

The Dialectic of Christian Politics

The Kierkegaard-Maritain Model¹

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ABSTRACT This article suggests that the problem of Christianity's involvement in the world of politics may be described as taking the form of a dialectic of Christian politics. This means that while the transcendent essence of Christianity is apolitical, the presence of the Christian message in the immanent world always brings with it political consequences and makes Christendom a part of political life. The dialectic is presented with reference to the thought of two key contemporary Christian thinkers: Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and Jacques Maritain (1882-1973). Both recognized the dialectical tension inherent in Christianity, but each found a different solution to this problem: whereas Kierkegaard denies Christianity any possibility of political involvement, Maritain concludes that such involvement is necessary for proper Christian existence in the world. The goal of this article is to uncover, on the basis of their considerations, a third, positive solution to the dialectic of Christian politics—a model that would demonstrate how the elements of the Christian ideal (transcendence) could be transferred to the temporal world (immanence), morally improving the latter without becoming falsified in it.

KEYWORDS Christianity; Kierkegaard, Søren; Maritain, Jacques; politics

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INTRODUCTION

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) and Jacques Maritain (1882–1973) are two of the key thinkers of contemporary Christian philosophy. They share the belief that the human world is in need of a moral and spiritual revival inspired by Christian ideas. Both are aware of the dialectical relationship between Christianity and sociopolitical reality, as well as the tension arising therefrom, and both see, in the way Christianity can relate to socio-immanent reality, an element that is crucial for the Christian mission's success in the world. Each, however, envisages a completely different solution to this problem. Kierkegaard and Maritain are in agreement as to what the essence of Christianity consists in, yet they differ fundamentally in their understanding of the role Christianity should play in the temporal world.

Although Kierkegaard was not a political thinker, and wrote no works that were strictly political, one can nevertheless discern a considerable potential for sociopolitical criticism in his scattered deliberations, as shown by the growing interest in this aspect of his work in recent years.² His thought is known and studied in this context particularly with reference to his book *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age. A Literary Review*, where he presents a critique of the liberal social transformations of his time. His criticism of Lutheran Christendom is tightly connected to this negative assessment of his epoch. Themes from this critique came to be incorporated into various works belonging to the later stage of his output. Of these, those of greatest relevance to the theses pursued in the present article are *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* and *Practice in Christianity*.

Kierkegaard, in accordance with the individualistic character of Lutheranism, focuses on the need to transform man as a singular person, and does not develop in a direct way the sociopolitical consequences of his thought. He is concerned primarily with the spiritual good of the individual. He wants to convince his readers of the need to deepen their inner life and open up to the existential significance of Christianity that, according to him, issues not from the dogmas and culture of Christendom, but rather from the depths of a personal relationship with God based on the authority of the word of God (Scripture).

Maritain, unlike Kierkegaard, is a dedicated political thinker (though far from being limited to only this domain), who devoted many of his works to the problems of the contemporary world, to issues of democracy, pluralism,

2. See, for instance: Pattison and Shakespeare 1998; Avanesian and Wennerscheid 2014; Sirvent and Morgan 2018; Walsh Perkins 2019.

human rights, and relations between the Church and the state.³ His vision of a Christian, democratic state was very influential in the second half of the 20th century, and continues to prove inspiring for many authors studying Christianity's relationship to democracy or, more broadly, the functioning of the state.⁴ Amongst Maritain's many works dealing with Christian politics, the most synthetic and important treatment of his political ideas is to be found in his book *Integral Humanism*, whose theses will be the main source for the analysis of his thought in this article.

Maritain—as befits a Catholic—strongly emphasizes the communal sense of the existence of Christianity and tasks himself with creating a foundation for modern Christian political thought with reference to the work of St. Thomas Aquinas. This thought is to be a response to the moral downfall of the world witnessed in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. To this end, he creates the project of integral humanism, which is advanced in reaction to the concept of anthropocentric humanism that had been steadily developing since the Renaissance and which he considers dominant in the thought and sociopolitical life of the Western world. He discerns in this concept the source of contemporary nihilism, including socialist humanism together with its development into Marxist-communist humanism.

It should be noted that, of course, Maritain knew the work of Kierkegaard, and that he to a certain degree admired the latter, calling him “The Champion of the Singular” (*M-MP*, 357f.). He found

in Kierkegaard's non-philosophical experience of being alone before God and being brought face to face with one's self a crucial defense of spiritual experience against a rationalism that attempts to subsume everything within it. (Kramer 2011, 229)

Moreover, what is of great importance for our further investigations here is that

Maritain expressed deep appreciation that Kierkegaard succeeded in reestablishing the individual moral agent, exercising deliberation and choice, as the absolute center of moral value. In Maritain's opinion, the singular individual

3. See: *Freedom in the Modern World* (*M-FMW*); *Scholasticism and Politics* (*M-SP*); *Christianity and Democracy* (*M-CD*); *The Person and the Common Good* (*M-PCG*); *Man and the State* (*M-MS*); *Integral Humanism: Temporal and Spiritual Problems of a New Christendom* (*M-HI*). For all such abbreviations, please see the list of these at the end of the text.

4. See, for instance: Invernizzi Accetti 2019.

as a decision-maker is the most significant thing in Kierkegaard's philosophy. (Barrett 2020, 434)

On the other hand, he remained critical of the individualized account of Christianity emerging from Protestant thought, and was not only a fervent critic of the vision of Karl Barth, who to a great extent based his thought on Kierkegaard's (*M-HI*, 70, 103), but was also skeptical and critical of the extremely individualistic, subjective and irrational account of faith given by Kierkegaard himself (Kramer 2011, 228; Barrett 2020, 435–6).

The result of these two disparate visions of Christian moral renewal—Kierkegaard's individualistic one and Maritain's communal one—is that they formulate the possibility of Christianity's involvement in sociopolitical reality in different ways.⁵ Kierkegaard entirely negates such a possibility, seeing in it the automatic denial of the Christian ideal⁶ and a lost opportunity to fulfill this ideal in the life of the individual.⁷ Maritain, in turn, believes that Christianity has a duty to influence the sociopolitical order of the world, for by introducing its ideals into the world Christianity makes it a better place to live and thereby gives people a greater opportunity for spiritual development. It is not the case, however, that the deliberations of Kierkegaard and Maritain are closed off from one another in this area, or that their two conflicting visions are impossible to reconcile.

5. I pointed out earlier that one can look for the sources of Kierkegaard's and Maritain's differing views in the different Christian traditions in which their philosophies matured. However, I would not claim that their views are representative of Protestantism and Catholicism, respectively, or that they capture the existence of a real difference in the approach to the problem of the relationship of the Christian ideal to the political world in these two types of Christian tradition. Certainly, this issue is very complicated and requires a separate study, for which there is no room here.

6. The concept of the Christian ideal, used extensively in this text, comes from Kierkegaard, and simply means the transcendent essence of Christianity (*K-PV*, 127–41). Maritain, meanwhile, used the concept of the Christian ideal with reference to a concrete historical ideal. This has a different meaning: here, the ideal is a generalization of certain crucial Christian ideas which are realizable in a given historical time (*M-HI*, 127–28). The Christian ideal therefore has, on Maritain's account, a meaning that is more immanent than transcendent. What Kierkegaard understands when speaking of the Christian ideal Maritain refers to as "Christianism." (It should be noted here that translators of English translate the French "christianisme" simply as "Christianity"—see *M-HI*, 41.)

7. The conceptual separateness of these accounts must one again be stressed here. Kierkegaard, in all of his work, puts great emphasis on the concept of the individual. For him, the individual means that which is essentially human, a capacity to be oneself before God. Maritain, in this context, speaks of the person, not the individual, because for him, in turn, the individual has a purely material and societal meaning, not a religious one (*M-SP*, 56–88; *M-PCG*, 21–79; see also Watkins and McNerny 1995, 153–6). However, the concepts of the individual and the person will be used in this context interchangeably.

It is thus worth examining their solutions to see whether, on the basis they provide, there exists a possibility of constructing a model which, by linking the most important elements of their thought, would offer a chance to more fully solve the problem presented by the dialectic of Christian politics. The attempt to construct the model described here, despite being based on their thinking, goes beyond their thought and constitutes an original formulation of this problem.

To accomplish this task, a brief general outline of the problem of the dialectic of Christian politics as it arises within Western history and tradition will first be indicated (Section 1). Against this background, Kierkegaard's and Maritain's reflections on the essence of Christianity and its relation to the temporal world will be juxtaposed. This will allow the issue of the dialectic of Christian politics to be sketched in a way that places it in the context of their thought (Section 2). The third step will be to reconstruct both thinkers' criticisms of Christianity's naturalization in the temporal world (Section 3). Within this framework, the nature of the differences between the solutions to the problem of the dialectic of Christian politics that Kierkegaard and Maritain propose in their work will then be shown (Section 4). Finally, and in terms that run somewhat counter to those differences, an attempt will be undertaken to reconcile the most important elements of their thought, where this opens up the possibility of constructing the original model that is to be proposed here as a solution to the problem of the dialectic of Christian politics (Section 5).

The fundamental thesis of this text is that this dialectic needs to be formulated in such a way that its two fundamental elements—the transcendent ideal that defines the personal relationship between man and God, and the immanent ideal that defines the communal character of sociopolitical reality—do not stand in the way of each other, but instead help one another achieve both the ultimate and the temporal ends of human life.

1. A GENERAL OUTLINE OF THE PROBLEM OF THE DIALECTIC OF CHRISTIAN POLITICS

Christianity's involvement in the world of politics has, since the beginning of its existence, aroused controversy in connection with its world-transcending message that speaks of the necessity for its adherents to abandon earthly attachment to their temporal ends. At the same time, almost from its very inception, along with the persecution of the first Christians came the politicization of Christianity, the spreading of which, across the lands of the Roman Empire began to threaten the traditional religion of Rome. Christianity ultimately underwent complete politicization with its being

made the state religion of the Roman Empire by Theodosius the Great. It is from this moment onwards that the political affairs of Europe and the world have been closely connected to the Christian religion. And even though, today, in many contemporary states, Christianity does not exercise such a great influence upon the world of politics as it did up until at least the times of the French Revolution, the Christian worldview remains an essential intellectual and moral buttress for many significant political forces in the world.⁸

A fundamental problem that already appears in the Gospels (Mt 22:21) and the Letters of Paul (Rom 13:1–7) is the issue of what relation Christians should have towards secular political power, to what extent they may submit to it, and to what extent they are to remain independent of it. Ultimately, the greatest difficulty that stems from the abovementioned questions concerns whether or not Christianity can (or should) involve itself in political affairs and exercise real, top-down influence on how law is made and enforced in a state. Over the course of Christianity's two thousand years of existence, opinions on this matter have been fundamentally divided between those who adhere to the view that there is a need for Christianity to influence both sociopolitical life and the way in which the state and the laws regulated by it are administered, and those who acknowledge a need to reject Christian involvement in any political matters.⁹ Discussion and heated debate about the issue continue to this day.¹⁰

The problem of Christianity's involvement in political life seems to exhibit a dialectical character. This issues directly from the philosophical construction of Christianity itself, in that it is built upon a fundamental point of tension between the immanent life of a human being and his transcendent calling. Thus, the thesis can be put forward that Christianity is marked by a dialectical relation to politics. This dialectic is as follows: Christianity, on the one hand, as a transcendent ideal primarily tasked with focusing on man's personal relation with God, says nothing about the sociopolitical dimension of a human being's existence and is not meant to influence this aspect of life. People identifying with Christianity, on the other

8. (See: Invernizzi Accetti 2019, 1–3)

9. Contemporarily, this is of course part of a larger debate about the relationship between religion and politics, where religion may be understood both in a general way and through the lens of particular religious systems. See, for instance: Weithman 1998; Audi and Wolterstorff 1997; Ayoob 2008; De Gruchy 2002.

10. As exemplified in contemporary political disputes surrounding the prohibition of abortion and euthanasia—disputes that are powerfully and deeply felt, especially in societies rooted in Catholicism.

hand, or those who call themselves Christians, function just like everyone else in temporal reality and create Christendom in it, this really being an immanent cultural and sociopolitical force, one which has tremendous influence on the way particular communities and the human world exist.

This dialectic yields the tremendous diversity of Christian political conceptions existing in the contemporary world, with this diversity corresponding to the various relations in which Christians stand towards the sociopolitical sphere (Christian democracy, Christian monarchy, Christian conservatism, Christian liberalism, Christian socialism, Christian anarchism, as well as Christian political indifferentism). These Christian political conceptions are linked to different theological visions that may, in some way or other, even be divergent from one other—and it is clear that not every adherent of these visions (for instance, those of liberal theology, liberation theology, process theology) is likely to agree with the presupposition that Christianity has, in respect of its main goal, nothing to do with the sociopolitical dimension of a human being's existence.

Even so, such a presupposition seems to be in agreement both with Christ's words that His kingdom is not of this world (Jn 18:36) and St. Paul's doctrine, where the relation between the individual and God clearly comes first, prior to any relationship with state. On the other hand, St Paul's doctrine was itself the first formulation of Christendom's principles, and as such opened up the problem of Christian politics—which has meant that some thinkers claim that his doctrine possesses an essentially political dimension (e.g., Taube 2004). The present text, however, will not directly address particular conceptions of Christian politics, and does not seek to involve itself in discussions concerning them: it rather attempts to present the source of the problem and arrive at the possibility of a solution of a basic kind.

The dichotomy—constituted on the one hand by the apolitical essence of Christianity, and on the other by the political manner in which it exists in the temporal world—raises the question as to whether a personal, transcendent, Christian ideal can have a real influence on the communal, immanent ideal that serves as the foundation for the sociopolitical reality of human life. To put the matter another way: the issue at hand is whether, and in what way, Christianity can or should participate in a community's sociopolitical life without thereby negating its spiritual essence and being taken advantage of for specific human ends, while at the same time supporting the moral development of the temporal world. This is also, indirectly, a question about the way Christendom exists as a temporal Christian community.

2. A SKETCH OF THE DIALECTIC OF CHRISTIAN POLITICS,
WITH REFERENCE TO KIERKEGAARD'S AND MARITAIN'S REFLECTIONS
ABOUT THE ESSENCE OF CHRISTIANITY AND ITS RELATION
TO THE TEMPORAL WORLD

2.1. *Spiritual (transcendent) reality and temporal (immanent) reality
in human life*

The distinction between the spiritual (transcendent) and temporal (immanent) reality of a person's life counts as fundamental for both Kierkegaard and Maritain. This division results from how they understand the essence of what it is to be a Christian. Christianity introduces a spiritual dimension into a person's natural (temporal) reality, a dimension which transcends and completes it, imbuing it with ultimate sense (*K-CUP*, 33; *K-WL*, 376–7; *M-HI*, 97–8).¹¹ On both philosophers' accounts, this distinction is justified on existential grounds, as Christianity calls individuals (persons, for Maritain) to life, and addresses its message to them. Christianity is thus that which, in an essential way, activates and guides man's freedom.

The relation of the spiritual (the eternal) to the sensual (the temporal) is formulated by Kierkegaard in a dialectical way. These two spheres of life remain in an unceasing tension which plays out within the existence of the individual (*K-SUD*, 13–4). It is they who decide which of these spheres is most important for them, and which one they wish to devote their life to. Kierkegaard, however, is convinced—in accordance with the biblical saying which he repeatedly appeals to—that no one can serve two masters (Mt 6:24): they must choose between God and the world (*K-UD*, 205–8). What this means is that man as spirit is understood by Kierkegaard to be a synthesis of temporality and eternity, one in which there is no equality between the elements of the synthesis. It is impossible for the individual to simultaneously and fully realize himself or herself in both domains: as a natural person, completely focused on their existential ends in the context of temporality, and as a Christian devoted in the context of their

11. In this article, Kierkegaard's writings will be approached in a general kind of way as being his own statements—this, of course, being a kind of shortcut, as it is well known that he did not consider the views of his pseudonymous authors to be expressions of his own opinions (*K-CUP*, 625–30). However, one may at least accept that where his vision of faith, religion, Christianity and Christendom are concerned, he is very coherent in his account, both in all his pseudonymous works and his religious discourses. This coherence is itself an argument for reading the whole of Kierkegaard's work as it relates to these topics as furnishing his own view, or at least the view of a single religious author—as he called himself in his retrospective works. (See *K-PV*, 23, and many other places in *K-PV* where Kierkegaard identifies himself as a religious author).

life to God. One sphere will always dominate the other, subordinating the other to such an extent that the latter starts to serve it, working towards fulfilling its ends.

Maritain is more cautious in his judgments, and does not articulate the tension in such sharply demarcated terms. It is clear, however, that he affirms the separation of temporal and eternal ends, as well as their formal independence from one another. In this sense, on his account—as on Kierkegaard's—that which is Christian is visibly separated from temporal reality: this is a relation between the supernatural and the natural. That which is Christian always exists here first as that which is revealed by God, that which comes from the intimate life of God, that which man in and of himself could not invent or create. The natural is, on the one hand, the locus of the supernatural's action, yet on the other it clearly possesses its own distinct aim, which defines the common good of people living together in a given place and time in terms of building a socio-cultural community (civilization). On Maritain's account, both a given community and a given person should be engaged at one and the same time in fulfilling their temporal ends and serving the supernatural (*M-HI*, 95–8, 291–4). Nevertheless, it may be that the good of the community precludes entirely the possibility of serving the supernatural, defining the purpose of people's lives entirely within the realm of the temporal.¹²

2.2. The place and role of Christianity in the human world

Each of our two thinkers acknowledges that Christianity completely transforms how people comprehend both the world and themselves. Both think, however, that the essence of Christianity is primarily about the spiritual maturation of the individual bringing them into a relationship with God, rather than the transformation of social behavior and practices.

On Kierkegaard's account, Christianity is not meant to change anything in the temporal world, its purpose being rather to transform the interiority of particular individuals who, in turn, are supposed to spread forgiveness and convert others to an inner relationship with Christ (*K-WL*, 135–7,

12. An example of such a situation is the communist state, whose ideology is based on a principled atheism that utterly precludes the possibility of a relationship between the religious and the political. Not only is it the case here that the common good is defined in an entirely material (economic) way, but there is also no possibility of drawing religious inspiration when attempting to define what constitutes the essence of a person's life. Thus, in Maritain's opinion, communist ideology has no space for the concepts of freedom, human dignity, or human rights, in that they must, he claims, rest on a religious foundation (see Dunaway 1978, 66–9).

332–5). In this sense, Christianity does not in any way whatsoever deal with the temporal problems of the world, such as social inequality or injustice, but instead aims to unite people in spirit in spite of their inequalities (*K-WL*, 72, 143–7). On Kierkegaard's view, there is not in a direct sense any kind of social mission in Christianity.¹³ Theoretically speaking, any social consequences of Christianity's workings could, on this view, at most occur indirectly, as a result of one's adoption of a Christian attitude; such consequences, however, do not fall within the essence of Christianity. Christianity is tasked with bringing about the spiritual transformation of individuals, not the moral transformation of the world, though in an obvious way the latter may result from the former.

Such a radical reading of Kierkegaard's vision of Christianity's absence from or inactivity in respect of immanent social reality may be controversial for many—as more than a few will tend to see in Kierkegaard's deliberations at least some inspirations for the improvement of people's political life.¹⁴ On the one hand, it is obvious that Christians have much to do with the social reality surrounding them: they exist as people within the realm of immanence, and are social, political and, most of all, moral agents just like everyone in this world, so that they make decisions that appeal to the immanent world. It of course would be very difficult to separate their immanent, worldly view from their Christian involvement. On the other hand, the general problem is that such Christian persons, for Kierkegaard, only go to make up Christendom—whereas Christianity as such, and as an ideal, is something that essentially transcends the latter, this being only its immanent, highly imperfect and very often illusory reflection (see Section 2). This is the critical point of Kierkegaard's vision that is strictly connected with what he calls the “infinite qualitative difference.”¹⁵ It is here that his

13. It should be stressed here that Kierkegaard's apoliticism in relation to Christianity becomes for him a starting point for criticizing the sociopolitical transformations of the world of his time. Kierkegaard aims his critique at the politicization of the masses—seeing this as a threat to the development and existence of authentic individuals in the world (Conway 2015, 400–2). This dimension of political criticism in Kierkegaard's thought, as Nygaard (2011) shows, turns out to be entirely in line with the way most thinkers and artists of Copenhagen thought at the time, observing as they did the sociopolitical changes of their era with unease.

14. I am speaking here about the general tendency existing in Kierkegaard scholarship, where Kierkegaard's thought—especially his *Works of Love*—is used directly as an inspiration for the moral improvement of political life. (See, e.g., some items from the works mentioned in note 2.) I would be much more cautious about proposing such a direct interpretation of Kierkegaard's works, and this is why, in this article, I seek to propose—in relation to both Kierkegaard's and Maritain's thought—a more nuanced, indirect interpretation of this topic. (See Section 3 and, in particular, Section 4).

15. See, for instance: *K-PF*, 41–7; *K-CUP*, 217, 412–3, 492, 580; *K-SUD*, 99, 121, 126–7.

critique of the Christendom of his time starts, because it is here that we find his belief that the true Christian cannot be essentially interested in any immanent interest or goal in this world. For Kierkegaard, things that people do in the world and which are not mediated by (and in) God are not Christian in their nature—they are only worldly things, and cannot be granted a Christian form of legitimation. If, for Kierkegaard, it is only deeds leading to another human being's reconciliation with God that are Christian in their nature, then it would seem that because no political activity has this goal (i.e. the aforementioned reconciliation) as its main aim, none can be Christian in that strong sense. Logically, of course, the better someone fulfills his Christian duties the better he ought to be *qua* socio-political or moral agent—but if he starts being primarily a political agent, he stops being a Christian agent. In Kierkegaard's thought, this is the dialectic of Christian politics that is engendered by the abyss between the purity of the Christian ideal (transcendence) and the sinfulness of every human being's life (immanence).¹⁶

The vision of Maritain is far more balanced. He believes that Christianity (and, in particular, Christians, as its representatives) have a very important social mission to fulfill in preparation for the coming of the kingdom of God (*M-HI*, 110–11). This does not mean, however, that Christianity is meant to build the kingdom of Heaven on Earth. He considers such an approach to be in error (*M-HI*, 104–7, 111). Christianity can and should make the temporal world—which is a place for the workings of Satan and sin—a better place for life; it should contribute to doing away with inequality and injustice (*M-HI*, 108–11). This is, however, not its main purpose, but a secondary (though indispensable) one, resulting from the existence of a first-order spiritual end (*M-HI*, 112; *M-SP*, 225). The spiritual good of the person is paramount here, consisting in their acquiring perfection and spiritual freedom. This overriding spiritual end, this eternal interest of the human person, is to be served by sociopolitical reality. That reality is intended to help individual human beings achieve this spiritual freedom and perfection, in the sense of making the temporal world a place where achieving these aims is more feasible (*M-HI*, 133–6, 176–7, 205).

16. If one misses or overlooks this critical point in Kierkegaard's thought, then one risks conflating these two realities of transcendence and immanence and aestheticizing his view—something that will be tantamount to doing the very thing he accuses Christendom of doing to Christianity.

2.3. *The apolitical nature of Christianity and the political nature of Christendom*

Despite the fact that Kierkegaard focuses primarily on showing the importance of this spiritual end while Maritain attempts to raise awareness of the significance of the Christian's temporal actions with regard to it, it is clear that both thinkers make the same distinction between the spiritual (eternal) good of the person and the temporal good of society. The domain of the political is quite clearly for them that which is temporal, while the domain of the religious (as that which is Christian) is clearly the eternal. Of great significance here is the primacy of the eternal, this being responsible for organizing the totality of human existential reality in the form of individuals established in God and destined to fulfill their personal freedom. All temporal ends, however important and necessary they may be in the everyday social life of people, are secondary and subordinate to this superior spiritual end. This seemingly obvious distinction, however, has very important consequences for any attempt to understand the possibility, manner, and degree of Christianity's involvement in temporal sociopolitical reality. This is the first step in defining the dialectic of Christian politics based on the evangelical injunction to "give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (*K-PC*, 168–70; *M-HI*, 98).

Put briefly, Christianity, in its eternal essence—as Maritain states—is a participation in the intimate life of God (*M-HI*, 98), and as such has no sociopolitical dimension. Neither Christian revelation nor Jesus Christ's mission on Earth are in essence political, as they do not concern the social life of man. Despite all the inequalities relating to life under temporal conditions, Christianity upholds the spiritual and eternal good of the person as the goal of his or her existence. In this sense, Christianity is in its very essence apolitical, meaning that its main end is not to become involved in the sociopolitical life of the world and transform the latter in accordance with the eternal pattern of the kingdom of God. The place where the Christian ideal is actualized is thus not in the sociopolitical life of Christians, but—in accord with Kierkegaard—in an inner, spiritual (transcendent) relation with God, one which transcends the psychophysical (immanent) human world (*K-CUP*, 43, 224; *K-PC*, 67). The fact that the result of this relation may perhaps be the Christian's interaction with the world, as in the case of the life and death of Christ, and so—with this—the probable influence of the Christian's attitude on the behavior of other people, is of great but secondary importance here.

It is in this context that one must also understand the role of the Church, which—according to both Kierkegaard and Maritain—is not simply a temporal community of Christians living in a given place and time, but

a representation of this spiritual, transcendent reality on Earth, it thus being a holy Church, a depository of the truth (*K-JN9*, 223; *M-HI*, 41, 102, 126). However, that which defines the temporal society of Christians is referred to in the accounts of both thinkers using the term “Christendom” (or “the Christian world”) (*K-PC*, 94–121, 211–21; *M-HI*, 41–2, 132).¹⁷ The Church, as that which is spiritual, is the embodiment of the Christian ideal and, as such, is apolitical. Christendom, on the other hand, as a temporal society of Christians, is political. Christendom is not directly responsible for whether the Christian ideal is actualized on Earth, for only particular Christians in their relationship with God and their neighbors can be responsible for this.

Where these two realities meet—that of the holy, spiritual Church and that of human, temporal Christendom—is where the political paradox of Christianity manifests itself: Christianity is apolitical in the first, main dimension of its existence and, at the same time, becomes political in the second, peripheral dimension of its functioning. This dialectic of Christianity, which consists in the simultaneous existence of man on two levels of reality—the spiritual and the temporal—is translated here into the dialectic of Christian politics, resulting in the fact that the Christian will be apolitical in their relationship with God and in relation to the absolute good but political in their social relationships and in relation to the common good.

3. THE NATURALIZATION OF THE CHRISTIAN IDEAL IN THE TEMPORAL WORLD

The most important problem arising in this context concerns how the essentially apolitical Christian ideal comes to be introduced into social life, such that it triggers political consequences in the latter and so impacts on the functioning of society and culture. The comments of Kierkegaard and Maritain in this regard seem to suggest that the Christian ideal becomes falsified in Christendom if it is introduced directly—that is, if it is treated as a certain intellectual model subject to reformulation so that it may be adjusted to better fit the prevailing social situation. Both Kierkegaard’s criticism of the prevalent form of Christendom and the Church in Copenhagen in his day, and Maritain’s criticism of the anthropocentric humanism that leads to the creation of totalitarian ideologies, show the most important

17. Maritain uses the expression “the Christian world” (French: *le monde chrétien*) only in a negative sense, to denote the temporal existence of Christianity in the age of anthropocentric humanism. When he speaks of the ideal of a proper Christian order in the world (be it the medieval one or a future one), he uses the term “Christendom” (French: *chrétienté*). In English translations of Kierkegaard’s works the term “Christendom” is only used as a translation of the Danish “Christened.”

features and threats issuing from such a direct transfer of the Christian ideal into social life.

3.1. *Kierkegaard's criticism of Christendom*

Kierkegaard, in accordance with his authorial strategy, presents this problem in a radical way: on his reading, the commitment to apoliticality of the Christian ideal implies the impossibility of using Christianity for socio-political purposes in the temporal world. Every such attempt leads to the falsification of this ideal. He levels this accusation against "established Christendom," by which he means the Orthodox Lutheran Church, which exerted a great impact on social and political life in the Denmark of his day (*K-PC*, 218–9, 232; *K-PV*, 80). This process of falsification, in Kierkegaard's view, consists in the Hegelian rationalization and objectification of Christianity, meaning the process of turning it into a form of abstract knowledge, a system of thought which would legitimize the authoritarian power of the state over the individual (*K-PC*, 85–94).¹⁸

For Kierkegaard, Christianity is an "existence communication" which requires internalization, the subject's full commitment to the truth of the word of God (*K-CUP*, 379–80; *K-PC*, 87, 225–6). Turning this truth into objective knowledge that can be captured and described by reason, such that it may then be accessible and understood by everyone without having to personally delve into its meaning, makes this truth into the same sort of object of knowledge as we encounter in any other field of epistemic engagement, and strips it of that which constitutes its essence (*K-CUP*, 224, 606–10; *K-FSE*, 63–4). Meanwhile, as stressed by Kierkegaard, the essence of the figure of Christ resides in this: that the teacher is more important than the teaching itself—that He, Christ, is the truth, the embodiment of the words He speaks (*K-PC*, 123–4; *K-CUP*, 326.). In this way, He ceases to be recognizable in any direct manner (*K-PC*, 127–33). It is not enough to learn about His teachings to be a Christian: one must first believe in Him, wish to be like Him, and want to follow Him as a prototype (*K-PC*, 237–41; *K-UD*, 221, 225–6). In other words, becoming and being a Christian requires mediation via the attitude of Jesus Christ, who poses to each person the question of whether they want to believe in or be offended by Him (*K-PC*, 96, 115, 141). Each person who chooses not to follow His path takes offense, rejects the truth of His life, and fails to become a true Christian. Such a person will not be able to establish a spiritual relation with God in their life—on the contrary, as one immersed in sin, they will have a tendency to rationalize

18. See also Krimmse 1990, 379–404; Law 2007, 90–6.

this relation with God in temporal terms, to generalize it, to turn it into an object of learning in schools and a matter of the state.

This is precisely what Kierkegaard accuses the Lutheran Church of doing in the Denmark of his day: that instead of inclining people to live in deep and true faith, it reduces the requirements of faith to the sphere of ritual, modifying faith to accommodate the possibilities of bourgeois living. In this way, the Christian ideal connected with the truth of God's word and the prototype of Christ becomes a bourgeois ideal consisting in securing the moral order of life, in giving it meaning, in creating a sense of security and comfort in worldly life (*K-MM*, 95–8, 109–11, 160–1). Religion is thus reduced from an individual relationship of man with God to something universal: it becomes the moral foundation of social reality.¹⁹ Moreover, Christianity, understood in this way, turns out to consist in the common good of all people: something to be looked after by the state on the one hand, and something that strengthens the power of the state over its citizens on the other.²⁰

Kierkegaard thus rejects the possibility of directly linking being a true Christian with being a part of Christendom. This is so because the individual cannot at the same time relate to the universal through his relation with God (the relation of faith) and relate to God through his relation to the universal (the relation of Christendom) (*K-FT*, 70; *K-MM*, 188). These two realities are, for Kierkegaard, completely separate. As a result, each person who makes a doctrine out of Christianity and introduces it into public life, each member of Christendom, each politician that uses Christian values or appeals to them thereby reveals that he or she is not a Christian in the real sense, that he or she has not established a personal relationship with God. Such a person at once falsifies the truth of Christianity and makes

19. This is the main brunt of Kierkegaard's sociopolitical critique. Such a generalization of a human being's existence from the level of the individual to that of the universal is what he calls "leveling," meaning an equalizing of sorts: the formation of the public in place of a true social life based on responsible individuals. For Kierkegaard, this is a betrayal of genuine commonality that consists in transforming individuals from societal actors into spectators subordinated to an abstraction (Jegstrup 1995, 428). The tool essential to carrying out these negative sociopolitical transformations was, for Kierkegaard, the press, which replaced personal communication amongst people with the anonymous communication that is publicity (Lappano 2014, 786). As mass media, the press gives rise to the formation of the public and the crowd—a parody of sociality (Lappano 2014, 784).

20. In this way Christianity becomes a mass phenomenon. Christians can, as such, be much more easily controlled—in the name of generalized religious truths—than can responsible individuals. On the matter of civil society, Kierkegaard was a staunch opponent of Hegel, for whom a state was required in order to realize citizens' identity and freedom, just as Kierkegaard also opposed patriotism, nationalism, and all forms of thinking that constricted personal freedom at the level of the individual's actions (Zook 2008, 397–8).

this truth that which it is not. As a result, on Kierkegaard's account, no true Christian will set out to become involved in solving the sociopolitical problems of this world, and they certainly will not do so as a result of Christian motives. The task is rather to disseminate spiritual goodness, in the form of love for one's neighbor, to every person, regardless of their views, place of origin, or social status (*K-WL*, 58, 60, 72).

In this sense the true Christian will, on Kierkegaard's view, inhabit the same relationship with someone who is a national hero and with someone considered a traitor, for he or she will seek out the spiritual force of love established in them by God, rising above that which distinguishes them in merely temporal terms. He or she will therefore act not out of concern for the interests of the state or the good of the community, but out of consideration for the spiritual good of particular people.

3.2. *Maritain's criticism of anthropocentric humanism*

Maritain surveys the problem Kierkegaard presents from a broader historical perspective. He notes a certain historical-cultural process going on here, that began with the end of the Middle Ages and whose last act was the rise of totalitarian states in the first half of the 20th century (*M-HI*, 15–34, 153–61). He sets himself the task of showing the mechanism that led to the disintegration of the medieval vision of a human being as a person fully united in his or her earthly being with God—a vision which, in Maritain's opinion, saw its most mature formulation in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas (*M-HI*, 9–14, 143–53). The gradual separation in the temporal realm of what is human from what is divine—a process in which the Reformation played a special role and in which Hegel's philosophy marked the final stage—led, finally, to a complete reversal of the inherent order in which man acts for the glory of God (the supernatural). Where Kierkegaard analyzes the Christendom of an emerging modernism, Maritain observes the sociopolitical situation of the developed modern world, one in which a consequence of the decrepitude and failings of Christendom is, in his view, the development of anthropocentric humanism, an outright negation of the idea of Christianity (*M-HI*, 27–8, 113–8).

This anthropocentric humanism performed a dialectical reversal of the Christian ideal and transferred the relation of man's subservience to God onto the relation of the material world's subservience to man (*M-HI*, 30–2). In other words, contrary to what Christianity in a principled way implies, where man as a person can spiritually develop only in a relation of dependence on God, anthropocentric humanism has led to a gradual transformation of the experience of the living God into a philosophical idea that has justified man's desire to become ruler of the world (*M-HI*, 32–4). Maritain,

in presenting the way in which the reality of man immersed in God disintegrates dialectically into divine and human realities—with this ultimately leading to man becoming the only causative force in the world—indicates that man's road to emancipation from God runs through nature (*M-HI*, 22–4, 29–30, 32). For man to be able to deify himself, what must first occur is a complete separation of his temporal ends (natural ones) from eternal ends (supernatural ones) (*M-HI*, 19–24, 27, 31). The world divorced from God becomes fully the domain of man, who, in determining his rights and actualizing his ends in this world, performs a complete reversal of roles: from being a subservient servant of God in the world he becomes ruler of the world, which God, as an idea, serves (*M-HI*, 21, 24, 31–4).

This is particularly visible for Maritain in the philosophy of Hegel, where Christianity becomes part of a historical process and ultimately loses its transcendent dimension. The Christian ideal of redemption is introduced into the dialectic of history; it becomes an element of temporal history and the state becomes that in which man can achieve the fulfillment of his freedom (*M-HI*, 21, 23). In this way, deprived of its supernatural end, Christianity comes to be naturalized within history, and its ideal is used as a certain load-bearing model describing the purpose of developing social relations (*M-HI*, 30, 34).

Maritain directly shows in such terms how communist ideology, based on Marxist dialectics, uses the Christian ideal as a certain model into which it inserts its own content. The communist myth about constructing a perfect state in which all inequalities between people are eliminated and in which universal happiness and order prevail is, in Maritain's view, a transposition of the idea of the kingdom of God (*M-HI*, 40, 51–3, 57, 107, 170). In the communist vision, however, the perfect state is meant to be fulfilled here and now in temporal life on Earth (*M-HI*, 54–5, 58–9). Communism, in this context, manifests itself as a certain type of atheistic religion in which matter occupies the place of spirit, the state occupies the place of God, and the collective occupies the place of the human being (*M-HI*, 35–40, 61–3, 226–7; *M-PCG*, 85–90). In Christianity, proper contact between a person and God can only have a spiritual dimension and be accessible to individual human beings who develop their freedom in God. In communism, as a materialistic religion, the basis for the union of the state and the collective is a set of economic factors to which the essence of human functioning has been reduced (*M-HI*, 46–50; *M-SP*, 20).²¹

21. This analysis of communism, as reversing the Christian ideal and bringing the latter into conformity with its own agenda, would seem to be Maritain's original contribution to political

According to Maritain's account, this communist reversal of the idea of Christianity is on the one hand a response to the dehumanization of social relations in bourgeois liberalism (capitalism) (*M-HI*, 46, 77–82, 87–91), but on the other a result of Christendom's acquiescence to the development of bourgeois social relations (*M-HI*, 41–3, 112–8, 229–30, 245). These two elements are, for him, parallel outcomes issuing from the rise of anthropocentric humanism, in which man has given God dominion over heaven but made himself the absolute ruler on Earth. The result of this dualism is that man started to shape his temporal order in separation from Christianity and the wisdom thereof, and to perceive himself and his freedom in terms of complete autonomy (*M-HI*, 27, 30, 78, 116–7). In consequence, for Maritain, depriving Christianity of any influence over the shape of sociopolitical and cultural relations in the temporal world ends in what he calls the "tragedy of humanism," this being when man destroys himself in the new, atheistic order of the world (*M-HI*, 8f., 28–34).

Both Kierkegaard and Maritain locate Christianity's political depravity in the same source: the divorce of the Christian ideal from its spiritual roots. On Kierkegaard's account, the consequence of this is that the apolitical Christian ideal comes to be employed to construct a Christendom in which all baptized people, regardless of their spiritual engagement, can consider themselves Christians and be part of a sociopolitical community that identifies with Christian rituals and culture (*K-MM*, 117–8, 143, 168, 187–8). On Maritain's account, this same mechanism brings it about that the Christian ideal gets used as a fundamental building block of an anthropocentric humanism in which man adores himself and deems himself master of history and matter (*M-HI*, 32–4). For both thinkers, a Christianity deprived of the transcendent, individual, relation of man with God becomes a dangerous vehicle for political ideas that contradict its essence and yield a false picture of the latter in the world. Christianity, naturalized, becomes a tool of racial, class, and nationalist domination in a world of people engaged in fighting one another for power and material gain (*M-HI*, 7, 65, 203; *K-MM*, 143–4, 226; *K-JN* 9, 223, 430; *K-JN* 11/2, 324, 363).

4. THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON THE TEMPORAL WORLD

Of great importance is the fact that while both thinkers construct formally similar criticisms of Christendom and discern the same causes of its decline

theology. It is worth noting here that he was at the same time a critic of political theology as construed by Carl Schmitt. Maritain held that this way of thinking objectified theology, conceptualizing it in terms that neglect the spiritual sense of the political (McCormick 2013, 176–9).

in the sociopolitical reality of the 19th and (in the case of Maritain) 20th centuries, they arrive at contrary conclusions as far as the possible influence of Christianity on the temporal human world is concerned.

In his idealist vision of Christianity, Kierkegaard rules out the possibility of the Christian ideal being mediated in the world in any way. This is so for one simple reason: the Christian ideal is anti-natural (*K-JN* 9, 425–6, 428–30; *K-JN* 10, 262–4); it is inscribed with the possibility of offense related to the temporal world overtaken by sin (*K-PC*, 81f., 109–13; *K-SUD*, 83–4, 87). The political is part of this world of sin, and the latter is incapable of accepting the spiritual principle of Christianity which reveals the sinful world's untruth (*K-PC*, 232; *K-JN* 8, 399). Every clash of these two realities must trigger a nature-essence conflict. The conclusion of these deliberations on Kierkegaard's part is that the true Christian, who represents the Church militant, must always suffer in the world; he must be persecuted and share the same fate as Christ, becoming a victim of this world (*K-PC*, 63, 172–3, 196–8; *K-FSE*, 169; *K-UD*, 328–1, 338–9).

From Maritain's deliberations, however, it is clear that Christianity is not anti-political, as this would mean that it was anti-social, that it existed *contra* society or in defiance of it (*M-HI*, 109–10, 136–7, 225). The ideal apoliticity of Christianity, which refers to the personal ideal of human salvation—when it appears in the real social world—takes the form of a certain political program whereby the human world is saturated with Christian ideas and enriched with them (*M-HI*, 118–22, 203–4). This transition from the ideal apoliticity of Christianity as a church of saints to the actual politics of Christianity as Christendom illustrates its essentially prosocial purpose in the world (*M-HI*, 108–11). In other words, Christendom, for Maritain, not only makes sense but also plays a very important role, as it is that which refracts Christian ideas in the world to make this world a more righteous and worthy, and simply better place to live, both in the moral dimension and the material one (*M-HI*, 111–2.).

Foundational to Kierkegaard's thought is the collision of two ideals—that of immanence and that of transcendence. Despite the fact that, from a formal perspective, fulfilling both ideals is based on the same existential scheme of internalizing content and committing to the good (*K-CUP*, 191–2, 197–8, 325), the difference between them is fundamental. The immanent ideal speaks of the common good, about what is universal in human life; it refers to the world of community (family, the state, cultural communities, civilization) (*K-EO2*, 255–65, 323–4). The transcendent ideal concerns the highest good, the individual's salvation; it refers to a person's individual relation with God (*K-UD*, 127–9; *K-WL*, 264–5; *K-CD*, 188–9, 200). Here

a collision occurs between the ethical (the universal) and the religious (the individual) (*K-CUP*, 262; *K-PC*, 88, 93): a collision from which it follows that, in Kierkegaard's thought, these two ideals cannot be fulfilled at the same time in the life of one person—for, in acting on behalf of one, a person begins to negate the other (*K-FT*, 54–7).

The result is that on the one hand the ethical person possessing the highest authority in his or her community may, in a religious sense, remain a normal sinner in need of forgiveness just like the most morally problematic member of the same community, while on the other a person who enters into a spiritual, religious stage of his or her existence and who is able to disseminate love for one's neighbor in the world cannot in real terms affect the social shape of the world. They cannot be, for example, a community leader, or even a moral authority for such a community. This is because they must be fully committed to the spiritual good of their neighbor, even if in temporal terms that person acts to the detriment of their community.

This collision does not escape the attention of Maritain, who speaks of a certain paradox or antinomy consisting in the fact that the Christian is supposed to be entirely devoted to his or her sociocultural community and at the same time have an overriding existential end in the form of a personal and eternal calling in God (*M-HI*, 135–6, 205). Kierkegaard claims that a person cannot be completely subservient to a temporal end and at the same time strive to actualize in their life a superior, eternal one. Maritain, however, sees a solution to this antinomy, in that while a Christian is supposed to work for the development of the temporal, common good, it is this common good that should be simultaneously subordinate to the eternal good of the people constituting the community (*M-HI*, 133–6; *M-PCG*, 69–79). It thus turns out that it is possible to link the ends of the community with the eternal ends of the individual only when the community takes on the form of a secular body politic constituted in Christian terms, with it subordinating its understanding of the common good to the eternal good of the human being (*M-HI*, 176–7). It is then that, despite the independence of the temporal ends of the community and the eternal ends of the individual from one another, these two orders can be reconciled. The common good is in this case inspired and strengthened by the ideas of Christianity, and the people fulfilling this common good in their lives at the same time create conditions for the spiritual growth of particular members of the community (*M-HI*, 205, 293–4; *M-SP*, 69–77; *M-PCG*, 39–49, 54). This, specifically, would mean something different from what Kierkegaard claims: namely, that the Christian, on Maritain's view, can simultaneously achieve his or her personal and eternal ends as well as his or her community-oriented and temporal ones.

Such an idea is of fundamental importance for the success of the socio-political project Maritain calls “integral humanism” (*M-HI*, 72, 87f., 162, 289). This project, admittedly, does not concern the spiritual life or eternal ends of human beings, yet without the possibility of linking spiritual reality with temporal reality it cannot succeed. Integral humanism is a Christian project, but at the same time a secular one (*M-HI*, 162, 176–7), focused on developing the temporal goods of a community as well as the intellectual, moral, material, political, and sociocultural aspects of the temporal reality of a person’s life (*M-HI*, 134, 291–2). Building such a secular Christian community is, Maritain believes, a difficult task that requires sacrifice, heroism, and a sanctification of secular life (*M-HI*, 118–25; *M-FMW*, 144–7, 151, 179), but at the same time it offers a real chance to overcome the injustices of capitalism and create a sociopolitical order that will be relatively just, founded upon fraternal friendship, and which will provide the masses with a certain acceptable level of prosperity (*M-HI*, 136–7, 187).²² To this end, however, personal models are needed which can only be created by people who fulfill their calling in God. Otherwise, Christian ideals will have no locus for penetrating the temporal world, as they will have no real model in the spiritual world (*M-HI*, 73–4, 121–2). This is why it is so important to link this spiritual reality with the temporal one.

It turns out that the dialectic of Christian politics furnishes a different solution in Kierkegaard’s and in Maritain’s thought. For Kierkegaard, this dialectic is disjointed and fails to lead to a synthesis of the spiritual and temporal worlds. The synthesis of these two realities is possible only in the life of the individual, who will subordinate his or her temporal life to the eternal requirements of Christianity. However, not only does such an individual not exercise any direct, constructive influence on the sociopolitical life of his community, but also, even more, they face being excluded from it as a result of having negated its values and the understanding of the common good (*K-UD*, 338–9; *K-PC*, 115–8). In this sense, the apolitical Christian ideal always takes on a negative form within the temporal reality of Christendom, which, by engaging this ideal in social and political life, abolishes it (*K-PC*, 35–6, 143–4, 211).

22. What must be emphasized here is that Maritain’s project is a democratic one, founded upon what he refers to as democratic faith or, at times, secular faith. Maritain is convinced that Christianity and democracy are based on the same foundations of freedom, dignity, fraternal love and the absolute value of the moral good. For this reason democracy is, on his account, a type of secular faith, and that which unites people in the context of forming a democracy is neither ideology nor religion, but instead a shared conviction that one ought to represent these fundamental human values in one’s political attitude (*M-MS*, 108–114; *M-CD*, 18–9, 31, 38–9; see also Kraynak 2016, 76–80).

Maritain's vision, on the other hand, is such that this dialectic of Christian politics has its own positive solution in the form of an integral vision of Christendom, in which sociopolitical reality not only may, but should, see Christian ideas refracted through it (*M-HI*, 108, 112, 212–3). Admittedly, the French philosopher postpones the realization of his program of a secular Christian state to an indefinite time in the future, as he does not envisage the possibility of its existence in the modern capitalist world (*M-HI*, 241–55). Nevertheless, he speaks clearly of it as a concrete historical ideal which, with the proper involvement of Christians, has a chance of succeeding in the temporal world (*M-HI*, 127–32).²³

5. THE KIERKEGAARD-MARITAIN MODEL

Standing at the intersection of these two dialectics pertaining to Christian politics, the question arises as to whether it is possible in some way to meaningfully combine their elements. An attempt to fully link them seems methodologically impossible, but it is worthwhile considering whether they can be reconciled in a way that would enable one to actually define the possibility of the transcendent Christian ideal influencing immanent sociopolitical reality. What this comes down to is whether personal Christian ideals, such as love for one's neighbor, the equality of all people in relation to one another, justice, and human dignity can take on a real form in the temporal world, in the sense of being present in some way within it.

It seems that what links the accounts of Kierkegaard and Maritain, despite all their differences, is a belief that the Christian, transcendent ideal can exist in its proper form in a personal relationship between the individual and God. If this is to manifest itself in the world, this can only happen through the efforts of Christians who are capable of serving this ideal through their lives. It is therefore not in dogmas, laws, or institutions that the Christian ideal can exist in its proper form, but only ever in and through the act of a singular person.

In connection with this, it seems clear that there is no such community-oriented, immanent form of the Christian ideal in existence, meaning one that would be equivalent in significance and strength to the transcendent

23. Interestingly, in total contrast to Kierkegaard, Maritain sees an opportunity for greater spiritual growth towards God on the part of particular human beings in the improvement of life conditions for the masses—not only in terms of morality, but also with respect to the law and wealth (*M-HI*, 137). Thus, the secular Christian order and the relative material prosperity of the masses are meant to fuel the spiritual development of particular persons, and these persons, themselves becoming more perfect in their freedom, are to refine this temporal good of the community.

ideal. For this reason, Kierkegaard rejects the possibility of there existing any kind of real form of Christian truth in the immanent world (*K-CUP*, 570–3, 576). In turn, Maritain—who is aware of the dissimilarity of these two ideals arising from the differences between eternal and temporal ends—does not speak overtly about the direct and full presence of this truth in immanence, but about a refraction of the truths of the Gospel in the temporal order, of the world of grace, and of God’s kingdom in the socio-temporal realm (*M-HI*, 108, 112, 148, 212–3, 243),²⁴ and about the political order impregnated by Christianity (*M-HI*, 168), or about Christian inspiration simply put (*M-HI*, 203–4, 269, 275).

If one thus intends to uphold the positive interpretation of Maritain, according to which there exists a real possibility that the transcendent ideal influences sociopolitical reality, then it seems that what must be spoken of here is an indirect influence. The ideal is unstable outside of the existence of a particular person and it, in its essence, can only move from person to person by means of forgiveness, faith and love. For this reason, if one wants to search for the transcendent ideal’s potential meaning for immanence, it must be shown how the former will be transmitted to the latter, what precisely will be transmitted, and what the transmitted element will be reproduced and preserved in.

It seems that on Maritain’s account, that which can reproduce in some way the Christian ideal in the temporal world is the common good. He would say that this good is the right earthly life of the assembled multitude, of a whole composed of human persons (*M-HI*, 133). This proper life means that social structures will be organized according to the rules of justice, human dignity and fraternal love (*M-HI*, 111). Here the transcendent ideal is what gives the immanent ideal these rules of conduct, strengthens man’s temporal understanding of them, and makes them more perfect in their human version (*M-HI*, 134).

24. The concept of refraction as a certain metaphor for the imperfect reflection of one reality in another was probably taken by Maritain from Bergson, who was his teacher. On Bergson’s account, refraction does not yield an image that is simply a replication of the original (as is the case with reflection); it produces an image that is neither copied nor destroyed, but transformed. Refraction may be interpreted here as a form of mediation (Mullarkey 2004, 483). Such an understanding of refraction makes clear how Maritain captures the possibility of the transcendent ideal existing in sociopolitical reality. Christianity cannot in its transcendent essence simply be reflected in the world, being fully present in it. Such a reflection can take place only in the spiritual life of a human being fulfilling his or her freedom in God. In the case of social reality, only a refraction of this essence is possible, an indirect influence on this reality—a certain transformation of this reality on the basis of the Christian ideal.

The process of the Christian ideal transmitting rules to the common good cannot, however, take place objectively—that is, by turning them into knowledge, by shaping the rules and laws of societal functioning with them as a foundation. What unfolds via the route of objectivity is, according to Kierkegaard's criticism, the Christian ideologization of sociopolitical reality: an imposition of a Christian cultural code on the human masses as the proper way of understanding the world. It is not possible to objectively transfer Christian truth into the temporal world without entrapping this truth within it, naturalizing the latter (*K-CUP*, 585, 607–16; *K-PC*, 86).

For this reason, Kierkegaard introduces the concept of subjective truth, which cannot be appropriated directly, objectively, by means of intellectual cognition (*K-CUP*, 189f.). He understands Christianity to be the domain of human interiority, the individual's choice, the personal appropriation of truth. This truth can be communicated only indirectly; it requires faith in its meaningfulness as well as a commitment to fulfill it in one's own life (*K-PC*, 123–44; *K-FSE*, 25–51). Knowledge is not the domain of this truth. Its domain lies in the testimony of the subject, in their expression of this truth through themselves. This means that the transcendent ideal (the truth of Christianity) cannot be learned objectively: it can only be put into practice, shown by example, and thus communicated to others, with the hope that they will open themselves up to it (*K-PC*, 140–1; *K-FSE*, 18–9).

The fact that the transcendent ideal functions in this existential way means that only a subject—a concrete person—can serve as its vehicle of transmission. Only the individual can mediate between the transcendent ideal and the immanent one. Between the absolute truth of Christianity and the objective truth of sociopolitical reality, there must appear the subjective truth of the individual. A person must appear who will acknowledge the transcendent ideal as something whose importance for themselves warrants reproducing some element thereof in their existence, in their relation to the common good. This is not about a Christian, in the sense of a witness of the truth (a saint), but about a person who in their life is guided by the immanent ideal (the common good). Only such a person—a well-shaped ethical subject in the sense in which Kierkegaard presents this attitude in the second part of *Either/Or* (*K-EO2*, 155–338)—can be truly influenced by the transcendent ideal in the temporal world, with this ideal at one and the same time strengthening the subject's attitude to the immanent ideal and attracting that subject to itself.²⁵ An individual whose subjective truth is

25. As shown by Smith (2005, 46, 52–3, 57), what lies at the heart of the political (ethical) subject on Kierkegaard's account is this subject's individual responsibility, for which the

linked to the common good and is actualized in sociopolitical reality cannot transmit the transcendent ideal as a universal ideal for human action (if they do so, they will, again, ideologize and naturalize it), but they can, by relating to it in temporal terms, perfect their way of acting and thereby introduce elements (rules) of the transcendent ideal into the temporal world.

By the same token if, for example, a transcendent Christian understanding of love for one's neighbor is to be reproduced in the way a given person relates to others in sociopolitical life, then this must first occur in the interiority of the subject. Only when this subject relates to the transcendent ideal in their attitude can they then complete this transformation and transposition into immanence. This is not a matter of displaying this ideal in a postulative or declarative (i.e. objective) sense, but of accepting its mode (rule) of action in relation to the common good. It could, for example, translate into an ability to limit the influence of personal preferences on decision-making in the social sphere, or an ability to equalize the opportunities of various ways of relating to the common good within the community, without assigning them a value on the basis of personal preferences.²⁶

Of great importance here is a fact that is worth stressing yet again: the transcendent ideal does not transmit to the subject ready-to-use content in the form of knowledge, rules, or laws that they could directly apply to their understanding of the common good (the immanent ideal). The transcendent ideal—in accordance with the qualitative dialectic of Kierkegaard (*K-CUP*, 202–3, 495, 612–3)—establishes rules of inner behavior; it strengthens the

concept of spirit is normative. This spiritual understanding of responsibility requires that the individual establish a relation with the transcendent ideal, which constitutes the foundation of a true social sense. A false social sense is, according to Kierkegaard, shaped in relation to a reversed concept of equality which is conditioned not by this individually and spiritually developed responsibility, but by an externally imposed conception of social equality (this conception being an element of the process whereby individuality is leveled) (Smith 2005, 49–50; Tillley 2014, 950–1). It is worth noting here that Kierkegaard was opposed to democracy, as he saw it as a source of leveling because of how it imposes externally the ideology of social equality.

26. The Christian ideal of love for one's neighbor was presented by Kierkegaard in *Works of Love*. In short: Christian love for one's neighbor has a spiritual dimension and, in opposition to typical human love (erotic love, friendship, love of country, etc.), is not founded upon a relation of preference—that is, on a two-dimensional relation between two people or between a subject and some object of adoration (*K-WL*, 52–63; see also Ferreira 2001, 43–52). The guiding principle of spiritual love is eternity's equality—the equality inherent in the Christian's relating to every person as his neighbor independently of the relation that joins them in the temporal world (*K-WL*, 67–73, 81–9, 137–143; see also Ferreira 2001, 53–64). This love is always mediated in God, with its proper reference point always being God and its proper goal being to help another person love God (*K-WL*, 58, 106–7, 112–3, 120–1, 142; see also Ferreira 2001, 71–5).

way in which the subject relates to the common good, how they understand it, how they involve themselves in it and, finally, how they shape it through their existential attitude. It is only in this way that the spiritual good can strengthen the moral good in a person and cause the temporal, human world to become more just and full of fraternal love, just as Maritain wishes it to be. The transcendent ideal's mediation in the subjective truth of the individual brings it about that the ideal strengthens morally only the person who actually wants it and will strive to perfect their moral life. Only such a person, according to Maritain's version of the ideal, can develop the common good, strive to make the temporal world a better place to live, and at the same time perfect themselves internally while seeking out their own path to a full expression of the spiritual good in their existence.

CONCLUSION

The model outlined above attempts to show how the Christian ideal can penetrate sociopolitical reality in a way that brings about a moral (and, subsequently, a legal and cultural) development of the human community without at the same time distorting this ideal. It entails three fundamental conclusions for the way the Christian ideal can exist in sociopolitical reality.

Firstly, this ideal should always exist as a hidden force; it should be what Kierkegaard calls the incognito of religiousness (*K-CUP*, 431f.; *K-TA*, 109). This cannot take the form of a political program, or of political manifestos that use religious ideas to battle other worldviews so as to obtain a dominant position in the world. The influence of this ideal cannot here concern an object of politics or its content, but must always and exclusively relate to how politics is done, to how political ideas are actualized in the world. In this way, as stated by Maritain, the Christian ideal supplants the purely technical dimension of political activity with an ethical one (*M-HI*, 214–9). This Christian understanding of politics is meant to be effective not in pushing through, at all costs, the views accepted by Christians, but in making the world a place worth living in for all people regardless of their views.²⁷

From this it follows, secondly, that political life, saturated with the Christian ideal, is not at the same time a place for the political preaching of Christianity. Christendom, as a temporal Christian community that consists in teaching Christianity and in nurturing and developing Christian culture, is not tasked with creating either political structures or generating any worldview-based influence on the sociopolitical life of the community. On

27. This pluralism is one of the fundamental postulates of the Christian democratic state as understood by Maritain (see *M-HI*, 162f.; *M-SP*, 109–10; *M-MS*, 109; see also Evans 1960).

this view, the main aim of the existence of Christendom is rather to educate human beings to be ethical subjects responsible for themselves and for their community: that is, to be individuals capable of opening up to the influence that the transcendent ideal can have on their behavior.

Thirdly, and in line with Maritain's thought, the Christian ideal so understood consequently does not limit its influence solely to followers of the Christian faith, but can create ways of relating to the common good that are valuable for all people (*M-HI*, 205–7). What makes this possible is the fact that what is Christian here is not displayed ideologically. The world will not be better on account of people knowing a great deal about Christianity and imposing on others a Christian way of thinking about the temporal world: it will be better because they know how to express, through their actions, that which defines the ethical significance of the personal Christian ideal. Only such an indirect affirmation of Christian behavior in the attitude of ethical subjects can, over time, change the rules of action accepted and respected by the community. These rules, however, cannot become viable and permanent by being objectified at the level of knowledge and codification, but rather only by being implemented personally by each member of the community.

The Kierkegaard-Maritain model proposed above presupposes an initial assumption about the existence of a dialectic of Christian politics that, in turn, consists in there being some fundamental tension between the Christian ideal—apolitical in its essence—and political Christendom. The model undertakes a fundamental reformulation of this dialectic with respect to the way in which Christendom engages in the sociopolitical life of the community. It calls for a change away from an objective understanding of Christianity as one of the worldviews vying for political power in the world to a subjective approach as a way of relating to the common good. This would seem to avoid the ideologization and negative appropriation of the Christian ideal in sociopolitical reality while promising to create a locus for the temporal world's being truly saturated with this very same ideal.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS:

Kierkegaard's works:

K-CD – *Christian Discourses*.

K-CUP – *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* to Philosophical Fragments.

K-EO2 – *Either/Or*, part II.

K-FSE – *For Self-Examination. Judge for Yourself!*

K-FT – *Fear and Trembling*.

K-JN 8 – *Journals and Notebooks* (vol. 8).

K-JN 9 – *Journals and Notebooks* (vol. 9).

K-JN 10 – *Journals and Notebooks* (vol. 10).

K-JN 11/2 – *Journals and Notebooks* (vol. 11, part 2).

K-MM – *The Moment and Late Writings*.

K-PC – *Practice in Christianity*.

K-PF – *Philosophical Fragments*.

K-PV – *The Point of View*.

K-SUD – *The Sickness unto Death*.

K-TA – *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age. A Literary Review*.

K-UD – *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*.

K-WL – *Works of Love*.

Maritain's works:

M-CD – *Christianity and Democracy*.

M-FMW – *Freedom in the modern world*.

M-HI – *Integral Humanism*.

M-MP – *Moral Philosophy*.

M-MS – *Man and the State*.

M-PCG – *The Person and the Common Good*.

M-SP – *Scholasticism and Politics*.

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