that this is even narrowly true of Marx's own predictions. He would have never imagined that nations such as Russia or China would embark on the project of Communism; indeed, according to his theory, it should have been impossible for them to embark on such a project. But the historical facts are that Communism happened where it was not supposed to happen, and it failed to happen where it was predicted. This indicates that the power of ideology was far stronger than the power of political economy, and that whether Communism manifested or not depended less on objective political economy than on the ideological sympathies and inclinations of the people of a given nation. In other words, it was the imagination, and not the political economy, that was responsible for driving changes and reconfigurations within societies.

In a way, the perspective of Castoriadis could also be understood as a rebuttal of Freud, even as the former was influenced by the latter. Freud's basic conceptual schema is very similar to that of Marx, in the sense that Freud was also a reductionist. According to Freud, the sexual drive within human beings was the primary drive, with all other desires and impulses being perversions, repressions, or sublimations of the sexual drive. This is very much analogous to Marx arguing that the primary driver of history is the political economy, and that all ideologies are the result of the failure to understand reality for what it is. Freud tended to dismiss all other drives within the human being as superfluous or the result of psychological maladies, in the same way that Marx dismissed all ideologies as by definition being the products of projection and false consciousness. And just as Marx thought he was being objective and in no way ideological, Freud thought the same about himself: both men were blind to their own deep ideologies. But in the same way that Castoriadis restores the imagination to its proper seat, other psychologists have countered Freud's perspective.

Other psychologists have identified different fundamental drives within human beings. Otto Rank (1989), for example, was a disciple of Freud who later turned against him; and Rank identified the primary drive of the human being as not the sexual impulse but rather the will to immortality. In particular, Rank suggested that art in particular, and all of culture in general, was the result of human beings responding to this fundamental drive within themselves. This would mean that culture, including the ideologies within a culture, are *not* a resentful reaction to failure in the physical world (or perversions based on misapprehensions of political economy) but rather an independent creation of its own that answers to independent needs within human beings. The key premise here is that there are independent, psycho-spiritual needs within people that cannot be reduced to the strictly material level, and that ideologies answer to these needs, in a parallel sense to how political economies respond to physical needs.

In the framework being developed through this analysis, it could be suggested that Rank is to Freud what Castoriadis is to Marx. Both Freud and Marx are reductionists who insist on seeing human behavior in strictly physical terms, with all "spiritual" concerns being the result of false consciousness and/or mental illness; whereas both Rank and Castoriadis reject this reductionist view of things, insisting instead on the independent prerogatives of soul and imagination. Again, the present paper is informed by the perspective that ideology is an independent reality with a legitimacy of its own, and not just some sort of epiphenomenon that must be dispelled or sickness that must be cured. In this sense, the present paper strongly aligns, with the perspective of Rank and Castoriadis, and it strongly rejects the perspective of Freud and Marx. Again, this is to a large extent due to the fact that Freud and Marx refused to acknowledge the fact that they themselves were quite extreme ideologues. They took their own ideologies far too much for granted.

With respect to Western religion in particular, then, the question cannot be *whether* Western religion has an effect on politics. The simple answer to that question would be: of course it does, because that's what ideologies do. Every ideology has myriad effects on the real world around it; and moreover, believers in a given ideology always seek to bring the physical world into greater accord with their ideology. If one believes in peace as a value, for example, one would likely work toward creating a world that is characterized by greater peace, or at the very least wish for such a world to come about. The value of peace itself would be part of an ideology (no matter how implicit that ideology is for any given person), and that ideology would have real effects on the society within which it operates. So, insofar as believers in Western religion continue to exist, Western religion will surely have an effect on politics and governance, at both the domestic and the global levels.

Nor can the more general question be asked of whether ideology should affect politics. The simple answer here would be that there is no other way for things to work. Civilizations emerge from ideological values and are structured in accordance with those values; in an important sense, without any ideology at all, *there would be no civilization*, but rather just a sort of state of nature, with people existing at nothing higher than the purely animal level. The question thus resolves itself not *whether* ideology should be present, but rather *which* ideology should be dominant within any given society. Of course, the answer to this question will differ on the basis of what basis one adheres to oneself: any given person will always think of his own ideology as the best one, and wish for that ideology to exert a dominant effect on the society in which he/she lives. This is not something to be criticized; rather, it is a sort of natural egotism that must be accepted and then negotiated if one wishes to live within and cultivate a peaceful society.

In this context, it can be suggested that one of the very unique things about America is that it was founded on a sort of meta-ideology, or an ideology that explicitly made room for the coexistence of many ideologies. This, for example, is the meaning of the famous separation of church and state. If the term "ideology" can be used as a stand-in for the term "church," the implication that follows is that American society is supposed to be configured in such a way that the laws of the land can exist in such a way that they do not infringe on the right of each and every person to develop and hold his own individual ideological picture of reality. This would be in stark contrast to a Marxist regime, for example, in which every person would be expected to hold the Marxist picture of reality, with deviations from the collective picture being considered a form of treason, exactly because there can exist no separation of church and state within a society organized along the lines of Marxism.

It is worth noting, though, that the separation of church and state is *itself* an ideological postulate, driven by the key value of individual liberty. This is a specific ideological value that is not universal but rather emerges within certain cultural contexts and not others. Marxist ideology, for example, would suggest that the collective is more important than the individual, and that there is thus nothing inherently wrong with quashing an individual who disrupts the cohesion of the collective. In contrast, America was explicitly built on an ideology of the liberty of the individual being paramount, with infringements on that liberty not being acceptable as long as the given person in question does not infringe on that same liberty of others. This may seem like natural common sense—but again, it must be remembered that from within the perspective of any given ideology, the reality portrayed by that ideology always seems like common sense. It is important to have more self-awareness in this regard that what was demonstrated by Freud or Marx.

Case Study: Gay Marriage

The contemporary issue of gay marriage helps show how ideological conflicts play out within the modern West itself. The Supreme Court of the United States recently reached a decision that overrode individual state statutes in order to make gay marriage a legal right all across America (Liptak, 2015). The dominant narrative suggests that this is a matter of civil rights, akin to the abolition of miscegenation laws (i.e. laws that made it illegal for a man and a woman of different races to marry each other). From this perspective, the argument could be made that people who are opposed to gay marriage are inherently bigots, akin to people who stood in the way of a black man and a white woman marrying each other. However, this issue raises important matters related to the impact of Western religion on politics within the context of America in particular and Western civilization in general.

The fact is that from the perspective of traditional Western religion, there is an origin story regarding the nature of man and the nature of woman: this is the story of Adam and Eve. The gist of this origin story was that man and woman are made in a very complementary way, designed for each other; and that marriage is the symbol of this complementarity, finding its fulfilment in not only sexual but also more holistic union. From this angle, the concept of gay marriage would be a literal contradiction in terms: people of the same sex cannot get married, for the simple reason that marriage is an inherently spiritual concept, and people of the same sex were not made for each other in the same way that people of opposite sexes were made for each other. Ideologically speaking, this has nothing to do with civil rights; it has everything to do with metaphysical realities. From the perspective of traditional Western religion, the simple fact is that marriage is a concept that cannot possibly apply to people of the same sex; the concept is *defined* in such a way that it can only apply to a man and a woman.

From the more liberal or progressive angle, however, marriage is not defined by any metaphysical constructs; it is defined exclusively in terms of legal rights that can obtain between two consenting adults. From that perspective, it becomes wrong to define marriage rights in terms of sexual orientation, in the same way that it has been wrong to define marriage rights in terms of racial status. From the perspective of liberal/progressive ideology, sexual orientation is just as real a personal marker as race, and to discriminate with respect to marriage rights on the basis of sexual orientation would be as wrong as doing so on the basis of race. Of course, this completely ignores the traditional Judeo-Christian construct of what marriage is—and this is because there is a genuine conflict of ideologies in play here. From the perspective of each ideology, the claims of the opposing ideology are quite simply illegitimate.

To clarify the issue: the Judeo-Christian ideology within America and the secular progressive ideology within America have fundamentally different ideas of what marriage even is. From the Judeo-Christian angle, marriage is a fundamental covenant between man and woman that is a reflection of the essential nature of man and the essential nature of woman. From the secular progressive angle, on the other hand, man and woman *have* no inherent natures, and it is a sort of atavistic perversion to even affirm that they do. Secular progressivism thus defines marriage in purely legal, and not metaphysical, terms. The one ideology insists that marriage is a metaphysical concept with metaphysical parameters, whereas the other ideology likewise insists that marriage is a social construct for a legal relation between consenting adults. These are mutually opposing constructs, insofar as the one side affirms that marriage has a metaphysical aspect, and the other side denies the existence of any such aspect. This is a fundamental conflict between opposing ideologies, and there would seem to be no real common ground between the

one construct on the other. This is how it must be, when there are such deep disagreements over basic definitions and premises.

The issue at hand becomes especially virulent when people who disagree with gay marriage on principle begin to be seen as bigots by advocates for gay marriage. In a way, it is possible to make a seductively simple analogy and argue that opposition to gay marriage is no different from racism against colored peoples. Just as many people used to believe that colored people should be treated as second-class citizens, either through outright disenfranchisement or through efforts such as Jim Crow laws to keep them segregated from the rest of the population, the argument could be made that sexual orientation is now a new axis of bigotry. This is part of why the liberals and progressives tend to think of themselves as being on the right side of History: the idea would be that just as opposition to equal rights for colored people has been consigned to the dustbin of History, the logic is that the same will eventually, and inevitably, happen with opposition to gay marriage.

A crucial point that is missing, here, however, is an honest consideration of freedom of conscience. It is not the case that opposition to gay marriage implies an opposition to *gay people*; rather, the critical point would be that for many believers in traditional Western religion, marriage is a holy sacrament that has been defined by above as the union between a man and a woman, and they thus cannot in good conscience participate in a practice (i.e. gay marriage) that violates their deeply held beliefs. From the perspective of progressive ideology, the question is one of civil rights and overcoming "backwards" people who are opposed to civil rights. From the perspective of Western religion, however, the question is one of freedom of religion, and whether believers will be coerced by the government into engaging in practices that they find to be wrong, immoral, and/or illegitimate.

This also calls attention to the inherent Marxist lineage of modern progressive ideology. From the perspective of progressivism, it is literally impossible for there to be *any* good-faith reason for opposing gay marriage; it can *only* be an expression of bigotry, hatred, and narrow-mindedness. This hearkens back to the fundamental Marxist notion that all ideology is a product of false consciousness, which implies that at the very best, a believer in any ideology can only be a self-deluded liar. On the other hand, modern progressives do not seem to think that they themselves are believing in any ideology at all; they believe that they are being reasonable, scientific, and objective. This also hearkens back to the basic incapacity of Marxism to ever comprehend itself as an actual ideology. The formal position there is that everyone else is wrapped in ideology, but Marxism itself is the true reality. This displays a remarkable blind spot regarding the nature of ideology, especially for a full-fledged theory of ideology.

In terms of strict ideological analysis, it is difficult to see how gay marriage could stop with just gay marriage. In other words, once the concept of marriage itself is understood not as a holy sacrament but rather as a social construct, there is little reason to stop from altering the concept even further. For example, one dimension of the concept of marriage in Western religion has been gender, or marriage being between a man and a woman. Now that dimension has been discarded. These raises the question: why should *number* remain a holy dimension, if gender has already been discarded? In other words, if marriage between people of the same gender is accepted, it is difficult to see why marriage should be limited to just two people; that is, it is difficult to see what would stand in the way of the legalization of polygamy (Greenfield, 2015). Progressive ideology imagines marriage as a fluid and changeable concept; and if this is the case, then perhaps we have only seen the beginning and not the end of the changes that the concept may eventually undergo.

In a way, the issue of gay marriage makes it clear how difficult it is to truly separate church from state. This is the case for the simple reason that every state is *itself* inspired by a particular "church," or ideology. Even the notion that church and state *should* be separated is reflective of one particular ideology that cannot and should be seen as interchangeable with others. Of course, it would seem that marriage must be defined by the state in one way or another. The question thus becomes not whether the state will define marriage, but rather in accordance with what ideology it will be defined. On the one hand, there is the relatively static concept of marriage as a union between one man and one woman; on the other, there is the fluid concept of marriage as being a union between any two consenting adults—which leaves open the possibility that the number "two" could also be undermined in the near future. These definitions are mutually exclusive and emerge from different ideologies; there is no real reconciliation possible between them.

It is worth noting, however, that the only real interest of the government in getting involved with the issue of marriage at all is to ensure the propagation of society: that is, it is fundamentally a matter of insuring families and children. This is likely why just about every society that has ever existed has defined marriage in terms of a union between a man and a woman: it is because this is the only sort of union that can actually produce children. It is also worth noting that the widespread acceptance of polygamy is actually much *more* common than the widespread acceptance of gay marriage—again, because polygamy (especially structures involving one man and several women) is a structure of union that is capable of increasing the production of children. In this sense, the structure of marriage supported by traditional Western religion would seem to be a reasonable one that has more to do with natural imperatives than with any sort of bigotry or hatred.

This argument would not matter from the perspective of progressive ideology, because ultimately, progressive ideology has nothing to do with either natural imperatives or the past or any form of tradition. Indeed, the fact that modern American society is turning into something unlike much that has been seen before would to the progressives be a badge of honor as opposed to a call for caution: after all, the entire idea is that society is "progressing," as it leaves behind the bigoted baggage of past societies and cultures and ascends into a new justice and freedom that has thus far never been imagined, let alone seen. This is an ideological postulate, pure and simple. But like the Marxists before them, liberals and progressives almost universally tend to see their own worldview as a form of science or objective truth, as opposed to seeing it as a devout religious faith that rivals the faith posited by Western religion.

It is telling, for example, that much of the progressive discourse on gender has done away with any considerations of biology (an actual science) altogether. Questions of social justice have come to take precedence over questions of objective reality, as can be seen in the way that the LGBT acronym displays a curious tendency to just keep expanding. The notion, for example, that there is a multiplicity of genders is a purely philosophical or ideological affirmation that has almost literally nothing to do with established biological science. At the level of biology, human beings (excepting the ones with rare chromosomal abnormalities) come in two varieties: XX and XY, which corresponds to female and male. Gender has traditionally been a term used to refer to the social roles and expectations that inhere to being XX or XY within the context of a given society and culture. The notion that gender is absolutely independent from biological sex and has a reality all of its own: this is a notion that is in general a pure ideological invention by modern progressivism, having literally no grounding whatsoever in any branch of established science.

As politically incorrect as it may be to say so, the "born this way" narrative regarding the nature of homosexuality is one example of the way that within progressivism, science has given way to ideology. In this and age, the very suggestion that a gay person is not necessarily "born" gay would be enough to get oneself labeled as an irremediable bigot. Meyer and McHugh (2016), however, confirmed through a rigorous and scientific systematic review that there is insufficient evidence to support several of the central claims of progressive gender ideology—including the notion that gay people are born that way. Rather, the study seems to point toward a complex psychological process of self-exploration that is strongly influenced by culture, experience, and ideology. This means that the dominant progressive narrative, which suggests that sexual orientation is an immutable property of the person that is fixed at birth, may well prove to be empirically false.

As French (2016) has reported on this study, for example, a correlation was found between childhood sexual and/or physical abuse on the one hand and the formation of LGBT identity on the other. This suggest two hypotheses. The first would be that LGBT children are abused *because* they are LGBT; the second, however, would that the trauma of childhood abuse *results in* the formation of LGBT identity. In order words, the direction of the causality is an open scientific question. Progressive ideology, however, has already made its decision, insisting that LGBT identity is immutable reality and that anyone who suggests otherwise is by definition a bigot. This points toward the more general tension between ideology on the one hand and science on the other. In its essence, science is not an ideology, but rather a process and method of open inquiry. If science produces findings that run contrary to the claims of a given ideology, then the usual response of that ideology would be to ignore and/or contort the claims of science in order to preserve the integrity of the ideological picture.

This is in the nature of almost any ideology. What makes the ideologies of modern progressivism and its ancestor Marxism so exasperating, though, is their ongoing insistence that they are not ideologies at all, but rather just objective reflections of science. There is nothing scientific, for example, about claiming that a biological man can transform into a biological woman, just because he thinks of himself as a woman: actual science would indicate that that XX or XY are coded into every cell of the human body, and that there is no way for any given person to change this situation. And yet modern liberals and progressives are the ones who recently staged what they called a March for Science, which consisted of full-throated support for the entire modern LGBT agenda. This genuinely is a form of bad faith and/or false consciousness, insofar as progressivism (like Marxism) tends to hijack the name of science while proceeding with activities in a thoroughly religious manner.

At the very least, it can be suggested that traditional Western religion does not suffer from this kind of bad faith. Every believing Christian also *knows* that he/she is a religious person; there is no question of actually denying it. On the other hand, the average modern progressive may consider himself to be an atheist who believes in science—whereas in truth, he is just as committed to his own ideology as any given Christian is committed to *his* ideology. This bad faith makes actual conversation and dialogue across ideologies a difficult project indeed, given that one side of the situation refuses to even acknowledge that is even engaged in ideology at all. In fact, this is probably an insidious tactical move that has been adopted by progressivism, perhaps on purpose: progressivism can claim the epistemological high ground by framing itself as standing up for objective reality, insofar as that enables it to dismiss rival ideologies as delusional. In truth, however, all ideologies are on even ground, with every ideology seeming as insane from opposing perspectives as any other.

Case Study: ISIS

At the global level, a huge conflict of ideology can be seen in the struggle between Western civilization on the one hand and the terrorist organization known as ISIS on the other. Among other things, the fact that this is often not even understood as an ideological conflict testifies to the actual depth of the ideological conflict. It is in this context that a comment such as the one made by Sanders, blaming Islamic terrorism on an empirical factor such as climate change, begins to seem significant (Liu, 2015). Such a comment displays ignorance of the fact that the issues at hand are ideological in nature; such a comment also displays a refusal to take ideology as a serious moving force for human beings.

Of course, such a blithe dismissal of ideology is also reminiscent of the Marxist view of ideology as false consciousness. The main idea would be that it matters little that the members of ISIS say that they are committing their actions in the name of the Islamic faith; the important point would be that the members of ISIS are delusional, and that they have no "true" understanding of why they are doing what they are doing, and that the "real" reasons for their actions have to do with empirical facts of political economy, and not with actual and sincere ideological belief. Again, this is because progressivism and modern secularism tend to be ideologies that refuse to accept that they themselves are ideologies, and that thus are incapable of comprehending the actual nature and power of ideologies. The simple fact would seem to be that if someone says that he is very clear about his motivations for his actions, then it would be a good idea to place some weight of evidence on that actual testimony, as opposed to believing in an *a priori* manner that he cannot possibly believe what he is saying. This is especially true if that person is from a different culture, given that different cultures often prove to have blind spots relative to each other.

In particular, it is worth considering here the fact that the very separation of church and state that is a cornerstone of most Western societies is completely missing from ISIS in particular and the Islamic world in general. That is, this separation itself proves to be the specific feature of *one particular ideology*, as opposed to a universal feature of all ideologies. In the Islamic world, the separation of church and state is not an ideal to be striven for, but rather a temptation to be rejected. The Islamic religion is, to an extent, an inherently political religion, with its prophet Muhammed actively trying to establish an Islamic society. Within such a context, it becomes almost absurd to insist on a separation of church and state; indeed, within such a context, a separation of church and state could only seem like a form of blasphemy, or society refusing to take Islamic religion seriously.

This claim is supported by the relevant data on this subject. According to survey research, huge majorities of people in Islamic countries would like sharia law—that is, the formal legal code of Islam—to be the law of their lands (Pew Research Center, 2013). They believe that the implementation of sharia law would be synonymous with justice, whereas the failure to implement such law would be tantamount to blasphemy. Within the context of Islamic ideology, it is fundamentally not acceptable to separate religious affairs from secular affairs. Without understanding this ideological point, it would be difficult to understand the nature of an organization such as ISIS or the sort of campaign on which such an organization is embarked. The basic point here is that aside from any extraneous questions pertaining to political economy, much of the Islamic world is fundamentally averse to anything like what the Western world has meant by the separation of church and state. There is a fundamental ideological conflict here having to do with essential and basic premises of society, and the conflict needs to be understood as such.

Wood (2017), for example, has made it clear that the explicit goal of ISIS is to establish a caliphate: that is, an Islamic state that is governed by sharia law. And if ISIS had its way, this would be the governing system for the entire planet. It is a fundamental premise of Islamic society that Islam must be reflected in the society's codes of laws, and that non-Muslims are essentially second-class citizens. This is not even an extremist or fanatical position, but rather the general view of most of the mainstream Islamic countries of the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Pakistan. Islamic society is an explicitly ideological project and understands itself to be such. Western society is also an explicitly ideological project—but a key difference here would be that more and more people in the West are failing to recognize the ideological foundations of their own societal project.

In this context, the oft-repeated phrase that "Islam is peace" becomes a problematic one. The basic fact is that this is a projection of what Western people tend to think about their own religious traditions in general, and not an accurate representation of the way in which many Islamic people around the world tend to view their own religious tradition. In even mainstream Islam today, "peace" comes through the dominance of Islam within society, and there is no concept of peace that can be separated from the full implementation of sharia law. The West, based on its own religious and ideological traditions, tends to assume that the separation of church and state cannot possibly be antithetical to any religious tradition anywhere else in the world. Again, however, this is a matter of projection, or imputing onto other ideologies the basic premises of one's own ideology. Just because Western religion is not opposed to the separation of church and state does not mean that Islamic religion is also not opposed to the separation of church and state. Much the opposite, the evidence indicates that the opposite is the true state of affairs.

In general, it would seem that believers in Western religion—who are generally on the conservative side of the political spectrum within America—have a deeper awareness of the threat posed by ISIS than people on the progressive side. And this is probably because adherents of Western religion know better than to underestimate the power of ideology. After all, most Christians feel a struggle to live in accordance with their own ideologies; they know what it means to work toward bringing their lives into congruence with abstract values. Therefore, when ISIS says that they are trying to fulfill the will of Muhammed, Christians at least structurally understand what that means, given that they themselves are trying to fulfill the will of Jesus. In other words, adherents of Western religion know the driving power that ideology can have, and they know better than to dismiss it as just a fantasy or a cover for more "real" forces at work in the political economy.

An irony, of course, would be that the progressives clearly have their own ideology as well—but they would in general seem to be woefully unaware of how ideology operates, given that they refuse to acknowledge their own ideology as an ideology, as has been discussed above. As a result, the more secular people within America and Western society would seem to have some difficulty with understanding the nature and motivations of a threat such as ISIS. If Islam is defined as peace, then ISIS would perforce have to be defined as non-Islamic—which causes problems and incoherencies of its own, given that ISIS is in several respects only a more extreme representative of policies that have general mainstream support within much of the Islamic world. In short, without in-depth ideological analysis, it becomes almost impossible to understand the enemy within this context. They must remain mysterious and perhaps even seem inevitable, almost like a force of nature, as opposed to being human beings who are motivated by very specific factors.

This also causes problems when it comes to the question of the posture that America should take toward the Islamic world, including with respect to immigration. For example, it is true that religious discrimination is not tolerated within America, meaning that a person's faith should not affect his/her opportunities within the society and culture. However, this distracts attention from the deeper question of *legitimate* discrimination on the basis of ideology. In general, America, as well as any nation, has the sovereign right to protect itself from any person, group, or ideology that advocates the violent overthrow of its legitimate government. Insofar as there are certain strains of Islam that do in fact call for such a thing, the American government would have the right to guard itself against adherents of those strains, including efforts to keep those adherents from entering the country. This would be *not* because these strains are Islamic, but rather because they are violent and extremist.

The way McCarthy (2017) has put the matter is that it is not Islam that America needs to ban but rather "sharia supremacism," or anyone who has the intention of working toward a revolution where the constitutional system of the nation is overthrown and replaced by sharia law. Sharia supremacism is a menace to American society and culture, and it is the explicit duty of the government to protect its people against such a menace. Where the issue gets tricky, however, is distinguishing between monitoring for sharia supremacism on the one hand and overt religion discrimination against Islam on the other. Of course, it is an obvious point that one cannot really be a sharia supremacist without *also* being a Muslim; however, it is not necessarily true that all Muslims are conversely sharia supremacists. But the point still stands that all of the targets of this kind of monitoring will in fact be Muslim, and this means that enemies of such a policy could easily blur the conceptual lines in order to make the argument that the monitoring amounts to religious discrimination.

In a certain sense, this calls attention to the fact that it is virtually impossible to have a society *without* religious discrimination, insofar as every ideology can be understood as its own sort of religion. A society built on the principle of tolerance nevertheless cannot and should not tolerate an open ideology of intolerance. Likewise, the American ideology—or *civic religion*—is premised on the separation of church and state, which means that at the end of it all, America cannot really tolerate ideologies that seek to abolish this separation, or the constitutional system of checks and balances more generally. If Islam, as such, is intent on the imposition of sharia law, then it would logically follow that America cannot really tolerate Islam. As the matter stands, America can *only* accept the forms of Islam that in good faith do not call for the imposition of sharia law across all of society—assuming that such forms do exist.

It is worth noting here that America has a history of banning certain ideologies from the country. The Communist Control Act of 1956, for example, placed strong restrictions on the presence of Communists within the country (Auerbach, 1956). Even at the time, commentators reflected on the implications of such laws for free speech. The same sort of questions can also be raised from the perspective of religious (or ideological liberty). What does freedom of religion really mean, if a person does not have a right to be a Communist or jihadist? More specifically: at what point does the government have the right to set parameters on what is and is not a threat to the nation as a whole? Few would deny that there is a point at which such restrictions become legitimate. However, it is also true that there may be a kind of slippery slope involved, where once the government gets started regulating speech and/or religion, the process can continue indefinitely, until the nation as a whole is reduced to a state of tyranny, where the only acceptable speech is that which has been approved or authorized by the government as safe and legitimate.

For example, according to emerging progressive ideology, to question the religion of Islam is becoming defined as "hate speech" against Muslims, just as to question the nature of homosexuality is becoming defined as hate speech against gay people. From that premise, progressives could easily move to outlaw viewpoints that are common against believers in traditional Western religion, on the grounds that such viewpoints are filled with "hate." Of course, this logic would be absurd and a clear violation of both freedom of speech and freedom of religion. But in that case, why was it not absurd to deem Communists an actual threat to the nation, or to now deem sharia supremacists as the same? The danger here is of a slippery slope on the one hand, and understanding the entire matter as a relativistic slide of perspectives on the other.

The answer here would seem to hinge on the fact that an actually dangerous ideology would have to hinge on a threat to the American system of governance itself, as opposed to hurt feelings among any given group of people under that system of governance. Sharia supremacy would be dangerous not because its basic ideas may be distasteful to many Americans, but rather because sharia supremacy is an actual praxis of violence, manifesting in the development on non-assimilating Islamic enclaves and random terrorist attacks in public spaces. The fact that a given person may disagree with the "born this way" narrative of homosexuality nevertheless does not give him/her the authority to interfere with the natural and constitutional rights of any given gay person. Likewise, no matter how much a sharia supremacist may disagree with the American system of laws, his/her actions must nevertheless be judged by that system; and if that person has an ideology that directly leads him/her to commit violence and offend against the rights of others, then that ideology could in fact be called a dangerous one, with America as a whole being justified in trying to exclude it from the nation's borders.

A crucial point that emerges here is that America does in fact have a coherent ideology of its own, and that ideology has to a large extent been derived from Western religion and the Judeo-Christian tradition. And no ideology can tolerate another ideology that overtly seeks its destruction. The modern ideology of secular progressivism does not seem to know what it is doing, given that it is unmoored from the general language of ideology altogether. What should be clear is that no American can actually cooperate with the ideology of sharia supremacism while still remaining ideologically an American, due to the simple fact that the ideology of sharia supremacism exists in fundamental antagonism against the constitutional values and ideology of America. This is a kind of zero-sum game, in the sense that neither ideology would ever be able to abide with the dominance of the other.

This can perhaps be understood as a form of religious discrimination. But insofar as that is the case, the crucial caveat that must be added is: *every* society must engage in religious (or ideological) discrimination of one kind or another, insofar as no society is obliged to tolerate an ideology that aspires to violently overthrow its own ideology and deepest values. America may well be unique in the fact that it is a society in which free speech and religious freedom are held in such high regard that even truly dangerous ideologies are given a fair hearing, to the greatest extent possible that is compatible with reasonable security. As history has shown, many other regimes have had no qualms about just conducting violent purges against dissidents of any kind, in any effort to purify and secure the bases of society and culture. The ideology of America, however, largely prevents this from happening and extends legal protection even to those with the most atrocious and literally un-American of views. The next section of the present analysis will argue that this is an ideology that is specific to the West, and that it is to a large extent derived from the premises of Western religion.

Liberty and the Evangelical Mentality

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, issued by the United Nations (1946), is purportedly a secular document. And yet there are all sorts of principles and assertions within the document that are clearly inspired by powerful ideological values. The very notion that a human being has any "right" at all is a fairly novel one that only emerged within a particular historical and cultural context. Among other things, it implies the idea of a benevolent Creator who has granted an image of his own dignity to all of his creatures. The notions of rights and inherent dignity seem obvious, of course, to most people in the modern West. But when the foundations are of such values are examined, it becomes clear that people are either walking on nothing but air, or else creating their own foundations out of nothing, in a very religious and ideological manner.

Of course, this Declaration strongly hearkens back to the American Declaration of Independence, as well as the Bill of Rights of the American Constitution. For anyone familiar with world history (and even American history) it should be obvious that the provision of the declaration of the United Nations (1946) that abolishes slavery is a novel development: virtually every society prior to recent times, including the ones that fed into the modern West, had no qualms at all with slavery as a social institution. The very concept that there is such a thing as a universal human and that this universal human has inherent rights: this concept itself is the product of a highly unique and specific culture and ideology. This points toward the inherently religious foundations of modern secularism and humanism. These values did not just emerge out of nothing, as if created within a vacuum. Rather, they are expressions of the moral core that has always been present within Western religion, albeit translated to some extent and with a great deal of metaphysical "baggage" dropped.

It is worth noting, for example, that the Islamic world developed its own counterproposal regarding human rights (Islamic Council, 1981). This document affirms much of what the United Nations (1946) document affirms, except that it relates all of its propositions to "the Law," which in this context as well as in the original Arabic means sharia law. It would be fair to suggest that this gives the game away. Who in the West would be comfortable with the proposition that a person cannot lose his life *except* in accordance with the parameters of sharia law? For a non-Muslim, sharia law is fundamentally not to be trusted as a code of justice, and the notion of a society that is governed by sharia law, as opposed to constitutional principles, can only be understood as an unjust society.

This calls attention to the basic irony of both the documents above calling themselves "universal" in their scope. In particular, the United Nations (1946) declaration is clearly *not* universal as in applying to the entire human species, if the Islamic world explicitly feels the need to qualify the statements of that declaration with explicit references to Islamic law and culture. Rather, the only reasonable conclusion that could be drawn is that the United Nations declaration is uniquely a product of the West, just as American ideology is uniquely a product of the West. And both could be seen as closely tied to the general history of Western religion and ideology. When these values are called universal, this is an aspirational and *not* a descriptive statement: all it means is that Western people believe that these values *should* be universal, and that it is wrong for them to not be universal. That itself, would of course be a feature of Western ideology itself. Unlike many other ideologies, Western ideology—whether Judeo-Christian or secular-progressive—tends to believe that it lays claim to universal verities, and that it the responsibility of the adherents of the ideology to spread the good word far and wide, converting the whole world if possible.

This leads to the odd paradox that Western culture tends to be *evangelical* about human liberty. By its own ideology, America tends to believe that all people in the world should have the same values that America has, and that the founding principles of America and Western societies more generally should be adopted by societies and cultures all over the world. These core Western values are the ones that are actually reflected in the United Nations (1946) declaration. It is important to bear in mind that these values are not shared by all cultures and societies, but certain cultures and societies believe that they *should* in fact be universally shared. Without this basic premise, it would be almost impossible to understand ideological conflicts around the world, and Western civilization would be left with little but non-comprehension over why everyone else seems to be so uncooperative.

It must be granted, of course, that there has been a lot of hypocrisy within the West itself. The West has a long history of imperialism, after all, and even the American Constitution itself allowed for the ongoing existence of the institution of slavery. But it is also true that the West eventually relinquished all of its colonies, and that the abolition of slavery is now understood to do a fundamental and universal human value. In a certain sense, then, the historical hypocrisy must be balanced against the ongoing aspiration. It is deplorable that the West in general and America in particular tolerated slavery; however, it is also true that modern Western societies are among the leading ones that have ever considered slavery to be a moral problem and actually moved toward the abolition of the institution. There have been many societies and cultures in the world that have never thought about slavery as a problem at all, given that they did not possess ideological values that would have led them to think of slavery as a problem. Rather, they would have thought of it as just part of the natural order of things and a fundamental feature of their political economies.

Moreover, it is important to understand that the emphasis on individual dignity and liberty that marks modern Western civilization is probably inextricable from Western religion. It is Western religion that posits that man is made in the image of God; and it is also Western civilization that posits that God himself became the bearer of salvation in the form of a specific individual man. These ideological propositions strongly accentuate the value of the individual person *qua* individual person, and not just as the representative or organ of whatever collective group. The notion that all people are created equal can itself not be understood without appeal to the Judeo-Christian God. This world makes it clear enough that all people are *not* equal, whether in terms of their circumstances or their capabilities or their genomes. The ideological proposition, though, would be that before their Creator, all people are equal with each other, and that this is the principle that must be reflected in the organization of a free society as well as its system of laws.

This is a highly ambitious concept, and it should be clear by now how ideological and even religious the concept really is. In a certain sense, it would be almost impossible for the entire world to accept the concept unless the entire world also accepted at least some of the implications of the basic premises of Western religion. In this sense, the quest for universal liberty, as well as policies and forms of governance that are meant to further that quest, ultimately derive from Western religion, which means that Western religion always has and should probably continue to have an enormous effect on the politics of the West, at both the domestic and the global levels. Once it is understood that the idea of universal human liberty itself was founded within the West and emerged from particular forms of ideology and culture, it would be almost impossible to coherently reach any other conclusion than the one that has been posited here.

The evangelical drive associated with the West's belief in liberty has sometimes gotten the West into trouble. This was clearly the case, for example, with George Bush II and the Iraq War. It is true that there may have a range of political economic factors that were associated with the invasion of Iraq. At the same time, however, it also seems clear that Bush felt a real and sincere drive to bring democracy to the Middle East (Sanger, 2003). Bush was a believer in Western religion, and he seemed to mix his religious evangelism with the global priorities of America within the political sphere. One could suggest that this was a bad idea; but on the basis of the above analysis, it has now become clear that the dividing line between Western religion on the one hand and American ideology on the other has never been such a clear one, insofar as many of the political premises of America and the West must be understood as having been at least indirectly derived from Western religion.

Indeed, the way that the West tends to talk about freedom and democracy are reminiscent of the Great Commission that can be found at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, in which the disciples of Christ are told to go forth and spread the good news all over the world. A similar kind of evangelical zeal can be seen in the general Western desire to see the whole world become democratic and free. This cannot be attributed to pure coincidence; rather, it could be suggested that there is an actual genealogical connection between the universalism of the Great Commission on the one hand and the universalism of Western ideology on the other. In both cases, the ideological assumption that is made is that the "chosen" people have the special mission of delivering enlightenment and/or salvation to the rest of the people of the world. And of course, the concept of the chosen people goes back much further than the time of Jesus, extending all the way back into the Old Testament, with the Jews being the archetype of what it means to be chosen.

The line that is being traced here, then, is from the choosiness of the Jews with the Judaic tradition, through the Great Commission within the Christian tradition, to the evangelism of liberty and democracy that can be found within the modern, largely secular West. In a way, it would seem that the West has forgotten the roots of its own zeal, as well as the foundations of its own ideologies. It is as though the West has now come to believe in its own rhetoric, forgetting that its own ideologies are not universal at all but rather the products of specific historical, cultural, and societal constructs. It is one thing to affirm that the ideologies of the West *should* be universal; it is something else altogether, and even a form of delusion, to carry on as if the ideologies of the West already *are* universal.

If the Middle East seems to be struggling, for example, that may in fact be a reflection of Western ideological bias. From the perspective of many Muslims in the Islamic world, the actual goal to be achieved is not a free and democratic society but rather a theocracy ruled by sharia law. In this context, attempts to import Western-style democracy into the Islamic world would almost be doomed to failure from the start, since not only does the currently existing ideology of the Islamic world not allow for this form of governance, that ideology that not even consider any sort of aspiration for such a form of governance. Indeed, this is probably one of the most important of the modern examples of the confusions and troubles that can ensue when the West begins believing its own rhetoric and acts as though its own ideologies are in fact universal. Careful ideological analysis should have indicated from the start that the project of democracy in the Middle East would fail, and would continue to fail unless and until there were radical changes in the ideology of the Islamic world itself, such that the Islamic world became "converted" to the ideology of the West, as opposed to seeing the latter in the most antagonistic of terms.

In this context, it is also worth pointing to the potential ways in which the ideological conflict within America itself could become a dangerous one. It was argued above that modern secularism and Western religion have a great deal in common, insofar as modern secularism is derived from several of the premises offered by Western religion itself. However, there would seem to be a dangerous trend in play within American politics, which consists of the increasing totalitarianism of the political Left. In principle, it would seem that what is happening is that the liberals and progressives have generally given up on Western religion, but they have maintained both its evangelical zeal as well as its faith in the Kingdom of Heaven. The Left, though, has transposed the Kingdom from the vertical dimension of another world to an actual future reality that is to be achieved within the confines of History.

As Goldberg (2009) has indicated, this transposition lays at the origins of what can literally (and not just as a slur) be called fascism. Essentially, the state replaces God as the driving force of History, with an insistence on individual liberty does becoming a form of blasphemy or getting in the way of God's plan. Echoes of this mentality can be heard in the American political belief that they are on the vanguard of History, doing History's will—which, of course, produces something between exasperation and resentment toward people who insist on being free in ways that do not correspond to the Left's divinations of History's will. This sort of thinking is religious through and through; and more than that, it is religious in a thoroughly Western fashion. Without the theological concepts and categories developed by the Judeo-Christian tradition, this kind of secular progressivism would be totally inconceivable. This is why despite how far apart traditional Western religion may seem from secular progressivism, it must be asserted from a broader perspective that secular progressivism is itself a form of Western religion.

Ironically, however, in their desire to break down the barrier between church and state and use the state as an agent of divine will, the progressives may actually have quite a bit more in common with the sharia supremacist strains of Islam than they imagine. In both cases, individual liberty is a bug and not a feature, with the state's role being not to defend individual liberty but rather to fulfill the will of God, whether that God is identified with the name of History or the name of Allah. From the perspective of such a grand project, individual liberty would just get in the way of things, given that liberty tends to be disorganized and messy, with people often opting not to follow the plan of History or Allah. The state thus becomes an agent of social engineering, or a way of getting people in line with the grand historical agenda. This is quite antithetical to the nature of the American experiment itself, where the purpose of the state has always been *not* to embark on positive historical agendas but rather to defend the liberty and security of the American people.

Traditional Western religion allows for the separation of church and state, due to two main reasons. Firstly, it is assumed that God and not man is the driver of history, which means that man does not need to take responsibility for grand historical agendas. Secondly, it is also assumed that the Kingdom of Heaven is transcendent and not immanent—meaning, it is literally another world that can only be made real by God himself, and not an incremental project that can be achieved in the future simply through better or different governance. These assumptions allow for a maximum of liberty within everyday life, since the state would have no real agenda to pursue than the defense of such liberty. In contrast, the secular progressivist ideology that has been derived from Western religion, like sharia supremacist Islam, has inherently totalitarian ambitions, insofar when one believes that one is doing the will of God, the liberty of others seems like little more than an annoyance that must be overcome.

Description versus Aspiration, Revisited

On the basis of the discussion and analysis that has been conducted above, it will be worthwhile to revisit the difference between the descriptive and aspirational perspectives that was discussed in the introduction of the present paper. This analysis has shown that at the descriptive level, ideology strongly affects politics at all times, insofar as politics is nothing other than people with different values working out their conflicts within the public irony. All people have values, and all values emerge from ideologies. In that sense, politics within an ideology is literally unthinkable: even the most primitive people have an implicit ideology that tells them that it is worthwhile to fight for survival and to try to get their own way, their own will and their own power.

In this sense, it could be suggested that the philosopher Nietzsche (1989) was correct about his concept of the will to power. However, for most people, life in general and politics in general is not just about mere animal survival, but also about the pursuit and defense of higher values. For Americans, such a value may be liberty, whereas in the Islamic world, such a value may be submission to the law of Allah; but either way, people develop and then strive to achieve such values. Politics is always animated by such conflicts, which means that it is impossible to imagine a politics in the absence of an ideology. Even people who claim to be strictly "pragmatic" are merely obscuring their own ideologies from others and even from themselves, given that an actual pragmatism of *ends* is logically impossible (Goldberg, 2009). One can be pragmatic about how goes about achieving one's ends; but there is no such thing as an end that is defined by pragmatism alone; rather all ends arise within the context of values (even if the value is just simple survival) and all values emerge from ideologies, which finally means that ideology will always heavily impact politics.

Moreover, it has been argued above that the general ideology of the West is inseparable with the history of Western religion. Whenever anyone talks about human rights, they are implicitly drawing on the Judeo-Christian tradition: even in its secular form, this language is premised on axioms and postulates that can squarely be located within Judeo-Christian conceptions of history, ethics, and justice. These values are not universal at all; rather, they follow from a specific culture and ideology that is not and has not been shared with the rest of the world. In this sense, insofar as ideology will always have a huge effect on politics and governance, the same can be said for Western religion itself, insofar as Western religion is foundational to the ideology of the West.

It is worth noting again that this is true even among people in the West who consider themselves secular or even have an overt disdain for traditional Western religion. As has been noted here, even the secular-progressive version of history, as exemplified by Marxism, is unthinkable without the basic Judeo-Christian notion of God having a plan and History having a fulfillment toward which it is striving. There is nothing objective or scientific about such premises; rather, they are ideological through and through. This means that even those who claim to "hate" Western religion nevertheless owe a very serious debt to it, to the point that it is only the foundation laid by Western religion itself that enables their own critical vision in the first place. Essentially, Western religion will continue to influence politics as long as values such as universal human rights, democracy, and the dignity of every person continue to influence politics. The far Left within America in these times, whether one believes they are really fighting for justice or not, are nevertheless compelled to make reference to justice in order to argue the righteousness of their own cause. This shows the extent to which Western religion is still influencing even putatively secular ideologies.

The aspirational dimension of ideology, especially Western ideology, is clearly evangelical in the same way that the Judeo-Christian tradition is evangelical. According to the Bible, the Jews are the specifically chosen people who nevertheless bore a message for the entire human race. Similarly, all of Western ideology, especially when it comes to its own claims of universalism, is clearly premised on the notion that Westerners are a chosen people who have good news to bring to the rest of the world. The concept of universal human rights initially just began as the rights that people had within the context of modern Western societies, and there are still many places in the world where such rights are not respected. In purely descriptive terms, then, universalism is a joke; but in aspirational terms, it testifies to the evangelical impulse that's at the heart of Western ideology, which even its secular forms has clearly been derived from Western religion.

It must be acknowledged, of course, that this evangelical impulse has often been self-serving and cruel. One thing of the long history of Western imperialism and racism, for example, which was often characterized by the *a priori* assumption of white people that their own culture and race was superior to anything else to be found on the planet. This is absolutely deplorable, and it has no defense. Nevertheless, what must also be acknowledged is the West's seemingly preternatural capacity for course correction. America did have slavery, but America also got rid of slavery, to a large extent because it became all too clear that the institution of slavery was not compatible with the ideology of America, especially as that ideology was expressed in the Declaration of Independence. In short, the fact that the West has often descriptively fallen short of its own values does not imply that those values themselves have not been commendable, or that there is anything intrinsically wrong with wanting those values to be universal.

Indeed, this desire for universalism is inherent to all evangelical religion. Of course, a Christian would want every other person in the world to be a Christian: if one's ideology suggests that it contains the Way, the Truth, and the Life, then it follows from simple compassion that the believer would want everyone else to experience that reality as well. In a directly parallel manner, the notion of universal human rights is aspirational, not descriptive. Not everyone is a Christian, but from a Christian perspective, everyone should be a Christian; not everyone has their human rights recognized, but from the perspective of Western civilization, everyone should have their human rights recognized. There is presumably only a very small number of people in this day and age who actually believe that human rights are worthless—and in fact, this testifies to how genuinely effect the West has been with respect to its efforts of ideological evangelism.

At the purely descriptive level, it is clear that cultural relativism holds a great deal of truth. It is a fact, for example, that the Middle East is animated by Islamic principles that may well be antithetical to the ideology of the West; and more generally, it is true that every culture develops and adheres to its own ideology and system of values. From the Western perspective, however, some ideologies and cultures are better than others, just as a free and democratic society is better than a tyrannical and autocratic society. This is not just a matter of horizontal comparison but rather vertical value judgment. At the same time, however, it must also be acknowledged that (simple ethnocentrism aside) the ranking system for cultures and ideologies is itself a product of Western ideology. There is a kind of tautological and self-fulfilling dynamic that emerges here—a dynamic that is not the problem of Western ideology per se, but rather an inherent paradoxical feature that emerges when one asks questions about the original premises of faith.

It is also worth pointing out that America as it has been known has been an aspirational project, with certain ideological principles being considered sacrosanct and essential to the preservation of American values. Liberty and justice have not been permanent and enduring realities within the nation, but rather more of a work in progress, with most Americans believing that at least attempting to make that progress is worthwhile. In this context, it is ironic that the contemporary camp that self-identifies as "progressive" may in fact constitute the most serious domestic threat to this project—due to the simple fact that for them, progress seems to mean not the increasing instantiation of American values but rather the supersession of American values altogether.

It is worth considering, for example, events as of the year 2017 involving free speech, safe spaces, and microaggressions. The main idea of a safe space is that students at colleges have the right to be protected from ideas that they may find disturbing and/or may make them uncomfortable (Cooke, 2015). This is done in the name of social justice. However, two points should be clear from contemporary discussions. Firstly, to establish such a safe space is probably a violation of First Amendment protections of free speech, insofar as people who say "offensive" things could be punished for doing so, and without due process to boot; and secondly, to establish a safe space *on a college campus*, when the entire purpose of higher education is to teach students how to think critically about a diversity of views and perspectives, is surely the height of absurdity. Of course, from the perspective of the progressive ideology, this all makes perfect sense. It only ceases to make sense if one looks at the matter from the perspective of traditional American values, as they are exemplified in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. From the progressive angle, these basic protections of liberty seem to be treated as

nothing more than barriers to be overcome as society "progresses" away from individual liberty and toward a collectivist social justice.

In this context, the culture wars within America could be understood as being the reflection of the conflict between two different aspirational ideologies, with Western religion on one side of the divide and secular progressivism on the other. Secular progressivism is always trying to realize the eschaton and bring about the end of history, often using authoritarian means to pursue its agendas if and when it can get its hands on the levers of power (Goldberg, 2009). Western religion, on the other hand, tends to place emphasis on the dignity and liberty of the individual person within the political sphere, leaving questions of the eschaton and the end of history for God himself to figure out through his work. Although somewhat schematic, this conceptualization shows why the cultural wars and political debates have become so vitriolic in these times.

Of course, it is not possible to say which side is "better" in anything resembling an objective manner, given the simple fact that from the perspective of either ideology, it looks better, and its rival seems like the enemy. From the perspective of conservative ideology and its underpinnings in Western religion, secular progressivism seems like it is out to destroy America itself. From the perspective of secular progressivism and its revolt against Western religion, on the other hand, Western religion seems like nothing other than a cover for bigotry and an obstacle against the achievement of the utopia of social justice. Even an appeal to the rule of law cannot be used to consider one ideology better than its counterpart, insofar as the rule of law itself may emerge from more conservative ideological premises, with secular progressivism often seeming to view the law more as a tool to be used to pursue its own ends than an absolute value to be respected in and of itself.

The fact that both Western religion and secular progressivism are deeply aspirational is the reason why this ideological conflict is an intractable one, in a similar sense to how the conflict between Western religion and Communism was an intractable one. The secular progressive definition of social justice is such that it cannot ultimately tolerate the ongoing existence of Western religious ideology. For example, one recent news item has indicated that the Alliance Defending Freedom is a "hate" group, when it is in fact nothing other than a defender of First Amendment protections of religious liberty (Pair, 2017). The label was given because the Alliance Defending Freedom supports causes such as the right of a baker to refuse to utilize his skills to make a cake for a gay wedding, in the event that such participation would run contrary to his religious conscience.

From the perspective of traditional Western religion, the notion that marriage is a union between a man and woman is a commonplace one; it is only recently, and only under the auspices of secular progressivism, that marriage has been able to get itself defined as something else. For a believer in Western religion, then, it makes complete sense that participation in gay marriage would seem immoral. This would have nothing to do with "hate" against any of the persons involved, but rather simply a matter of conscience regarding what marriage is and what marriage is supposed to be. From the perspective of secular progressivism, however, such a stand of conscience gets in the way of their societal project of social justice; and insofar as progressives tend to flatter themselves with the notion that their project is all about "love," it would logically follow that individual stands of conscience against that project could only be driven by "hate." It is by this inexorable logic that it becomes not only possible but even necessary to move forward and stand by the claim that the Alliance Defending Freedom must be a hate group.

It is only from within the aspirational framework of secular progressivism itself that it looks like ongoing identity politics and perpetual sexual revolution seem like good things that further the cause of social justice. From the perspective of a more traditional or conservative American ideology, it very much seems like these things are tearing the country apart, not to mention unraveling the foundations of individual liberty that were the unique features of the American experiment all along. In general, progressives think that traditional ideological values are themselves obstacles to justice and must thus be overcome, whereas conservatives think that traditional ideological values are the only safeguards that liberty has and are thus worth protecting. The ideological schism within contemporary America could thus be framed in terms of liberty/dignity and a general embrace of traditional Western religion on the one hand, versus social justice and a general rejection of Western religion on the other.

Of course, there is no reason for genuine liberty/dignity to be at odds with genuine social justice; rather, one could even say that the one would be the precondition for the other. The way that secular progressivism has framed "social justice," however, it is clear that the project is essentially a collectivist one that often displays outright disdain and even contempt for real individual liberty. Ideologically speaking, this has always been the nature of left-wing political aspirations, beginning at least with Marxism itself: the value of liberty can be shelved until the Communist utopia finally arrives, and in the meanwhile, little else matters but the accumulation of power. The aspiration is set against the other aspiration of a society of free people here and now, with any future justice being inseparable from the rule of law in the here and now. This is a descriptive account of the nature of the ideologies at play here. Whether one ideology is better than the other will depend on one's own ideological orientation, but what is objectively a fact is that this ideological conflict does in fact very much exist.

3. Methodology and Results

Thus far, the present paper has developed a sophisticated theoretical framework and context for conducting analysis of ideologies. This has largely been based on a synthesis of various important ideas from the relevant literature, and the main claims of the framework can be summarized in the following way:

1. Politics is inherently ideological, because values emerge from ideologies, and people are driven by values: politics is the process through which people negotiate their ideological differences within the public arena.
2. Western religion is foundational to the entire ideology of the West, to the point that even secularized concepts such as universal human rights must be understood as derivations from Western religion.
3. Ideology can be discussed in terms of description as well as in terms of aspiration: in terms of what is actually the case, as well as in terms of what *should be* the case.
4. Secular progressivism is an alternative ideology that has emerged within the West, but it clearly owes a great debt to traditional Western religion, to the point that it can in some contexts be understood as a Western religion in and of itself.
5. Western ideology, whether in traditional or secularized form, tends to have the same evangelical zeal that can be traced all the way back to the Bible.

The purpose of this part of this paper will be to report actual independent data that has been collected by the present student, so that the data can then be analyzed in terms of this framework that has been developed above. This will allow insights to be drawn that both strengthen the framework itself and help shed a better light on the contemporary state of ideology in America today.

The following interview was conducted with a selected American congressman. The subject agreed to speak freely with the student on the condition of anonymity, citing the volatile nature of the contemporary political scene for this request. Essentially, the congressman felt that he would experience a backlash from his colleagues and/or the general public if it became known that he reported the responses that are about to be presented here. This was somewhat disconcerting, but at the same time also reasonable and understandable, given how volatile politics within the nation has now become. In any event, the student was grateful for the promise of honest and open answers from the congressman. The interview was recorded, so that an accurate transcription of the questions and responses could be made. That full transcription will be reported below.

Before proceeding to that, though, a few words regarding methodology may be in order. The present study utilized a qualitative case study approach (Merriam, 2009). This consists of retrieving verbal data from selected subjects, and the analyzing that data for key themes that reflect on the main questions of the study being performed. Unlike with a quantitative study, a small sample is acceptable for qualitative research, since the point of the study not to produce statistically generalizable conclusions but rather to get as deep (and not necessarily broad) an insight into the phenomenon under consideration as possible. The sample of the present study consists of only the one single congressman. It may have been desirable to include more congressmen in the sample, but this proved to unfeasible for logistical reasons. In any event, the findings reported below, while all coming from one subject, were nevertheless adequate for formulating conclusions on the basis of analysis using the theoretical framework developed above. In the follow transcript, the student's questions are in bold, and the congressman's responses are in standard font.

The Interview

As you know western religion consists of multiple traditions. Do you subscribe to a western religion?

I do.

What religious sect do you declare allegiance or membership to?

I'm a Baptist.

How has your belief system shaped your local and national political views?

It has made me a more compassionate man. I'm well aware I work for a secular government and must weight that with my religion. But I chose to serve largely because in my faith tradition there is no greater honor than to serve others.

As a congressman, do you allow your religious belief to shape how you vote on legislation?

Sometimes. As I said before I have to weight these things often. Many times, I feel at odds with my religious convictions and the electorate. Sometimes I vote based on religious conviction and other times I vote with the shouts of my constituents. But if I feel strongly about something and the majority of my district disagrees, I will try to communicate my position through a series interaction and hope I can change a few minds in the process.

When you are faced with these challenges of "religious conviction" in office how do you address them?

Sometimes not well... I feel God gives us latitude on some things and others He's non-negotiable about. I pray when faced with conflicts in my decisions. And any lawmaker who has served at least one legislative cycle will tell you they have made bad votes before...they man not

say it publicly...but they have. It's those moment where you learn and try not to make the same mistake again.

In the strict sense of American politics, are you in agreement with ordained clergy occupying elected office?

I don't see a problem with it. I know some look at ministers of the Gospel as one dimensional but if they are fit to lead and willing to serve I say go for it. When a clergyman of a western religion is elected into politics have you seen them "deify" the office in a sense or do they become entangled in the traditional trappings of our political culture. I have seen this scenario many times, even with friends. I got to tell you. More often than not I see them allow the office to transform them rather than transforming the office. The culture of politics is messy and when you add world affair it can get really messy. Top that with a "good old boy" network and it makes it almost impossible to stay here unblemished.

As a congressman have you seen a net positive or net negative impact western religion has had on other countries?

It depends on the country. We have had a bad tradition of colonizing other nations and pushing our structure of beliefs, ideologies and systems on other nations.

The truth is every nation is different and unique for a reason. Has Christianity created more conflicts or peace?

I can't quantify that but I can say religion in general has promoted both war and peace. It really comes down to people. People use religion in different ways. We all know religion is a tool and the tool of religion can fix or destroy.

Do we still fight wars based on religious motivations?

I don't think so. I know there's an agenda against Muslims but we are never at war with a religion only bad guys who use religion as a cover for their evil deeds.

Many say this country was founded as a Christian nation; what are your thoughts?

Well it wasn't and most people who say that know it. We are not a theocracy. As a matter of fact, the founding fathers wanted freedom from religious dogma. We are a secular nation founded by men of faith. Truly if this country is of any religious persuasion officially, it's capitalism. And if you don't think capitalism is a religion just ask those who worship money and will do anything to have it.

Christian Minister Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had a major impact on American policy; do you believe it was his faith that led his journey against oppression in America?

I would like to think he would have fought against oppression regardless of his faith because it was the right thing to do. His faith definitely gave him strength and courage to stare death in the face.

Do you travel the world often?

Yes.

In Your travels how would you describe the impact western religion has had on eastern nations?

Many Eastern nations despise Western religion. Not really because of the religion many times but because of America's connection to that part of the world. There are also many Christian missionaries who risk their lives daily and some have died trying to spread the teaching of Jesus Christ.

How much is our current American policy influenced by western religion?

Not as much as it used to be. We are a progressive nation despite current political leadership. Our policies have shifted on gay marriage, gay adoption and mass incarceration to name a few. The traditional views of some interpretations of Western religion would hold on to more traditional systems even though they can be discriminatory and unfair. It seemed at one-time world nations were moving in the direction of “globalization”.

But recently world citizens have experienced a shift to nationalism. What is your sense about this phenomenon?

I think it’s temporary. The Brexit vote, Trump in the White House...it’s all temporary. But I do think people are looking for something new and tired of politics as usual. That’s the real message being sent to politicians across the country. Thank God France didn’t screw up like we did.

Most elected officials in America belong to a western religion; do you think this restricts our world view and impedes openness to progressive ideologies?

It can. And I see it in my colleagues every day. I think when people elect a representative for the most part they are voting for them collectively and at times you will have to leave your religion at the door.

When world leaders meet do they promote a religious agenda or strictly a secular one?

I have never pushed my religion on a foreign leader and have never experienced it being done to me.

As we continue to evolve as a species do you see western religion playing a larger or smaller role on the world stage?

Much smaller. If we are talking about traditional interpretations of western religion it will probably be obsolete soon. As with anything if you can't evolve to changing times you will become a dinosaur. If I only compare very recent history, it seems western religion has a limited impact on world policy, politics and government outside of western nations. Also, there's a diminishing of traditional applications of western religion even in our current policies in the United States. Other western nations who prescribe to a more secular agenda experienced this shift years before us. As the world community continues to evolve I predict more secularism and less religious influences in our governmental policies both domestically and abroad.

Synopsis and Analysis

Qualitative data analysis for this transcript proceeded through a kind of constant comparative, iterative reading of the material (Merriam, 2009). This was done while keeping the theoretical framework developed above in mind. In other words, when the data resonated with one or more of the key themes from the theoretical framework, a special note was made of this, so that the relevant passages and assumptions could be cross-analyzed further. Again, given the qualitative nature of the study, no statistical analysis of any kind was used in the data analysis process. Rather, the process primarily consisted just of a close reading of the text, in order to pick up on nuances and/or unintended implications in the congressman's responses. Several key themes and important points were identified in this way; these will be discussed further in the findings and discussion section of the present paper below. A general point that can be affirmed here, however, is that there tended to be confusions and sloppy conceptual shifts present, precisely because of the fact that people do not ordinarily think of Western religion in ideological terms, or think of ideology itself as a primary and necessary driver of all political processes.

In broad strokes, during the interview, the congressman responded to questions regarding the role of Western religion in politics. The congressman himself self-identified as a Baptist, but it became clear over the course of the interview that his views were generally liberal, and that while his faith informed his politics in the same way that it informed every aspect of his life, he did understand the basic tension between living in accordance with his faith on the one hand and discharging his duties as a public servant on the other. In one moving part of the interview, he said that he prayed for guidance on the right way forward when this conflict became especially serious.

The congressman also tended to dwell on the problematic effects that America's ideological missions in other parts of the world have had for both global governance and national security. The congressman has indicated, for example, that America does in fact try to push its own agendas and ideologies on other nations, and that several parts of the world hate Western religion, not even so much because of the actual content of Western religion itself as because of its irrevocable association with Western and particularly American foreign policy. The congressman has also indicated—even perhaps expressed hope—that despite the fact that many of America's politicians and leaders are still people of faith, the influence of traditional Western religion may well be on the permanent decline, as all of Western culture becomes increasingly secularized and progressive.

The following discussion will elaborate on five key themes from the interview data in light of the theoretical framework of the present paper. Each of these five themes will be centered on one key quote from the congressman; and the theoretical framework will then be used to conduct a kind of exegesis on the quote, showing what is both accurate and inaccurate about the statements made by the congressman.

4. Findings and Discussion

Pushing Ideology

The congressman reported the following: "We have had a bad tradition of colonizing other nations and pushing our structure of beliefs, ideologies and systems on other nations" (Personal interview). The Iraq War and the notion of bringing democracy to the Middle East serves as a ready example here. The congressman acknowledged that America does in fact have an ideology, and that America does in fact have a habit of pushing its own ideology onto others. This follows from what has been written above regarding the aspirational nature of Western ideology: the West has had a historical tendency to think of its own ideology as absolute and/or universal, to the point where there exists a positive moral imperative to "share" that ideology with all other cultures and nations on the planet. In general, this ambition has not ended well.

The explanation that the theoretical framework of the present paper has provided for this aspirational quality of Western ideology is that Western ideology is derived from Western religion, with its tradition of the chosen people of the Old Testament and the Great Commission of the New Testament. These concepts give moral justification for the imperative of "converting" everyone else to one's own ideology. The quote under consideration was provided by the congressman in response to a question about religion, which suggests that the congressman understands the connection between religion on the one hand and this evangelical ideological impulse on the other. From the perspective of the congressman, however, this aspirations by and large illegitimate: he classifies it as one of the ways in which religion causes problems in politics. The congressman would presumably favor a more cautious and humble approach based on a rational analysis of competing interests, as opposed to the ideological drive to convert the world.

There is good reason to believe that the evangelical impulse in Western ideology has in fact been problematic when it comes to the West's politics. The Middle East, for example, has no real history of democracy; nor is there any real indication that the Islamic world would even want democracy in the Western sense of the word. Pew Research Center (2013), for example, has indicated that a huge majority of the population of Iraq actually wants sharia law to become the law of the land. This follows logically from the ideology of Islam, which in several dominant interpretations does not allow for a meaningful separation to exist between church and state. When America attempts to impose a foreign ideology, inspired by a foreign religion, on these people, the results could be expected to be predictably disastrous.

In another part of the interview, the congressman indicates that many adherents of non-Western religions actually "despise" Western religion for just this reason: because America has tried to push Western religion on people who just don't want it. This would of course provoke backlash and resentment: one only needs to imagine what would happen if America as a whole experienced a credible threat of a foreign power wanting to impose sharia law on this nation. This is basic human nature and psychology, and America's ideologically evangelical foreign policy may well be one of the key reasons why the strains of Islam that inspire terrorists and jihadists have become as virulent as they have. It should be a matter of common sense that when people in the Middle East feel that their own religious ideology is under attack, they will double down and develop fanatical versions of the ideology that are explicitly antagonistic toward the West and its values. From their perspective, this would be seen as a matter of simple self-defense, insofar as the intrusion of American and Western politics, ideologies, and forms of governance may well be seen by many people across the Islamic world as attempts to coerce them into apostasy.

As has been noted in the present theoretical framework, one of the key problems here may consist of the West actually coming to believe in its own rhetoric of universality. It has been pointed out here that this rhetoric of universality is aspirational and *not* descriptive. That is, from the perspective of the West, it seems like the basic premises of Western religion should be adopted by all people across the planet. The actual state of affairs, though, is that this has never happened, and this likely to never happen. The fact is that other nations and cultures have their own ideologies in which they believe in very deeply, at a core tenet of those ideologies may well become resistance to Western ideology, in the event that the West persists in its efforts to have them drop their own ideologies.

It is also interesting that the congressman refers to the history of imperialism as part of this ideological problem. In the past, the West has believed in the "white man's burden," or the religious and moral duty of the people of the West to convert the benighted colored fools of the rest of the worlds to Western religion. This was clearly self-righteous and ethnocentric in the extreme, and it deserves to be considered as one of the darker chapters in the history of the West. It may be true that the West has by and large moved past this sort of overt bigotry. But the point still stands that across much of the world, the credibility of the West may well remain tarnished, insofar as the West has real history of referring to high ideals as a veneer of justification for naked self-interest. Without an awareness of this historical dynamic, it may become difficult for people to understand why much of the world may remain unsympathetic or even outright hostile toward the West's ideological project. The basic fact is that this project has not always been carried out in good faith, and it is probably much easier for the "winners" of this dynamic to forget this historical insult than it is for people who have national memories of being exploited and robbed.

The main point that should be taken from these comments by the congressman, then, is that America probably should reconsider the evangelical nature of its own ideology. It is true, for example, that America should stand up for basic human rights all over the world; however, what is also true is that America cannot effectively promote systems of governance that are at odds with the ideologies of other societies and cultures. There is probably nothing, for example, that America can do about the Islamic world, insofar as even if the Islamic world were given full constitutional democracy, many nations there would then proceed to *democratically* overthrow that order and institute societies governed by sharia law. It can be difficult for people in the West to understand that people in other cultures may actually choose such a system—and this is precisely because people in the West have a naive view regarding ideology and a blind spot regarding the drastic differences that can exist between different ideologies.

In any event, it is worth pointing out that true biblical evangelism was never meant to be achieved through coercion. The introduction of evangelism into politics thus presents inherent problems all of its own, insofar as politics is inherently a domain in which force and coercion are always tools on the table with respect to achieving one's objectives. If the West truly does want its values to be universal, then this can almost certainly never be achieved at the point of a gun, just as real religious conversion at the individual level can never be achieved in that way. It is not wrong for the West in general and America in particular to have universalist aspirations regarding matters such as democracy and human rights. However, it is crucial for such aspirations to be balanced against a solid descriptive understanding of the nature of the objective ideological situation on the ground, as well as a comprehension of human nature that tells them how different people emerging from different ideological backgrounds are likely to react to different policy decisions.

Capitalism as Religion

One of the more interesting statements made by the congressman in the interview was the following: "Truly if this country is of any religious persuasion officially, it's capitalism. And if you don't think capitalism is a religion just ask those who worship money and will do anything to have it" (Personal interview, 2017). This passage explicitly calls attention to the way in which ideology morphs into religion, and the way in which religion itself is best conceptualized as a form of ideology. It has already been pointed out that Communism is clearly religious in its structure and premises. The congressman seems to be suggesting, though, that the same could be said about capitalism as well. And this helps shed some further light on the essential and inherent nature of ideology itself.

When the congressman refers to capitalism as a religion, he uses as supporting evidence the fact that for many people, money itself is the be-all and end-all of all values: whatever makes money is good, and whatever loses money is bad. The moral analysis of a devotee of capitalism would not really rise very far past this level—and it is probably true that many people do in fact think exactly in these terms. From the perspective of traditional American ideology, the highest value is individual liberty; from the perspective of Christianity, the highest value is emulating Jesus Christ; from the perspective of secular progressivism, the highest value is social justice; and from the perspective of capitalism, the highest value would be money. This makes a great deal of sense, and it is intuitive of the congressman to note that every ideology essentially has its own "god," or highest value to which its believers must answer. Some ideologies are in radical conflict with other ideologies, to the point that one ideology may not even be able to coexist with the other, given that they are engaged in a zero-sum game where the dominance of one value implies the abolition of the other.

In ultimate terms, this sort of tension would seem to exist between Christianity on the one hand and capitalism on the other. One thing of the passage from the Gospel narratives, for example, where Christ declares that one cannot worship both God and Mammon (often taken as a symbol of money) at the same time. This also makes a great deal of sense. If a person is a Christian, then he/she may eventually come to a decision point where there is a binary choice between doing the right thing and losing money on the one hand, and doing the wrong thing and making money on the other. If God is defined in terms of doing the right thing, then it would logically follow that within such a situation, it would in fact be impossible to serve both God and Mammon at the same time. One of the ideologies must clearly stand down and be relegated to a subordinate position.

This also calls attention to the fact, though, that not all ideological conflicts have to be absolute. It would be absurd, for example, to suggest that a Christian can never be a capitalist; the real issue is more of a matter of a priority of values. There may be many cases in which doing the right thing is not opposed to making money or may even be conducive to making money. The point is only that *if and/or when* a conflict emerges, the right thing would have to win out over money. To say that someone is a devotee of capitalism would thus be to suggest that money is their *highest* value, such that they will sacrifice all other values to the acquirement of money, should such a need ever arise. Likewise, there is no absolute contradiction between capitalism on the one hand and traditional American ideology on the other; if anything, there is actually a deep affinity. But suppose there is a situation where a business owner could make money by selling weapons to America's wartime enemies. At that point, the person would have to choose whether his/her loyalty to traditional American ideology is more important or less important than the prospect of making money.

In contrast, it is worth noting that there is in fact an absolute conflict that exists between American ideology on the one hand and Islamic sharia supremacism on the other (McCarthy, 2016). One can either have a constitutional democracy, or one can have a society governed by sharia law, but there is no way for one to have both; one can have either a separation of church and state, or a society in which the church has effectively become the state, but one cannot have both. This is an important point to consider, because this is nothing like the contradiction that may exist between Christianity and capitalism. The conflict there is not absolute, because the ideologies are essentially operating in different realms. But both American ideology and sharia supremacism explicitly address the issue of structure of governance, and only one of these ideologies can ultimately prevail within any given time and place.

A similar absolute conflict may be emerging between traditional Western religion on the one hand and secular progressivism on the other—and this is essentially because secular progressivism seems to want to invest the state with the powers that Western religion ascribes to God (Goldberg, 2009). Both of these ideologies address the same fundamental issues, such as the relationship of man to history and the relationship of man to god. And when two competing ideologies are fighting over fundamental premises regarding the same question, only one of them can ultimately prevail. It is worth pointing out, however, that it would seem to be secular progressivism that is primarily the aggressor in this conflict. That's because traditional American ideology allows for a diversity of faiths and religions, without thereby precluding the possibility of peacefully coexisting together. Secular progressivism, however, cannot really have tolerance for competing ideologies or religions, due to the simple fact that, like sharia supremacism, it wants to break down the wall between church and state and essentially establish itself as a political religion.

Some of these considerations go beyond what the congressman directly implied with his claim that capitalism is a religion. However, that statement opens up interesting vistas for the theoretical framework of the present paper, some of which have been explored above. A criticism of this notion, though, could consist of the fact that capitalism is not necessarily so much an ideology as it is a technique or system. In other words, the question that could be asked is: if one's objective is to maximize commerce and prosperity, then would a capitalist system of free markets be the best way to achieve that end? Material prosperity itself is an ideological value (there are people who become ascetics in the names of the religions, after all), but it is surely among the most rudimentary of values. In this context, the maximization of prosperity would be an empirical question and not an ideological one.

All the same, the congressman has a point that if money becomes an end in and of itself or the highest value to which a given person aspires, then in this context capitalism could in fact come to be seen as an ideology, or even as a religion. There is an undeniably ideological element to how different societies believe that resources ought to be distributed. The free market is one method; central planning is another; and so on. Again, though, it is worth bearing in mind that these methods are often correlated to specific values that are supposed to be achieved. The classic Communist motto, for example, was, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need." Western ideology has in general affirmed instead something along the lines of, "From each according to his will, to each according to his merit." History has seemed to show that the adoption of capitalism as a system is in fact the most effective method for generating material wealth. However, there may still be other cultures in which the generation of material wealth may be explicitly or implicitly less important than other values that capitalism may not be as effective at achieving.

The Current Moment

According to the congressmen, the current political moment within America after the 2016 presidential election should not be understood as indicative of a long-term trend but rather be seen as more of a passing fad. He has said: "I think it's temporary. The Brexit vote, Trump in the White House...it's all temporary. But I do think people are looking for something new and tired of politics as usual. That's the real message being sent to politicians across the country" (Personal interview, 2017). In other words, the congressman believes that the recent events are not so much a sign of basic ideological change as they are of widespread frustration with politics as usual. In this interpretation, if the political parties and their politicians just corrected course to some extent, it would be possible to avert any further frustrations.

Truth be told, though, this analysis seems quite superficial. Among other things, it is fairly clear that Donald Trump won the presidency because people voted for him for *ideological* reasons—or rather, they voted for him because they saw him as the last thing standing between America and the progressive agenda that wants to transform America for good. That progressive agenda grew by leaps and bounds under the Obama administration, and it would have almost certainly been consolidated under a potential Clinton administration. In this context, voting for Trump could not just be seen as a sign of rage against politics as usual, but also as an act of tactical and considered self-defense against an agenda that is seen by many Americans as being fundamentally against traditional American ideology. The situation thus becomes one resembling the logic of war, where the prerogatives of self-defense allow one to take actions and positions that may have otherwise seemed beyond the pale within a different context. Insofar this is the case, it would probably be unwise to assume that these trends are superficial and likely to go away on their own.

One of the surprising facts of the recent American presidential election, for example, is that the huge majority of White evangelicals voted for Trump (Bailey, 2016). This is strange at first sight because evangelicals are generally known to be "values voters," who believe that the moral character of their politicians matters for the fitness of those politicians for public office—and no serious person could attempt to defend the moral character of Trump in terms of anything resembling traditional values. However, this huge swing makes a great deal more sense if one assumes that the Evangelicals were acting in self-defense. Essentially, the Evangelicals were seeing Western religion becoming more and more marginalized within progressive America, and they believed that this trend would only get worse if the Democrats continued to control the White House. In this context, it is almost as if the Evangelicals believed that they were confronted by a bunch of thugs, and they thus wanted to hire a thug of their own to defend them and their interests.

The conflict, then, must be understood in ideological terms. The people who got Trump into the White House simply do not appreciate the way in which America is tending toward secular progressivism in its basic ideology, leaving behind both its Judeo-Christian heritage and its historical commitments to a government whose primary purpose is to ensure the liberty of its people. To add insult to injury, not only is secular progressivism on the ascendant, it would also seem to be dedicated to actively antagonizing traditional Western religion. The classification of an organization defending religious liberty as a hate group, for example, is symptomatic of this general cultural and political trend (Pair, 2017). Evangelicals and other Christians are probably not incorrect in their perception that the emerging dominant society is actively trying to marginalize them. This will naturally create resentment and lead people to consider taking drastic measures in the name of self-defense.

This also helps explain the fact that as of late, more conservative-leaning Americans have increasingly been turning away from higher education (i.e. colleges and universities). Simonson (2017) has indicated that this is primarily due to a significant ideological divide. Essentially, higher education has become increasingly progressive, with race and gender ideology becoming integral components of the study of just about any subject. One crass example of this, for example, would consist of the denigration of the general Western canon of literature, on the grounds that that canon was primarily written by white men. This is antithetical to both Western religion's commitment to Western civilization and to the traditional American ideal of the melting pot, where the important factors are supposed to be assimilation and merit, and not narrow judgments on the basis of demographic criteria.

Getting further into this issue would fall beyond the scope of the present paper. The key point in light of the congressman's statement, though, would be that there is little reason to believe that recent political upheavals are a temporary fad and not a sign of broader ideological realignments. For example, believers in Western religion may well feel genuinely upset about an agenda that is turning college campuses—the institutions charged with the responsibility for educating a whole generation—seems to be ideologically indoctrinating people into secular progressivism and against Western religion. This is a long-term cultural trend, and it could be expected that conservatives will oppose the Democratic Party as long as the Democrats remain identified with that trend. The election of Trump could then be read merely as a sign of this general discontent with the direction in which America is going and the transformation of the basic ideology of America. It is very much likely that this was going on for a long time, but that it simply remained unheard and underground, until Trump was actually able to shatter a lot of commonplace progressive assumptions about contemporary America.

In this context, it is worth considering the general ideological realignment of the two main political parties within America. The Democrats used to be the party of the working class—but it is primarily the white working class that got Trump into office. This is surely a result of the Democratic Party's full embrace of secular progressivist ideology, from which perspective the term "white man" is increasingly used as not a description but rather as a slur and a criticism. Conversely, Republicans were known for quite a while as the party of big business, but they have now become the party of the white working class and various other populists. This seems to be a long-term shift in the basic ideological alignments of the main parties, and not a merely whimsical expression of discontent among the American electorate. If anything, it would seem that the present moment has only made the situation so clear that people can no longer ignore it, in the way that they have perhaps been ignoring it for many years.

Recent political issues would thus seem to be reflective of a broader ideological shift within the West. To dismiss them as the expressions of mere frustration would be short-sighted, due to the fact that the frustration itself emerges as a result of ideological conflict. If people are sick of politics as usual, then this must mean either that politics as usual has deviated from common ideology and values. This could be deviation from the ethos of representative democracy that is fundamental to American ideology, or it could more specifically refer to the change in American ideology marked by a shift away from traditional Western religion and toward secular progressivism. Either way, frustration itself should not be understood as a temporary emotional outburst, but rather as a reflection of responses to these shifts in ideology, which could potentially have long-term implications. In short, the congressman's comments on this subject would seem to reflect a certain level of complacency, perhaps a result of having lived within the Washington bubble.

A "Progressive" Nation

This segues into another comment from the congressman in the interview reported above: "We are a progressive nation despite current political leadership. Our policies have shifted on gay marriage, gay adoption and mass incarceration to name a few. The traditional views of some interpretations of Western religion would hold on to more traditional systems even though they can be discriminatory and unfair" (Personal interview, 2017). This comment can only seem ignorant in light of the theoretical framework that has been developed above. The fact would very much seem to be that this nation is *not* progressive, insofar as the Democratic Party—the party that has embraced progressivism—was soundly defeated in the last American election. The simple fact would be that there is a significant ideological conflict underway within contemporary America, and it is still in the process of panning out.

The comment quoted above reinforces the point developed in the theoretical analysis regarding the blindness of secular progressivism to its own status as a specific ideology. Secular progressivism sees itself as seeing the unadulterated objective truth of reality, as opposed to simply being one ideological interpretation of reality among many. The very statement that America is now a progressive nation, for example, suggests that the ideology of secular progressivism is winning against the ideology of Western religion. However, secular progressivism sees this matter not in terms of an ideological conflict, but rather in terms of ideology in general fading away and the clear truth beginning to emerge. This conception of truth itself is thoroughly conditioned by ideology; but again, secular progressivism is unable to see the matter in such terms. This helps explain why progressives have been so confused by recent political events: they literally do not have the conceptual apparatus needed in order to get a grasp of things.

A portion of the theoretical framework developed above, for example, explicitly focused on the issue of gay marriage as a case study. The fact that gay marriage is now recognized across the nation is not necessarily a sign that America is getting "better;" rather, it is merely a sign that America has shifted away from the ideology of Western religion and toward the ideology of secular progressivism. The latter ideology defines such a development as "progress" in an almost tautological manner. From the perspective of Western religion, however, such a development cannot be called progress, insofar as deviation from Western religion itself can never be progress. Such a development could only be read as evidence that Western religion is losing, which would only inspire believers in Western religion to double down and fight back to the greatest extent possible.

This also reinforces the point that secular progressivism is fundamentally unable to take other ideologies seriously. If believers in Western religion oppose gay marriage as a matter of principle, then secular progressivism can only interpret this as a matter of hatred or bigotry—and this is exactly because secular progressivism lacks a concept of good-faith devotion to ideological values. If someone believes that marriage is defined by God as between a man and a woman, then an opposition to gay marriage that flows from this belief would have nothing to do with hatred against gay people themselves; rather it would simply be a matter of ideological fidelity. In a way, the government defining marriage as a union between any two consenting adults is no more or no less arbitrary than God defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman. Each is a specific concept and a specific view that emerges from within the context of a specific ideology. In principle, there is nothing wrong with this. But insofar as the assumption is accepted that the government must define marriage in one way or another, it also follows that one or the other ideology must win.

It is also worth revisiting the difference between description and aspiration in this context. There is no denying the fact that when the Supreme Court declared that gay marriage must be legal across the nation, secular progressivism beat traditional Western religion regarding the resolution of this conflict. But this is a purely descriptive claim, which leaves open the question: *should* this have been the proper outcome? Secular progressivism will say yes, whereas Western religion will say no—and this is exactly because from the perspective of the aspirations of Western religion, this is a step backward and not forward, insofar it erodes the very definition of marriage itself as defined by the Bible. The value of social justice thus enters into conflict with the value of religious liberty; and more than that, fundamental questions are raised with respect to what the ideology of America itself should be.

A basic teaching of Western religion is that human beings are sinners. That means that people often do things that are spiritually bad for them, and that what people do—or even what people want—can be assumed in an *a priori* way to be morally good. The fact that gay marriage is now the law of the land within America thus says nothing about the actual moral status of this fact, or the decision by the Supreme Court that led to the fact. Rather, from the perspective of Western religion, the critical question that be asked consists of whether America has *sinned* by following this course of action, and whether it is incumbent upon people of faith to resist this, even if that lawfully only means refusing to participate in ceremonies of gay marriage. Of course, from the perspective of secular progressivism, taking such a stance would be understood as an expression of hatred. From the perspective of Western religion, however, it would just be a matter of conscience and moral integrity. The fact that this basic fact cannot even be grasped by many Americans within the contemporary situation only testifies to how extreme and virulent the whole situation has become.

America is only a progressive nation now if secular progressivism is understood as the absence of an ideology, which is how the congressman seems to mean his statement. The theoretical framework developed in the present paper, however, shows this assumption to be a huge fallacy. The simple fact is that secular progressivism is an ideology all of its own, and if secular progressivism has "won," then this could only be because it has managed to defeat traditional Western religion. Moreover, recent electoral and political events seem to indicate that this is by no means the case. There are clearly many people within America who are committed to standing up to the rising tide of secular progressivism, even if this means voting for a presidential candidate who self-evidently shares none of their values. In short, if there were ever a time to declare America to be a "progressive" nation, this would surely not be that correct time.

The congressman's statement would seem to be reflective of the fact that secular progressivism has a strong belief in its own inevitability. This can be traced back to the original Marxist inclination to call progressivism "scientific." If something is scientific, that means it is objectively real, and there is no point in denying it, since the truth will make itself manifest sooner or later. If progressivism is scientific, then this means that America (as well as all other nations) must eventually become progressive, and there is no point in denying it. This is clearly a brilliant political tactic that can raise the motivational level of people who believe in the ideology—but of course, this is not the same as saying that the proposition is actually scientific, or that it bears any actual correspondence to reality. Among other things, the proposition is non-falsifiable, which is a red flag indicating that it cannot be scientific (Popper, 1963). The fact is that progressivism is not inevitable, and recent political events have revealed just how not inevitable it really is.

The Decline of Western Religion?

A final quote that by the congressman that should be considered here is the following: "As with anything if you can't evolve to changing times you will become a dinosaur. If I only compare very recent history, it seems Western religion has a limited impact on world policy, politics and government outside of Western nations" (Personal interview, 2017). This quote probably exemplifies the divergence between the congressman's views and the theoretical framework that has been developed in the present paper. For one thing, it is fundamentally not true, from the perspective of Western religion, that Western religion itself can ever become outmoded. Rather, for believers of Western religion, this ideology is absolute and eternal truth, and it would be impossible for such a thing to ever become outmoded.

In this context, it is worth considering the views of the even a liberal theologian such as Paul Tillich regarding the significance of the Christian Gospel. According to Tillich (1973), the Gospel exists in a different dimension from History altogether. History is about time, whereas the Gospel is about eternity. Therefore, Tillich argues that the Gospel can be related to any particular historical situation, given that the Gospel is a commentary on *all* of History, as such. This approach is central to Tillich's entire theological method. And a basic implication of such a view (again, which is a fairly liberal one) is that the Gospel by definition cannot become outmoded or outdated. The conclusion is rather that as long as History exist, the Gospel will also exist, and that there is no such thing as History superseding the Gospel, because the Gospel exists outside of History altogether. Whatever happens within History will just be another permutation of human factors, and the Gospel is fundamentally equipped to address any and all such permutations, which means that the Gospel by definition can never go the way of the dinosaurs.

This is also reflective of a particular premise of progressivism, which is that human nature is evolutionary and changeable. From the perspective of Western religion, on the other hand, human beings have always been the same as ever, and one of the fundamental aspects of human nature is sin. Understood in these terms, the very idea that human nature could ever "progress" past the Gospel would itself be a manifestation of sin—more specifically, the primary sin of hubris, which leads people to believe that they somehow no longer stand in need of God and his redemption. Secular progressivism sees Western religion as an anachronism that may at best have served as a useful tool at a certain phase of human development, but that is now standing in the way of genuine human progress. For believers in Western religion, however, there can be no progress without this ideology, and moving away from Western religion is not progress at all, but rather just another variant of sin.

At the spiritual level as understood by Western religion, then, the point would be *not* to evolve and keep pace with the times, but rather to hold the ground of eternal truth, whether that happens to be in step with the times or not. As a purely descriptive claim, the congressman's statement is correct in that when an ideological perspective is at odds with the zeitgeist of the day and age, it is likely to be marginalized and less reflected in the dominant ideology of society as a whole. As an aspirational claim, however, the congressman's statement is bunk. This is because from the perspective of Western religion, it does not matter whether Western religion is marginalized or not. What matters is that Western religion is true, and believers must hold to its basic values, even if History seems unconcerned with those values. And this is supported by the basic premise that History is essentially amoral and does not have all that much concern for conditions of spiritual truth, just as "popularity" can never be a real criterion for evaluating whether one is in fact morally correct.

Moreover, when the congressman affirms that Western religion has a limited influence on Western politics, policies, and governance in these times, this completely neglects the basic fact that even secularized moral standards in these times are in fact very much the products of Western religion itself. As has been noted in the theoretical framework above, for example, there is nothing "universal" about universal human rights. The Islamic world felt a need to reinterpret the United Nations' (1946) declaration in this regard precisely because Islamic civilization does not share the same basic ideological assumptions as Western civilization (Islamic Council, 1981). To say that Western religion no longer has an influence on global politics would thus be to entirely neglect the whole of the ideological foundations of the modern West, which are inseparable from the influence of Western religion.

Again, a key point that has been made in the theoretical framework of the present paper is that what would be known as Western secularism or liberalism is itself basically derived from Western religion, and that even secular progressivism, which is explicitly antagonistic toward Western religion, nevertheless owes a huge debt to Western religion and can even be understood as a transposition of Western religion into material-political terms. The conclusion that follows is that as long as Western civilization in general and America in particular remains committed to values such as liberty, dignity, and democracy, Western religion will continue to play a huge role in Western politics, for better or for worse, and even if only at the subconscious level. The fact is that there is no foundation for these values, as well as the value of universal human rights, than the basic premises and postulates of Western religion. In short, the congressman is fundamentally wrong in his statements about the lack of ongoing significance of Western religion, or the quintessentially progressive notion that the West will somehow manage to outgrow Western religion.

This is interrelated with the congressman's claim that America is now becoming a progressive nation. This is even descriptively not true; and even it became truer over the coming times, it would be necessary for secular progressivism to make peace with at least certain aspects of the fundamentals of Western religion, if America is to go on protecting basic values such as liberty and human rights. These values emerged from within a civilization context that was powerfully animated by Western religion, and if anything, the secular translations of these values are less powerful than the original, if for no other reason than the fact that the translations are less transparent about the epistemological and metaphysical roots of the values themselves, which makes them harder to believe in and harder to defend.

In a way, the turn away from Western religion seems to be making America more solipsistic and less capable of meeting challenges from competing ideologies. For example, there is a certain irony in the fact that America is becoming increasingly engulfed by identity politics and perpetual sexual revolution, when there are other countries in the world that wish to be governed by sharia law and do not even give women the right to drive a vehicle. The domestic conflict between Western religion and secular progressivism is one thing. Another important point to consider, however, would be that at the global level, the decline of Western religion is making it more and more difficult for Western civilization to stand up for its own values. This is because in the final analysis, secular progressivism itself is a kind of hypertrophy of the concern with justice that has always been a part of Western religion itself. Western civilization surely has not always lived up to its own values. But if the underlying ideology were to fade altogether, then this could well raise the danger of civilizational collapse, as other societies and cultures have much stronger ideologies, as well as the courage of their convictions to spread those ideologies around the world.

5. Conclusion

In general, it can be suggested that the responses of the congressman are at odds with the theoretical framework of the present paper. However, this would seem to be indicative not so much of a problem with the theoretical framework as a superficiality in the responses of the congressman. More specifically, the blind spots in the responses were by and large the ones that were predicted by the theoretical framework itself: the congressman seemed to lack awareness that progressivism itself is an ideology, and that most dominant Western values cannot really be understood without reference to Western religion. This is keeping with the general problem of modern people believing that they are somehow "beyond" ideology, without realizing that this belief itself is ideological in nature, and that in reality it is impossible for anyone to exist without at least implicit adherence to one ideology or another.

For example, the congressman stated that America is now a "progressive" nation in a very blithe way. Irrespective of whether this is even true or not, it ignores the important issue that if progressivism is now dominant, then this could have only happened at the expense of Western religion, and that it is thus necessary to consider political backlashes in not just emotional but also ideological terms. The congressman acknowledges that Western religion would historically seem to be on its way out; however, he does not seem to comprehend why this may not necessarily be the natural or inevitable course of things, or why believers in Western religion may be liable to put up a fight. This is part of the broader problem of progressivism not understanding itself to be an ideology and instead just thinking of itself as objective reality. This makes it impossible to comprehend good-faith conflicts between ideologies, since according to progressivism, all people who claim to believe in a different ideology must be either lying or delusional.

At this point, it may be worth summarizing the general arc of the present paper. After the introduction, the paper developed a comprehensive theoretical framework for examining the relationship between Western religion and governance, politics, and policies. This led into a deep analysis of the nature of ideology itself, which revealed that the best way to understand Western religion as one ideology among several. More specifically, Western religion is the ideology that has exerted the most foundational effects on Western civilization as a whole, such that even the secularized values that have emerged over time are not really comprehensible without considering their roots in Western religion.

Among other things, the entire ethos of modernity, with its belief in progress and a future that is different from and better than the present, must be understood as a transposition of biblical vision into secular and material terms. Most cultures in human history have understood history as a cyclical process that has no intention in particular; it is uniquely Western to envision history as having an intention and building toward a climax. This is not all that different from believing in another world, or a Kingdom of Heaven; it is merely this same vision translated from a vertical to a horizontal axis. This is why Western religion is foundational for all of Western civilization, to the point that even basic Western values, such as liberty, dignity, and human rights, must be understood as derivations from the general ideology of Western religion. At this level, then, the effect of Western religion on politics is absolute, because the very values that are worked out through Western political processes are themselves derived from Western religion itself. This is a matter of historical fact; and it suggests that whatever happens next, the influence of Western religion on Western civilization is an irrevocable one. It is possible that American society as a whole will shift away from Western religion, but it can only do so on terms established by Western religion itself.

A key point that emerged through the development of the theoretical framework was that secular progressivism can in a way be understood as a form of Western religion in its own right. In the domestic context, this does not hold true, insofar as secular progressivism is engaged in active conflict with traditional Western religion. From a more global perspective, however, secular progressivism must be understood as a sort of bastard offspring of Western religion. Secular progressivism is possessed by an almost evangelical zeal; it seems very much like the purpose of the ideology is to make its own version of the Kingdom of Heaven manifest within the context of history and this world. Such a vision is uniquely Western, and it is uniquely inspired by Western religion, even as it is a full-scale rebellion against Western religions and its basic ideological values.

Secular progressivism was also found to have a curious blind spot regarding its own status as an ideology. This phenomenon can be traced all the way back to Marxism, which always considered itself a science and not an ideology (Marx & Engels, 1932), Marxism framed itself as the debunking of all ideologies, such that Marxism had the one true vision of empirical reality, with all other perspectives being little more than variations on delusion. This premise itself, however, is a strongly ideological one in nature, and the history of Marxism and Communism in the world has clearly shown that there is nothing scientific about Marxism at all. However, modern secular progressivism has inherited this sense of scientific certainty, as can be seen in recent events such as the "March for Science," which was little more than a rally in favor of the ideology secular progressivism. In the modern world, the claim of holding the mantle of science confers a certain *prima facie* legitimacy on a given ideology—unless, that is, deeper analysis reveals that the ideology has nothing to do with science per se, but is rather just hijacking the name of science for its own purposes.

After the development of the theoretical framework, the present paper proceeded to its independent research, which consisted of an interview with a selected congressman. This congressman was asked questions about the nature of the impact of Western religion on politics in this day and age; and many of the congressman's responses seemed to reflect a progressive ideological bent. The congressman acknowledged that he was a believer in Western religion. However, he also stated that not only does he try to keep this separate from his political duties when necessary, but also that he believed that Western religion as a whole was historically on its way out, as America is on a path to becoming a more secular and progressive nation, much like the rest of present-day Europe.

The way that the congressman framed several of his responses, however, indicated that he had perhaps not thought critically about the nature of secular progressivism itself and its status as an ideology. There is nothing natural or inevitable, for example, about shifting from a perspective that defines marriage in one way to a perspective that defines marriage in another way. Rather, this is simply reflective of a shift from one ideology to another, and the defeat of one ideology at the hands of another. The congressman, however, did not seem to delve into this kind of complexity. Rather, he seemed to conceptualize the whole thing as a natural progression, as can be seen by his reference to the dinosaurs going extinct. This implies a sort of pseudo-Darwinian ethos of the survival of the fittest, where one ideology wins against another simple because it is a better ideology and is destined. But ideologies do not work in this way. Rather, this kind of mentality itself is a hallmark of the ideology of secular progressivism, which has always understood itself to be destined for success with a kind of scientific inevitability. This is not a matter of empirical fact, but rather a matter of ideological projection and faith in a system of values.

The findings and discussions section of the present paper, then, as primarily served as a kind of cross-examination of the statements made by the congressman in the interview, in light of the theoretical framework that had previously been developed. The congressman did provide some good insights regarding the nature of ideology, such as when he identified capitalism itself as a form of religion. However, he did not take this insight far enough to suggest that progressivism is also a form of religion. Identity politics, for example, is based on several faith-based assumptions that run contrary to traditional American ideology and its underpinnings in the Judeo-Christian tradition. It would thus seem that the congressman himself has adopted the language of progressivism, even if in a subconscious way, to explain what is presently happening within politics in America.

Again, it is worth repeating that it is only Western religion that understands history in terms of teleology or intentionality. This is a unique feature of a particular ideology (or family of ideologies), that is not shared by ideologies in other times, places, or cultures. Indeed, this very assumption of universality is itself a key feature of Western ideology. There would thus seem to exist a sort of thought loop or catch-22, where Western ideology often has trouble comprehending its own particularity, exactly because Western ideology includes the premise that Western ideology is universal. The present paper has argued that this is an aspirational and not a descriptive claim. That is: Western ideology has an evangelical impulse, such that it believes that the whole rest of the world should believe in Western ideology. However, it is dangerous to ignore the fact that not only is this not the objective case at the present time, it may well never be the objective case. There is nothing inherently problematic with the aspiration per se. However, it is always problematic when one confuses one's own hopes and dreams with the reality of the world as it stands.

The congressman's statements in the interview thus end up reinforcing the notion that even the people who are in charge of politics within the nation are not necessarily fully aware of the ideologies, motivations, and values that drive their decision and animate the general historical moment within America as a whole. It is not right to affirm that America is a progressive nation, when the recent presidential election could only be understood in terms of a general backlash against the ideology of progressivism. It would seem that a basic problem with believing in the inevitability of one's own victory is that it tends to render one complacent and, to put it bluntly, stupid. If progressivism is inevitable, then it would logically follow that there would be no need for progressives to critically examine their own premises or their present situation, given that their victory is preordained anyway. This sort of mentality is in the long run not good for self-preservation; and in the shorter run, it is clearly not good for healthy political discourse.

A key point that has been made in the present paper that has also been reinforced by the congressman, though, is that Western ideology in general does in fact have an evangelical impulse. It is true, for example, that many other nations in the world may have learned to hate America exactly because America has often seemed to be on a mission to spread its ideology around the world. This follows from Western ideology's own understanding of itself as universal. Believing in its own rhetoric, the West would seem to have often been left in a state of non-comprehension when confronted with the rejection of its own ideology by other societies and cultures. If something is universal, then it follows that no such resistance ought to exist. And the only cogent conclusion that could be drawn here is that Western ideology and religion are specific phenomena that have grown within specific historical contexts, and that other societies and cultures may simply not share the same premises.

A general conclusion that can be drawn from the findings of the present paper is that the decline of the influence of Western religion on politics has been greatly exaggerated. This is the case for logical and historical reasons: the simple fact is that in an important sense, Western religion *cannot* decline, insofar as it is foundational for even secular and modern concepts and values. Without Western religion, these things would just not exist; and this means that however Western civilization may proceed in the future, it is still the case that Western religion will be responsible for those movements, to a greater or lesser extent. To think otherwise would reflect a basic lack of historical awareness. Western civilization is an ongoing project and process, and it is not a matter of making something out of nothing; all new things are developments of what came before them.

In one statement in the interview, the congressman indicated that there is a "bias" against Islam in contemporary American politics. But the fact is that this cannot properly be called a bias, except in the sense that any and all possible ideologies will always contain their own inherent biases. It is a matter of both logic and ethics that America will (or at the very least *should* be) always biased against the sharia supremacist variants of Islam—and insofar as sharia supremacism is mainstream Islam, the point necessarily follows that America must be biased against Islam in general (McCarthy, 2016). This is because sharia supremacism is fundamentally antithetical to the American project of constitutional, republican democracy, and the separation of church and state that follows as a corollary of that project. If America accepted any other form of governance, then America would no longer be America. And insofar as that form of governance itself follows from certain basic ideological principles and values, America must always remain biased against other ideologies that do not share those basic premises regarding society and culture.

One contemporary implication that could draw from this analysis and discussion of the present paper consists of the nature of the threat posed by ISIS, and the appropriate American response to that threat. It has been suggested here that secular progressivism is fundamentally unequipped to deal with this challenge, due to the simple fact that secular progressivism refuse to take the power of ideology seriously. Believers in Western religion have in general not made this conceptual error, due to the fact that they know exactly how powerful ideology can be. The simple fact is that ISIS is driven by ideology, with considerations of political economy being secondary to the driving force of ideology (Wood, 2017). In general, progressivism cannot comprehend this point, due to the fact that progressivism is essentially a materialistic ideology that refuses to acknowledge its own status as an ideology. The result is an absurd scenario where all sorts of excuses are made to explain the behaviors of the terrorists, with the terrorists' own testimony being the only thing that is never taken seriously.

The congressman in the interview seems to be coming largely from a progressive perspective, and he thus also seemed unable to address issues of real ideological conflict. The basic fact is that if America is biased against Islam, then this is because many contemporary interpretations of Islam seek the destruction of America. It would be insane if America were *not* biased against such an ideology. Increased tolerance and lessened bigotry are not answers to this basic problem, due to the fact that they essentially miss the very nature of the basic problem. That problem has to do with ideological conflict, and with America coming up against a system of values that is fundamentally antithetical to the system of values that has animated America since its founding. This is not a politically correct thing to say, but it does maintain fidelity to the empirical facts on the ground. Trying to sweet-talk one's way out of the problem would itself be characteristic of the one ideology and not the other.

Another key point that has been made in the present paper consists of the difference between description and aspiration. It is descriptively false that Western ideology is universal, insofar as it is empirically false that the entire world believes in Western ideology. No one but the most delusional of men could think that this is actually the case at the present moment. There are many ideologies in the world that explicitly reflect Western ideology, as well as the Western religion that is the foundation of that ideology. Other societies and cultures have other ideologies, and they may well resent having Western ideology pushed on them, just as the congressman in the interview indicated. The West thus needs to become more aware of its own historical and sociological context, and understand that the values of the West grew up within a particular time and place.

On the other hand, there is also the aspirational dimension of Western ideology. This consists of the belief, embedded within the ideology itself, that all people in the world *should* accept Western values, on the grounds that these values are the most compatible with human freedom, human dignity, and human flourishing. That claim may or may not be empirically true. However, the present paper has shown that this evangelical impulse is a fundamental component of Western ideology in general. In any event, most Western people probably do believe that the claim is in fact true. There is no one who would really affirm that a society of freedom is worse than a society of tyranny, or that a freedom itself is not a value worth striving for. For all the internal conflicts within the West itself, then, these are fundamental premises regarding what a good society should look like. And while it may well be true that this exemplifies what is really within the hearts of all people, it is also an empirical fact that at the descriptive level, many societies and cultures reject these values and resist having such values imposed on them from the outside.

Universal human rights would perhaps be the most critical example of what is meant here. At the descriptive level, it is a matter of historical fact that universal human rights have never been all that universal. Much the opposite, the very concept of human rights was itself an invention of Western civilization. Most decent people nowadays believe in the validity of universal human rights—but this only shows how successful the West has already been in its evangelical mission. In other words, this is an example of the aspirations of the West becoming fulfilled, and people all over the world actually accepting at least some components of Western ideology—which again, is inseparable Western religion. The conclusion that follows is that to denigrate Western religion would thus be to denigrate the very foundations of universal human rights. It goes without saying that that would be a hard sell that no one would really want to take up.

The interview with the congressman that constituted the independent research of the present paper was by and large disappointing, in the sense that the congressman seemed to fall into many of the fallacies and traps that had already been identified by the theoretical framework of the present paper. On the other hand, it was also illuminating, in the sense that it exemplified the nature of public discourse and common sense within America in these times. The key conclusion that can be drawn from this analysis and these findings is that Americans, both politicians and everyone else, must become more self-aware of the ideologies and values that sustain America as a nation. This will be the only way to resist both foreign ideologies that are hostile toward America at the global level and threats of internal collapse or disintegration at the domestic level. If this analysis has shown anything at all, it is that if America is to persist as a free society, then the fundamental role of Western religion in the basic American ideology can no longer be neglected.

References

- Auerbach, C. A. (1956). The Communist Control Act of 1954: A proposed theory legal-political theory of free speech. *The University of Chicago Law Review*, 23(2), 173.
- Bailey, S. P. (2016, November 9). White evangelicals voted overwhelmingly for Donald Trump, exit polls show. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/11/09/exit-polls-show-white-evangelicals-voted-overwhelmingly-for-donald-trump/?utm_term=.bb8717f17e7f
- Castoriadis, C. (1998). *The imaginary institution of society*. Boston: MIT Press.
- Cooke, C. C. W. (2015, November 12). Silly student protesters have it wrong: 'Space spaces' are incompatible with a university. *National Review*. Retrieved from <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/426979/silly-student-protesters-have-it-wrong-safe-spaces-are-incompatible-university>
- Greenfield, K. (2015, July 15). The slippery slope to polygamy and incest." *American Prospect*. Retrieved from <http://prospect.org/article/slippery-slope-polygamy-and-incest>
- French, D. (2016, August 23). Debunking the 'born this way' myth. *National Review*. Retrieved from <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/439273/liberal-views-sexuality-debunked>
- Fukayama, F. (2006). *The end of history and the last man*. New York: Free Press.
- Goldberg, J. (2009). *Liberal fascism*. New York, NY: Crown Forum.
- Huntington, S. P. (2011). *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Islamic Council. (1981). Universal Islamic declaration of human rights. Author. Retrieved from <http://www.alhewar.com/ISLAMDECL.html>

- Liptak, A. (2015, June 26). Supreme Court ruling makes same-sex marriage a right nationwide. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/27/us/supreme-court-same-sex-marriage.html>
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1932). *The German ideology*. Retrieved from <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/>
- McCarthy, A. C. (2017, January 30). Is it a 'Muslim ban'? *National Review*. Retrieved from <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/444402/trump-muslim-ban-goal-ban-sharia-supremacists-not-all-muslims>
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey Bass: San Francisco.
- Meyer, L. S., & McHugh, P. R. (2016). Sexuality and gender. *The New Atlantis*, 50. Retrieved from <http://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/number-50-fall-2016>
- Nietzsche, F. (1989). *Beyond good and evil*. New York, NY: Vintage.
- Paglia, C. (1991). *Sexual personae*. New York: Vintage.
- Pair, J. (2017, July 13). ADF demands apology, retraction from ABC News. *The Federalist*. Retrieved from <http://thefederalist.com/2017/07/13/adf-demands-apology-retraction-abc-news/>
- Pew Research Center. (2013, April 30). The world's Muslims. *Religion & public life*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-beliefs-about-sharia/>
- Pew Research Center. (2017). Party affiliation. *Religious landscape study*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/party-affiliation/>

- Popper, K. R. (1963). Science as falsification. *Conjectures and refutations*. Retrieved from http://www.stephenjaygould.org/ctrl/popper_falsification.html
- Qiu, L. (2015, November 16). Fact-checking Bernie Sanders' comments on climate change and terrorism. *PolitiFact*. Retrieved from <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2015/nov/16/bernie-s/fact-checking-bernie-sanders-comments-climate-chan/>
- Rank, O. (1989). *Art and Artist*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Sanger, D. E. (2003, November 6). Bush outlines vision for expanding democracy in Mideast. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/06/international/middleeast/bush-outlines-vision-for-expanding-democracy-in.html>
- Simonson, J. (2017, July 15). Higher education: Good or bad? *National Review*. Retrieved from <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/449508/higher-education-republicans-democrats-disagree>
- Tillich, P. (1973). *Systematic theology, volume 1*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- United Nations. (1946). *Universal declaration of human rights*. Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/#safe=off&q=declaration+of+human+rights>
- Washington, G. (1796). Washington's farewell address 1796. Avalon Project. Retrieved from http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp
- Wood, G. (2017, March 18). What ISIS really wants. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>.