

We Have Never Been Secular:
The Concept of the Secular and the Dutch Collegiants in the Radical Enlightenment

by

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

The following study examines the history of the seventeenth century Collegiant group in the Dutch Republic, focusing on their blending of Spiritualist and Rationalist influences. By reading Collegiant Rational Religion through the lenses of social history and the history of ideas, the following study makes explicit the ways in which the Collegiants were simultaneously a religious and secular movement. Being both religious and secular, the historical example of the Collegiant group challenges contemporary distinctions between religion and the secular.

Chapter 1 outlines the history of the Collegiants in the context of the seventeenth century Dutch Republic, from their first meetings in Rijnsburg in 1619 up to their period of Rational Religion. Through an examination of Collegiant ideas and practices, the first chapter describes the genesis of the movement after the Synod of Dordrecht, the early millenarian influence, and the Spiritualist period of the Collegiant group.

Chapter 2 then widens the scope of inquiry by situating the Collegiant group in the Early Enlightenment, focusing in particular on the Radical Enlightenment. The second chapter advances two concurrent arguments against a teleological reading of the Collegiant transition from Spiritualism to Rationalism, each concerned with preserving the dignity of the Collegiant blending of Rational Religion, rather than reducing it to a transitory phase on the way to Rationalism. The two concurrent arguments against the teleological reading of the Enlightenment include (1) the critique of the concept of Enlightenment as a normative ideal as provided by critical theory, and (2) the recovery of the role of religion during the Enlightenment period as provided by recent revisions to historical scholarship.

Chapter 3 narrows the scope of inquiry to the Collegiant transition to Rationalism, focusing on the ways in which the Collegiants blended together Spiritualism and Rationalism to form a Rational Religion that emphasized the compatibility of faith and reason. Through an examination of Collegiants who belonged to the Spinoza Circle and Collegiants who were also Mennonites, Chapter 3 concludes by describing the schismatic effect of the Bredenburg dispute and the collapse of the blended approach in the late Collegiant Rationalist period.

Chapter 4 concludes the study by rethinking the contemporary divide between the categories of *religion* and the *secular* by drawing parallels between Collegiant Rational Religion and the contemporary Continental Philosophy of Religion, the latter of which is represented by theologian and philosopher Daniel Colucciello Barber.

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Introduction

The Collegiants were a diverse association of Protestants who gathered together for worship and discussion during the seventeenth century in the urban centres of the Dutch Republic. Beginning in Rijnsburg in 1619, Collegiant groups spread to major cities such as Amsterdam and Leiden, where they remained until their last meetings in 1791.¹ A variety of Anabaptists, Arminians, Socinians, Remonstrants, Reformed, Chiliasts, and Quakers attended Collegiant meetings, and the groups that held regular meetings were called "colleges." Interior diversity of membership became one of the defining features of the Collegiant group, along with anticonfessionalism, anticlericalism, and their unique meeting format. In Collegiant meetings, there was no hierarchical leadership structure, and there were no claims to ecclesial authority. Instead, members freely shared their interpretations of scripture and experience as a body of equals, speaking from the floor of their meeting rooms rather than from a raised podium or pulpit.² Arising from their rejection of clerical authority and written confessions, this practice of group discussion became known as "free prophecy."³ In the egalitarian nature of free prophecy, the Collegiant rejection of hierarchical leadership complemented their theological conviction that there was no longer a true visible church of Christ. Instead of thinking of themselves as the one true church, the Collegiants understood themselves to be a group of individuals who met together in order to be guided by the Spirit.⁴

Influenced by the Spiritualism of Sebastian Franck and Caspar Schwenkfeld and the Rationalism of Baruch Spinoza and Rene Descartes, the Collegiants were a small but interesting extension of the Anabaptist Radical Reformation and the Free Church traditions. The beginnings

¹ Andrew C. Fix, *Prophecy and Reason: The Dutch Collegiants in the Early Enlightenment* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 37.

² *Ibid.*, 169.

³ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

of the Enlightenment movement deeply affected both Collegiant thought and practice. Throughout the early Enlightenment, the Collegiants shifted from a Spiritualist theology and practice that emphasized prophecy and the doctrine of the "inner light," to a Rationalist theology and practice that encouraged the personal use of natural reason. In its extreme form, characteristic of the late period of the Collegiant group, Rationalism privileged "objective thinking, without passion, prejudice or superstition, and without reference to non-variable statements such as those of religious revelation."⁵ This shift from Spiritualism to Rationalism resulted from the contradictory intellectual and social forces at work in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic.

In addition to their unique place as a hinge between the Radical Reformation and the early Enlightenment,⁶ the Collegiants are important and challenging for contemporary study because they defy categorization in three important ways. First, the contemporary terms of 'religious' or 'secular' do not adequately describe the Collegiant group as a whole. Although they began as a religious group in Rijnsburg and ended as a Rationalist group, it would be reductive to characterize the Collegiant group as either secular or religious because of their novel blending of Spiritualist and Rationalist influences over the course of their history. Apart from their Spiritualist beginnings, at no point in their history can the group rightly be called purely secular or purely religious. The diverse constitution of the group over time meant that from the middle of Collegiant history onward, even a minimal confessional common ground could not be assumed among those who gathered. This anticonfessional tendency encouraged the inclusion of a wide

⁵ Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment*. 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 100.

⁶ See Andrew Fix, "Radical Reformation and Second Reformation in Holland: The Intellectual Consequences of the Sixteenth-Century Religious Upheaval and the Coming of a Rational World View." *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18.1 (Spring 1987): 63-80. Fix writes that "the Collegiant movement became the center and focus of a highly significant development in the evolution of European religious and philosophical thought: the transformation of a millenarian and spiritualistic religious world view into an embryonic secular and rationalistic philosophy" (63).

variety of people in Collegiant meetings, resulting in an early expression of pluralism and tolerance.

The Collegiants moved through three distinct stages over the course of their history. They began as a group of Remonstrants who met together in Rijnsburg following the Synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619), and from the middle of their history onward they blended together Spiritualist principles with the Enlightenment Rationalism of Descartes and Spinoza. Although the late period of the Collegiants was characteristically Rationalist, even the Cartesian-inspired Rationalism of later Collegiant thought is not reducible to our contemporary category of the secular because it retained aspects of Rational Religion.

Second, the Collegiants deserve study from both the perspective of social history and the perspective of the history of ideas. Whereas the history of ideas tradition focuses on intellectual patterns and the key individuals who expressed them, social history tends to focus on structural shifts and the experiences of common people. The Collegiants call for study from both perspectives because they were defined by both an intellectual trajectory in which ideas and theological debates were highly valued and a social trajectory that affected the religious atmosphere of Dutch society. In order to develop a fair and balanced definition of the Collegiant group, the following thesis will attend to both the experience of ordinary Collegiant members, as well as the ideas of Collegiant leaders like Galenus Abrahamsz and Pieter Balling.

Third, while the development of Collegiant thought and practice unfolded as a movement from Spiritualism to Rationalism, it is imperative that this movement not be interpreted teleologically, as a transitory means to an end. While it is tempting to reduce the Collegiant trajectory to the inevitable outcome of the Rationalism that characterized the final years of the group, this study argues that Rationalism was not the only imaginable end of the group. To

characterize the Collegiants using the movement from Spiritualism to Rationalism risks missing the importance of their period of Rational Religion during which the forces of both perspectives were not only blended together, but explicitly understood as compatible. After focusing on this blending throughout, the final chapter will show how Collegiant Rational Religion challenges contemporary thinking about the categories of the secular and the religious.

Chapter 1

The Collegiants of the Seventeenth Century Dutch Republic

Literature Review and Historiographical Challenges

The two major English-language sources on the history of the Collegiant group are Andrew Fix's book *Prophecy and Reason*⁷ and Leszek Kołakowski's essay "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anti-confessional Ideas and Rational Religion."⁸ Fix's book is a widely-cited and comprehensive treatment of the historical and theological breadth of the Collegiant group. Tracing the movement from Spiritualism to Rationalism using secularization as his key category, Fix covers all of the major Collegiant thinkers, focusing on Galenus Abrahamsz in the early period and Jan Bredenburg in the late period.

Whereas Fix is considered to be the authoritative source on the history of the Collegiant group, Kołakowski is not as well-known a source, and therefore deserves a more significant introduction. In 1963 the Marxist philosopher wrote an article in his native Polish called "The Mennonite Anticonfessional Current and Rational Religion." Historian James Satterwhite of Bluffton University later translated the essay and published it in two parts in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* in 1990. Kołakowski eventually developed the original essay into a book, which was first published in Polish and then translated into French in 1969.⁹ Some salient

⁷ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*.

⁸ Leszek Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion: The Mennonite, Collegiant and Spinozan Connections (Part 1)," trans. James Satterwhite. *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 64 no. 3 (1990), 259-297. And "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion: The Mennonite, Collegiant and Spinozan Connections (Part 2)," trans. James Satterwhite. *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 64 no. 4, 385-416. Major Dutch-language studies include J. C. van Slee's *De Rijnsburger Collegianten* (Haarlem, 1895) and H. W. Meihuizen's *Galenus Abrahamsz* (Haarlem, 1954), along with more general studies such as C. B. Hylkema's, *Reformateurs* (1901), and W.J. Kühler's, *Het Socinianisme in Nederland* (Leiden, 1912.). See also Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 17.

⁹ Leszek Kołakowski, *Chrétien sans Église. La conscience religieuse et le lien confessionnel au XVIIe siècle*. Trans. Anna Posner (Paris: Gallimard, 1969). The translation also includes a new afterword by Kołakowski. Despite being considered an authority by Andrew Fix throughout *Prophecy and Reason*, Kołakowski's sizeable book (824 pages) has not yet been translated into English.

sections of the third chapter of *Chrétiens sans Église* have also been translated into English in the collection *The Two Eyes of Spinoza*, with some partial overlap with the second part of the Satterwhite translation.¹⁰

Satterwhite introduces the essay by explaining that Kołakowski was interested in religion for more than its usefulness for a reformed anti-Stalinist Marxism. Instead of merely being a foil for socialist critique, Kołakowski's interest in religion was present from the beginning of his career, and complements his work on modernity.¹¹ Satterwhite quotes R. M. Fernandes:

What attracted him [Kołakowski] to these movements was that they were attempting to 'realize Christian values without conforming to the rules of ecclesiastical organization. They sought a religious practice which would be free from the 'visible' constraints attached to Church membership, such as credo, rituals, sacraments, institutional *sacerdoce*, etc. They tried to form a Christian community that would not be a church.'¹²

The title of Kołakowski's larger study, *Chrétiens sans Église*, reflects this way of characterizing the Collegiants by suggesting that they remained Christians without the traditional ecclesial structures of the church. During the time in which this essay was written, Kołakowski researched "the relationship between freedom and institutional control – particularly in the context of a revolutionary movement."¹³ Kołakowski's attention to the rejection of church authority by the Collegiant group is reflective of this interest and colors his interpretation, although not in such a way that prevents his work from being useful to the historian, theologian, or philosopher.

¹⁰ Leszek Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth-century Non-denominationalism and *Religio Rationalis*: Mennonites, Collegiants and the Spinoza Connection," in *The Two Eyes of Spinoza, and Other Essays on Philosophers*. Trans. Agnieszka Koakowska. Ed. Zbigniew Janowski. (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2004).

¹¹ See Chapter 1 in Leszek Kołakowski, *Modernity on Endless Trial*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

¹² Satterwhite quoting R.M. Fernandes in Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 1)," 261.

¹³ Satterwhite in Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 1)," 260. Even the nature of Kołakowski's article is both religious and secular because it concerns itself with a religious topic (anticonfessionalism) for secular purposes (extricating Stalinism from Marxism).

Two historiographical problems arise from these two sources. The first problem is that in *Prophecy and Reason* Fix relies heavily upon the movement from Spiritualism to Rationalism to periodize the history of the Collegiants. The use of these two categories, although helpful, risks reducing the particular trajectory of the Collegiant movement to the now defunct narrative of the secularization thesis.¹⁴ Fix begins his book by describing the cultural and intellectual milieu between 1650 and 1700. The portrait that he paints of the "intellectual transformation" of the seventeenth century rests upon the displacement of "the providential religious worldview" by a "secular worldview based largely on the foundation of human reason."¹⁵ Although this narrative is true of the Collegiants in particular, sociologists and historians have significantly challenged the overall narrative of secularization, and Fix's support of the secularization thesis on the level of the Enlightenment in general risks overdetermining the particular secularizing trend of the Collegiant group and eclipsing the importance of their period of Rational Religion.¹⁶

The second historiographical problem is that Kołakowski readily intertwines his theological and philosophical reflection on the works of the Collegiant leaders with his historical description of the group. Therefore, differentiating Kołakowski's historical descriptions from his

¹⁴ According to Callum G. Brown and Michael Snape early definitions of secularization in the 1950s-1960s understood secularization to be evident in "the declining institutional strength of religion in state and civil affairs." See their "Introduction: Conceptualising Secularisation 1974-2010: the Influence of Hugh McLeod," in *Secularisation in the Christian World: Essays in Honour of Hugh McLeod*. Ed. Callum G. Brown and Michael Snape (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 3. Since this early understanding of secularization, scholars such as José Casanova have argued that secularization entails "the privatization of religious beliefs and practices," "the privatization of religion" in the political sphere, and "the differentiation of the secular spheres (state, economy, science)." See his "Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective." *The Hedgehog Review* (Spring & Summer 2006): 7-22. Amongst these varieties of secularization the theory of social differentiation has emerged as the most robust explanation. See Chapter 4 below for a more detailed explanation of the critique of the secularization thesis.

¹⁵ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 3.

¹⁶ The conclusion that I draw from the critique of the secularization thesis, and from a close reading of the Collegiant movement, is that the Collegiant transition from providential deism to human-oriented rationalism is not reducible to the linear decline of religion associated with the term 'secularization.' Fix accounts for this complexity in part throughout *Prophecy and Reason* by attending to the way in which Collegiant Rational Religion rests upon the compatibility of religious knowledge and rational knowledge. Despite Fix's nuanced treatment of Rational Religion, however, the grand narrative of secularization as the definitive aspect of the Enlightenment remains his anchor, and should be treated with suspicion insofar as he risks conflating rationalization with secularization.

theological or philosophical reflections is a challenge when using his work in this context.

Keeping in mind these two historiographical challenges, this study will endeavor to draw the best out of both sources in order to sketch a narrative history of the Collegiant group, and then to characterize the group thematically in Chapter 3.

Collegiant Beginnings

The broad narrative of Collegiant history stretches from their first meetings in 1618 to their last meetings in 1791.¹⁷ According to Fix, the arc of their thinking was such that they began as Spiritualist, millenarian, and apocalyptic Protestants, and then "passed through a stage of rational religion before arriving at a secularized philosophical rationalism that found its ultimate expression in the philosophy of Benedict Spinoza."¹⁸

In 1618-1619 the national synod of the Reformed Church met to discuss the controversy around the doctrine of predestination and the debate between Dutch Reformed theologians Franciscus Gomarus and Jacobus Arminius. Whereas Gomarus argued for strict predestination, Arminius defended a position that emphasized individual free will. This resulted in a significant division in the Dutch Reformed Church. The Remonstrants, also called Arminians, were the more moderate arm of this division. The synod decided to remove several hundred Remonstrant preachers from their offices across the Dutch Republic.¹⁹ This resulted in the removal of Christopher Sopingius from his role as preacher at the Remonstrant congregation in Warmond. Following his removal, the Warmond congregation continued to meet regularly without a preacher, an idea suggested by one of their leaders, Gijsbert van der Kodde. This group gathered

¹⁷ Nanne van der Zijpp, "Collegiants." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1956. Web. 13 Feb 2015. <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Collegiants&oldid=120967>

¹⁸ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

together "to read several chapters from the Bible, to pray, and to have a devotional address if anyone felt called to speak," and soon two brothers of Gijsbert van der Kodde joined the group.²⁰

In the twenty years following these first meetings in Rijnsburg, Collegiant groups spread across the Dutch Republic but maintained a national center in Rijnsburg that hosted bi-annual conferences.²¹ When the meetings grew beyond Rijnsburg, both followers and observers referred to the meetings as "colleges" and the adherents as "Collegiants."²² As the Collegiant groups spread throughout Leiden, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Groningen, and areas of Friesland, the two most influential groups arose in Amsterdam and Rotterdam.²³

Two major groups influenced the Collegiants during their early years: the Remonstrants and the Socinians. The Remonstrants resulted from the Arminian controversy within the Dutch Reformed church, and were defined by their "principles of anticonfessionalism, anticlericalism, and freedom of conscience."²⁴ Fix writes that "[t]he Collegiants were born, of Remonstrant parentage, into this world of religious turmoil."²⁵ The Remonstrants, who remain a small but active religious group to this day, had close ties with both the Collegiants and the Mennonites, the latter of which provided them with a confession of faith written by the Waterlander Hans de Ries.²⁶ The anticonfessional Collegiants were influenced by the "pietistic values and practical morality" of both the Remonstrants and the Mennonites.²⁷

²⁰ Van der Zijpp, "Collegiants."

²¹ Ibid.

²² Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 38.

²³ Van der Zijpp, "Collegiants." Nanne van der Zijpp writes that the Collegiant group in Rotterdam held meetings until 1787, and the Collegiant group in Amsterdam held meetings up to 1791. See also Kolakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 1)," 266.

²⁴ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 30-33.

²⁵ Ibid., 37.

²⁶ Nanne van der Zijpp, "Remonstrants." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1959. Web. 12 Jan 2015. <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Remonstrants&oldid=125998>. For an older but comprehensive survey see Cornelius J. Dyck, "Hans de Ries: Theologian and Churchman. A Study in Second Generation Dutch Anabaptism." PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1962.

²⁷ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 48.

The Socinians, on the other hand, influenced the Collegiants in a different way. Fix writes that "[t]he Socinian movement derived its name from Laelius and Faustus Socinus, radical Italian Protestants whose influence was felt most significantly in the flowering of Polish antitrinitarianism during the late sixteenth century."²⁸ In 1579 Laelius Socinus journeyed from Italy to Poland and contacted a group called the Polish Brethren. In less than two decades, he became their leader.²⁹ In 1598 Laelius Socinus's works were brought to the Dutch Republic, where they influenced the group of dissenters who would later become known as the Remonstrants.³⁰ Despite this influence, there were major differences between Remonstrants and Socinians. Whereas the Remonstrants were anticonfessional and anticlerical, the Socinians were distinctly antitrinitarian, and the Socinians argued from the positions of both reason and scripture.³¹ The Socinians influenced the Collegiants from their beginnings in Rijnsburg onward. In the first meetings of the Collegiants, Socinians were welcomed and their "rational approach to biblical interpretation" became very influential in the Collegiant group.³²

From the beginnings of the Collegiant group until midway through their history, major Collegiant leaders were influenced by both Remonstrant and Socinian perspectives, which led to the combination of their influences on the Collegiant group. Fix writes that "Socinian rationalism did not alone create the Rijnsburger rational religion, but it was extremely important in reinforcing and elaborating tendencies already present in Collegiant thought."³³ Despite the influence of Socinian thought on the leaders of the Collegiants, not all Collegiants were

²⁸ Ibid., 137.

²⁹ Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 14.

³⁰ Ibid., 25.

³¹ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 143. Fix also writes that "In addition to antitrinitarianism, a rejection of the deity of Christ and of Christ's satisfaction, pacifism, and a belief in the separation of church and state, the Socinians stressed human free will and rationality as well as the central importance of the individual's natural knowledge of God" (145).

³² Ibid., 42.

³³ Ibid., 161.

Socinians, and "[v]ery few of the Rijnsburgers adopted the fundamental points of Socinian theology," although many were accused of it by both the church and the state authorities.³⁴

The Early Spiritualist Period

Another major influence on the early Collegiant group was the millenarian apocalypticism (sometimes called chiliasm) inherited from the Spiritualist groups. Historian Geoffrey Dipple writes of the difficulty involved in defining Spiritualism, suggesting that it involved a mixture of biblicism and individual connection with the Holy Spirit, often in differing proportions.³⁵ In the sixteenth century, spiritualists overlapped and mixed with Anabaptists, making it difficult to distinguish between the two. Dipple does state that a large part of the Spiritualist perspective was "a distrust of religious ceremonies and ecclesiastical ordinances."³⁶ This definition, however provisional, accords with the Collegiant attitude toward the sacraments and rejection of institutional structures. Dipple writes further that a characteristic belief of Spiritualist Anabaptists was the fallen nature of the church, which also corresponds with the Collegiant rejection of the one true visible church.³⁷

The early Spiritualist influence upon the Anabaptist movement brought apocalyptic ideas to the fore for the Collegiant group. This apocalyptic millenarianism, the belief in a penultimate age of heaven on earth for one thousand years before the final judgment, was largely accepted in the religious milieu of the sixteenth century. Fix writes that "[b]elief in the imminent dissolution of the natural world became widespread among Protestants who were themselves repeatedly faced with the threat of annihilation at the hands of Catholic powers such as Spain, France, and

³⁴ Ibid., 161.

³⁵ Geoffrey Dipple, "Spiritualist Anabaptists," in *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521-1700*. ed. James Stayer and John D. Roth (Leiden, Brill, 2006), 259.

³⁶ Ibid., 291.

³⁷ Ibid.

the Holy Roman Empire."³⁸ This apocalyptic belief functioned as an important hinge between the Spiritualist inheritance of the Collegiants and the eventual Rationalism of the group. Fix writes,

In an age in which the traditional providential Christian worldview was still dominant, it would have been extremely difficult for most thoughtful people to make the transition all at once from belief in a world infused with the Holy Spirit to a view of the world in which the guiding hand of divine authority was largely absent. The chiliastic view of history made this transition possible for the Collegiants because it provided a middle ground that could be occupied by thinkers who were coming to see the world more and more in secular terms but who were not yet able to consider the world's separation from divine inspiration as final.³⁹

For the Collegiants the millenarian imagination helped to explain their increasingly secular experience of the world by locating the absence of divine inspiration in the apocalyptic conviction that the last days were at hand. This middle ground made sense of secular experience while still expecting the return of Christ. The separation from divine providence that the Collegiants experienced at the beginning of the Enlightenment period, alongside their belief that there was no true visible church, served as a half-way point for their transition to Rationalism. This half-way point was characteristic of Collegiant Rational Religion in a way that was both positive and negative. On one hand, the early Spiritualist influence changed the Collegiant understanding of the distinction between church and world in such a way that permitted the middle and later Collegiant group to see science, culture, and the arts as complementing their spiritual and moral lives. On the other hand, the gradual separation from divine providence began the process of disenchantment that would eventually characterize their late Rationalist period and numeric decline.

Apart from the millenarian atmosphere of the early Collegiant group, the greater Spiritualist influence rested upon the doctrine of the inner light (an early precursor to the

³⁸ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 63.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

doctrine of the same name held by many Quakers). For the Collegiants, the inner light was that part of a person that received "perfect religious knowledge as a means of preparing his soul to receive God's saving grace."⁴⁰ The Spiritualist idea that the inner light was common to all people and needed no external institutional support meant that "[t]he immediate contact with God that was the central feature of spiritualism made the visible church and external religion unnecessary, and even scripture was considered to be of secondary importance."⁴¹

Galenus Abrahamsz

A major figure in Collegiant thought who represents the movement out of the Spiritualist period into the blended period is Galenus Abrahamsz de Haan (1622-1706). Galenus was born in Zierikzee and raised in a Mennonite congregation who considered themselves neutral (*stilstaanders*) in the conflict between the Flemish and the Frisians.⁴² Galenus trained as a physician in Leiden from 1642 to 1645, and in 1648 he became the preacher for the United Mennonite Church in Amsterdam. Known as the Lamists, the Amsterdam congregation met in the church known as *Het Lam*. In 1649 Galenus declined the offer extended by the moderate Waterlanders to cultivate closer ties between their two churches. He turned down this offer to connect the United Mennonite Church in Amsterdam with the Waterlander church on the grounds that the Waterlanders were too accepting of those who were not Mennonites. However, Galenus' position quickly changed under the influence of both his friend Adam Boreel and the college that Boreel helped to found. Boreel's influence on Galenus is well-documented. Fix

⁴⁰ Ibid., 27.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² See Christian Neff, and Nanne van der Zijpp. "Flemish Mennonites." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1956. Web. 9 May 2015. http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Flemish_Mennonites&oldid=107374. And Christian Neff, and Nanne van der Zijpp. "Frisian Mennonites." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1956. Web. 9 May 2015. http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Frisian_Mennonites&oldid=106780.

writes that very shortly after he met Boreel at the Amsterdam college, "Galenus had joined the college and taken up Boreel's ideas with the zeal of a new convert."⁴³ Galenus' view that the true church was not present on earth was a direct result of the influence of Boreel and his college.⁴⁴ This anti-ecclesial view aligned with Galenus' hesitations about the use of ecclesial authority to prescribe confessions and represented a departure from earlier restitutionist thinking in Anabaptism.⁴⁵ H.W. Meihuizen writes that Galenus' "doubt whether any human being or any human authority ever could determine what someone else had to believe was intensified through his association with the Collegiants."⁴⁶ This questioning of ecclesial authority, along with the anticonfessional position that he found in the colleges, characterized Galenus' perspective until late in his life.⁴⁷

Soon after he began his leadership role at the Lamist congregation, more conservative members began to suspect that Galenus was not as orthodox as they had first thought. Accusing him of being a Socinian, some members of the leadership of the Lamist congregation arranged to meet with Galenus and his associate David Spruyt to discuss the issue of their heterodox views. However, before the meeting could take place in January 1657, Galenus and Spruyt presented their "Nineteen Articles," rejecting the possibility of any church rightly claiming to be the "the true church of the Lord."⁴⁸ The Lamist leadership disagreed with this position and instead

⁴³ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 96.

⁴⁴ Christian Neff, "Boreel, Adam (1603-1667)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1953. Web. 23 Feb 2015. [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Boreel,_Adam_\(1603-1667\)&oldid=120660](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Boreel,_Adam_(1603-1667)&oldid=120660).

⁴⁵ Geoffrey Dipple, *"Just as in the Time of the Apostles" Uses of History in the Radical Reformation* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2005), 270. Dipple writes that "In Galenus' thought, then, we see a clearly formulated spiritualist historical vision which reformulates some of the central elements of the Anabaptist historical vision, but derives from them radically different conclusions which challenge directly the whole restitutionist tradition."

⁴⁶ H.W. Meihuizen, "Galenus Abrahamsz de Haan (1622-1706)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1956. Web. 23 Feb 2015. [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Galenus_Abrahamsz_de_Haan_\(1622-1706\)&oldid=128590](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Galenus_Abrahamsz_de_Haan_(1622-1706)&oldid=128590).

⁴⁷ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 256.

⁴⁸ Meihuizen, "Galenus Abrahamsz." Cf. Kolakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 1)," 275.

affirmed the importance of confessions in the life of the church.⁴⁹ In response, "Galenus pointed out that the martyrs had not died for a faith in which there had been no deviation and that in the writings of Menno Simons a change in the concept of the church is noticeable."⁵⁰ This view of the interior diversity of the faith of the martyrs accorded with Galenus' positive experience of the Collegiant meetings and deeply affected his vision for the Mennonite church.

In June of 1660, the compiler of the *Martyr's Mirror*, Thieleman Jansz van Braght convened a conference of Mennonite churches in Leiden. As he had done before in Utrecht, van Braght led the synod to a conservative conclusion, in this case deciding that Galenus and Spruyt should "give up their views or to discontinue their ministry."⁵¹ He then "forbade Mennonite preachers to preach at Waterlander meetings and denied Waterlander preachers access to Mennonite congregations."⁵² Neither Galenus nor Spruyt recognized the authority or legitimacy of these demands and instead deferred to the authority of their congregation, in which they retained significant support. Kołakowski writes that "the matter ended in 1662 with a provisional agreement of mutual tolerance."⁵³ An unsteady peace remained until later that year, when conflict arose between the Mennonites Pieter van Locren and Samuel Apostool. Whereas van Locren agreed with Galenus that God's final judgment would evaluate what a person had *done* more than what they *believed*, Apostool argued that actions could not earn the satisfaction of God. After Galenus became involved "[t]he tumult which resulted from these discussions in the pulpit in Amsterdam spread throughout all Mennonite congregations in Holland, and even in

⁴⁹ Karl Koop, *Anabaptist Mennonite Confessions of Faith: The Development of a Tradition* (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 2004), 149.

⁵⁰ Meihuizen, "Galenus Abrahamsz."

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 1)," 275.

⁵³ Ibid.

foreign countries sides were taken for or against Galenus."⁵⁴ This began the *Lammerenkrijgh*, or the War of the Lambs.⁵⁵

Accounts differ regarding the root issue of the split. Whereas Meihuizen argues that the split was ultimately caused by a dispute regarding access to the Lord's Supper, van der Zijpp states that the conflict centered in the status of the true church and the importance of confessions.⁵⁶ The division likely resulted from a measure of both theological conflicts. Galenus was prepared to accept into communion anyone who had "lived an irreproachable life," but his adversaries had a more restrictive view of the supper and the confessional requirements for membership in the Mennonite congregation.⁵⁷ Those opposed to Galenus eventually seceded from the Lamist congregation, taking approximately one quarter of the congregants with them. This conservative group moved into a building called '*de Zon*' (the Sun) and were subsequently called the Zonists. Galenus attempted to bring the Zonists back into communion with the Lamist church, but he was ultimately unsuccessful. While earlier in his life he had rejected the liberalism of the Waterlanders, at this point in the development of his thought he was prepared to merge the Lamist congregation with the Waterlanders – a process that concluded in June 1668.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Meihuizen, "Galenus Abrahamsz."

⁵⁵ In his entry on the topic in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Nanne van der Zijpp writes that "[t]he name is a derisive epithet for the unpleasant bickering of the lambs of God, borrowed from one of the innumerable polemics of the time." During the conflict, the Lamist congregation split into the liberal supporters of Galenus (retaining the Lamist name), and the conservative opposition. Before the split, a conservative leader named Laurens Hendricksz appealed to the courts of the state to have Galenus removed from his position on charges of Socinianism, but was ultimately unsuccessful. See Nanne van der Zijpp, "Lammerenkrijgh." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1959. Web. 23 Feb 2015. <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Lammerenkrijgh&oldid=111295>. See also Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 147.

⁵⁶ Van der Zijpp, "Lammerenkrijgh."

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Galenus also worked to educate Mennonite preachers during that time, which eventually led to the creation of the Amsterdam Mennonite Theological Seminary. Throughout his lifetime Galenus published various theological tractates. During his early period he co-authored the *Olive Branch Confession of Faith* (1627), and during his late period he authored a catechism for the Waterlander conference. His thought developed from an early rejection of the liberal Waterlander tradition, through a lengthy middle period in which his tolerance was at its height, to a more qualified and moderate conservatism at the end of his life, relative to the increasingly rationalized atmosphere of the late Collegiants (Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 256).

Collegiant Rational Religion

The War of the Lambs is significant in the history of the Collegiant group because it represents the relationship between Spiritualist Anabaptists and the Collegiant groups connected to Galenus. Whereas the early Collegiants were influenced heavily by Spiritualism, the middle period of the Collegiant group was characterized by a complementary blending of Spiritualism and Rationalism, resulting in a form of "Rational Religion." The unfolding of Galenus' thought serves as one prominent example of a Collegiant leader who grew along with the great movement from Spiritualism to Rational Religion. Kołakowski writes that during this time, the "mixture of rationalist slogans with Christian Spiritualism is an undoubtable indication of the 'Cartesian invasion' in the area of religious life, and it can be observed in various versions in the nonaffiliated Dutch theology of the second half of the [seventeenth] century."⁵⁹ Representative of the advance of the Cartesian Rationalist perspective into Spiritualist discourse was the theology of Galenus' Collegiant friend Adam Boreel.⁶⁰ Boreel had influenced Galenus with his view that the Christian church "should be an invisible church without organization or sacraments."⁶¹

Galenus was a biblicist in the qualified sense. He granted authority to the Bible and privileged the New Testament over the Old Testament, a pattern common to the free church tradition that influenced him. Major doctrinal emphases include the love of God, the living of a simple life based on the teachings of Christ, and the process of striving for moral excellence and unity with the divine. Galenus' antitrinitarian beliefs were moderate. He believed that Christ was God's son, but was uncomfortable with the claim that Christ is one with the Father, instead preferring a more mystical account of the Incarnation. The concept of the church that Galenus developed was very open, and the boundaries that he drew around inclusion in the Christian faith and church membership were very generous. Galenus' open treatment of the boundaries around membership in the church was characteristic of the Spiritualist influence, but also of the movement away from world-denying apocalypticism toward the world-affirming possibilities of the middle period of the Collegiant group. Although he was a Mennonite church leader, the Collegiant anticlerical influence was strong enough to convince him that, in the words of Meihuizen, "leaders are to take a position of serving, and not ruling or certainly not of rank." See Meihuizen, "Galenus Abrahamsz." Cf. Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 1)," 281.

⁵⁹ Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 1)," 297.

⁶⁰ His dates are 1603-1667 in Neff, "Boreel, Adam (1603-1667)," and 1602-1665 according to Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 41.

⁶¹ Neff, "Boreel, Adam (1603-1667)."

Boreel began as a strict biblicist, evident in his 1645 publication *Ad legem et testimonium*, but his mysticism soon took on a Rationalist tone as he sought to use human reason to explain and justify the Biblical text. Boreel's "negation of existing religious organizations" soon extended to, and became compatible with, the use of reason.⁶² Kołakowski points out a significant later work by Boreel that makes "a noteworthy attempt to develop 'rational' arguments on the subject of the mystical doctrine of unity with God."⁶³ This work is titled *The Golden Christian Chain* (1678) and it developed a syllogistic argument that used both rational and scriptural justification to "show that for rational reasons God is the one and only goal of human beings, their reason and desire."⁶⁴ This compatibility is a major feature of Collegiant Rational Religion. Kołakowski characterizes this aspect of Collegiant thought in general, stating that,

Belief does not conflict with reason, because everything necessary for salvation is set out in Scripture clearly, without giving cause for doubt. No signs, symbols or rituals have the power of salvation in and of themselves, nor does belonging to any denomination; only internal devotion and living faith — but not *fides ex auditu* — can lead a person to rebirth.⁶⁵

Fix is in agreement with Kołakowski that Rational Religion and its compatibility of belief and reason characterized the middle of period of Collegiant development.⁶⁶ In particular, this influence of Rationalism on the Collegiants is evident in the works of Petrus Serrarius (1600-1669) and Daniel de Breen (1594-1664).

Serrarius was a close associate of the philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) and a member of both the Rijnsburger college and the Lamist congregation.⁶⁷ Influenced heavily by Galenus' view of the church, Serrarius associated with Adam Boreel and defended the Lamists

⁶² Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 1), 296.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 263-264,

⁶⁶ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 3.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 106.

against the Zonists in his 1659 work *The Trampling of the Holy City*.⁶⁸ Serrarius believed in "a rational light of discerning and a clearness of understanding,"⁶⁹ while also affirming the truth of inner religion against the perceived failure of all churches of his day. He believed that "in such times of corruption individual believers could gather together to read and discuss scripture as well as to comfort and admonish one another while they awaited the arrival of the millennium."⁷⁰ Although Serrarius was not a Rationalist like Descartes or Spinoza, his simultaneous millenarian and rational priorities do represent the influence of early Enlightenment rationalism on the Collegiants.

Daniel de Breen was a cofounder of the Amsterdam college with Adam Boreel, and de Breen served as the secretary for the Remonstrants at the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618.⁷¹ Kołakowski calls him a "pseudo-rationalist chiliast," pointing to the combination of chiliasm and Rationalism in his thought.⁷² In regards to this combination Kołakowski first warns that de Breen was not simply a Rationalist, but then states that the influence of Rationalism on his thought was significant:

To call de Breen simply a 'rationalist,' even in a religious sense, would certainly be an immense exaggeration. It is true that he formulated guidelines for interpreting Scripture, guidelines that are commonly called religious rationalism. In these guidelines de Breen formulated a general principle by enumerating technical principles of interpretation (comparison of texts, citing the author's purpose and the historical circumstances in which the text originated, analysis of the writer's style, linguistic analysis, etc.). All of this was, of course, based on a fundamental recognition of the sacredness of the Bible. This principle was that 'it is not permissible to accept any interpretation of Scripture that would contradict common sense, contradict itself or contradict the evidence of the external senses.'⁷³

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 75.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 108.

⁷¹ Van der Zijpp, "Breen, Daniel de (1594-1664)."

⁷² Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 2)," 385.

⁷³ Ibid., 386.

Kořakowski's warning is meant to communicate the subtlety of de Breen's thought, but the point remains that the coexistence of a biblicist and millenarian view with a rational hermeneutic principle demonstrates the compatibility of Rationalist and Spiritualist influences at this moment in Collegiant history.

As the millenarian and rational elements of Collegiant thought blended together, another half-way point emerged. A major connection between the Spiritualism of the early Collegiant movement and the eventual blending with Rationalism is the connection between the coming of the *eschaton* and the idea of progress. In his work on the philosophy of history, Karl Löwith points out the "hidden dependence of the secular religion of progress on the Christian faith, hope, and expectation of progressing toward a final fulfilment of history by judgment and salvation."⁷⁴ Given this connection, the millenarian expectation of the beginnings of the Collegiant movement provided the necessary conditions for the emphasis on human progress in the late period. In the interim period, millenarianism served as a half-way point between Spiritualist confidence in the presence of God, and the growing Rationalist suspicion that God's providence had weakened. As a half-way point of this movement, de Breen's pseudo-rationalist chiliasm is exemplary of the ways in which Collegiant Rational Religion encouraged the compatibility of faith and reason. Kořakowski helpfully defines the growing Rationalist influence on Collegiant Spiritualism as a "religious rationalism... that recommends interpreting the canonical writings in such a way as to adapt their contents with the demands of 'natural reason.'"⁷⁵

While Galenus had a positive orientation towards the natural world, de Breen held to "the idea of a basic antagonism, one not permitting of compromise, between the natural world and the

⁷⁴ Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 83-84. For a more recent affirmation of this connection between apocalyptic expectation and the idea of progress see David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990), 105-106.

⁷⁵ Kořakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 2)," 386.

Christian life."⁷⁶ This dualism was a direct result of the millenarian belief that the present world would pass away, along with the churches that claimed to be the one true church of God.

Accepting a dualist view of a "spiritual kingdom" and a "material kingdom" de Breen thought that the final judgment would "destroy false religious cults" and "topple all earthly monarchies and embrace the whole globe totally."⁷⁷ In this way he is much more akin to the early Spiritualists who influenced the Collegiant group than he is to Galenus on the question of the present world.

Historian of ideas Ernest Lee Tuveson affirms Löwith's argument that Christian millenarian expectation influenced the Enlightenment idea of progress and expands this connection by emphasizing the importance of the concept of utopia to the apocalyptic imagination.⁷⁸ Kołakowski also connects the millenarian expectation and Rationalist hermeneutics of de Breen in particular, with a concept of Christian Utopia.

And so it is also a most Christian utopia. In relation to religious life it has the same function as does a secular utopia in relation to secular life: it expresses the negation of the existing state of affairs with the aid of a positive description of the ideal state of affairs. To say that Christ will come and establish his kingdom on earth, his true church, is the same thing as to declare that no existing religious congregation is under Christ's care (from which naturally follows a suspicion of organized churches in relation to all millenarians). For de Breen the idea of a non-affiliated Christianity, purged completely of confessions, ecclesiastical organizations, the institution of the ministry and an external cult, is particularly linked with dreams of a completely worldly nature: doing away with state authority, law and wars, an abundance of worldly goods, mortal people covered with mortal joys—such as health, knowledge, longevity, peace, even splendor.⁷⁹

Kołakowski describes the role of de Breen's Christian utopia by identifying millenarian hope with the revolutionary negation of the present condition of the world. In this way Collegiant millenarianism is defined by a world-denying orientation, in which the world refers to the

⁷⁶ Ibid., 387.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 387-388.

⁷⁸ Ernst Lee Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Harper, 1964), 14.

⁷⁹ Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 2)," 389.

present time and place over and against the coming age. This type of utopian world-denial in the work of de Breen stands in contrast with the world-affirmation of Galenus, who was concerned for the Christian task of acting for the betterment of the world of culture and society. However, while de Breen saw a strong division between "the evil temporal world" and "the glories of the divine millennium," he simultaneously promoted toleration, "declaring that doctrinal differences did not belong to the essentials of religion."⁸⁰ It is striking that Collegiant discourse could contain the two contradictory approaches of Galenus and de Breen, and furthermore that de Breen's chiliasm influenced Galenus at the Amsterdam college in the years following 1653.⁸¹

Collegiant Rational Religion, in which two different perspectives were compatible and complementary, is the focus of the present study for a very specific reason. In the words of Fix, the Collegiants "inconsistently combined old and new and lived with contradictions they could not overcome."⁸² The major contradiction that Fix alludes to is between Spiritualism and Rationalism, which eventually resulted in the eclipsing of the Spiritualist influence by the Rationalist influence. Despite this eventual eclipse, Collegiant Rational Religion blended together these two perspectives – perspectives that are so often assumed to be incompatible, both in the historiography of the Enlightenment and in the present discourse on Christianity, religion, and the secular. The following chapter will show the greater historical context within which this compatibility was nurtured: the transition to the Enlightenment period.

⁸⁰ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 68-69.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 18.

Chapter 2

The Collegiants in the Radical Enlightenment

Characterizing the Enlightenment

The connection between the word "enlightenment" and "illumination" (*Illuminismo* in Italian, *Lumières* in French, and *Aufklärung* in German) reflects the self-understanding of many Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire and John Locke.⁸³ This common understanding of the Enlightenment as illuminating the darkness of superstition has unjustly resulted in the portrayal of the Enlightenment period as a "unitary phenomenon" characterized by reason and secularization, instead of "a group of capsules or flash-points where intellectual projects changed society and government on a world-wide basis."⁸⁴ Instead of seeing the Enlightenment as something that can be summarized or characterized singularly, cultural historians now recognize the dispersed and interiorly diverse nature of the Enlightenment period, spanning the domains of government, political economy, revolution, slavery, gender, science, and religion.

Two different perspectives tend to characterize efforts to describe the Enlightenment. On one hand, historians tend to describe the Enlightenment as a period in history from the middle of the seventeenth century to the late eighteenth century. On the other hand, critical theorists tend to critique Enlightenment as a set of principles and major themes such as disenchantment, secularization, and instrumental reason.⁸⁵ For the purposes of this study, Enlightenment will refer

⁸³ Outram, *The Enlightenment*, 1.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁵ For more in the area of instrumental reason see Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1989), Horkheimer, *Critique of Instrumental Reason*. Trans. Matthew J. O'Connell et al. (New York: Continuum, 1974), and Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Continuum, 1974).

to the approach of critical theory (without the definite article), and *the* Enlightenment will refer to the approach of cultural history (with the definite article).

Both the cultural history of the Enlightenment and the critical theory of Enlightenment no longer accept the idea that Reason was the primary characteristic of the Enlightenment, or the idea that 'progress' is an unproblematic description of Enlightenment. Instead, through their separate critiques, the cultural history of the Enlightenment and the critical theory of Enlightenment each demonstrate how reading the history of the Collegiants as a linear movement from Spiritualism to Rationalism misses the importance of their middle and later blended period of Rational Religion.

Whereas Spiritualism was defined by an individual connection with the Holy Spirit, and Rationalism a logical and deductive perspective, Rational Religion combined spiritual and rational attitudes. In the broad sweep of the Enlightenment period Rational Religion (also called "Reasonable Christianity") sought to construe Christian doctrine in such a way that would be acceptable to any rational person.⁸⁶

The cultural history of the Enlightenment now understands Rational Religion or "Reasonable Christianity" to be a major part of the period, contrary to earlier histories that identified the Enlightenment with uniform secularization. At the same time, the discourse of critical theory critiques Enlightenment reason for its totalizing pursuit of human progress, challenging earlier normative theories of Enlightenment such as those of Kant and Hegel.⁸⁷ Whereas the current historical perspective challenges the teleological reading of the Enlightenment as a process of increasing rationalization, the critical perspective challenges the normative supremacy of reason in Enlightenment thinking. These two concurrent arguments

⁸⁶ Outram, *The Enlightenment*, 122.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 116-117.

oppose the reading of Enlightenment history and philosophy that privileges progress and reason, therefore reinforcing the importance of Rational Religion by not reducing it to a transitory stage, but by granting it a dignity of its own.

Critical Theory and the Concept of Enlightenment

In December 1784, Immanuel Kant published a short essay in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* responding to the question: "*Was ist Aufklärung?*"⁸⁸ In the essay, Kant describes Enlightenment as a movement towards maturity and autonomy, into freedom and out of dependence upon others for understanding. For Kant, the courage required to acquire and maintain self-sufficient knowledge must overcome the comfort of tutelage. Kant's essay marked an epistemological shift toward understanding true knowing as knowing *on one's own*, without the guidance of others. Kant writes, "[i]f it is now asked whether we at present live in an *enlightened age*, the answer is: No, but we do live in an *age of enlightenment*," meaning that while the Enlightenment of society is by no means complete, society is in the process of becoming enlightened.⁸⁹ For Kant this process is progress towards universal "free thinking" in the public use of one's own reason (in the public sphere), and the simultaneous limitation of the private use of one's own reason (in the holding of civil offices).⁹⁰ When Kant upholds Enlightenment as freedom from tutelage he emphasizes the free choice of the individual in the public use of reason, while also emphasizing obedience to authority in the private use of reason.

Two hundred years after the appearance of Kant's essay, the French philosopher Michel Foucault responded in an essay of the same title claiming that "modern philosophy is the

⁸⁸ Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" in *Practical Philosophy*. Trans. M.J. Gregor (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

philosophy that is attempting to answer the question raised so imprudently two centuries ago: *Was ist Aufklärung?*"⁹¹ Kant's optimism on the subject of Enlightenment is tempered by Foucault's caution in his essay "*Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?*" Foucault identifies Kant's question as being definitive of modern philosophy, and then critiques the linear teleology of Kant's escape from tutelage towards a mature humanity. Foucault understands Kant's concept of Enlightenment as a way out (*Ausgang*) of the problematic immaturity of dependence upon authority.⁹² Whereas Kant confidently proclaims reason to be a liberating force, Foucault criticizes reason for having become its own kind of bondage. Foucault points out that it is a very modern act to ask Kant's question, noting that even the attitude that would seek to be for or against the Enlightenment is a kind of "blackmail" that we must free ourselves from.⁹³ Instead of obeying the terms of this dichotomy, Foucault writes that

one has to refuse everything that might present itself in the form of a simplistic and authoritarian alternative: you either accept the Enlightenment and remain within the tradition of its rationalism (this is considered a positive term by some and used by others, on the contrary, as a reproach); or else you criticize the Enlightenment and then try to escape from its principles of rationality (which may be seen once again as good or bad). And we do not break free of this blackmail by introducing 'dialectical' nuances while seeking to determine what good and bad elements there may have been in the Enlightenment.⁹⁴

Rejecting the blackmail of the Enlightenment, Foucault suggests that we analyze our historical determination through historical inquiry. Joining the philosophical discourse on the meaning of modernity Foucault understands "modernity rather as an attitude than as a period of history."⁹⁵ Similar to the recent historical scholarship on the Enlightenment, Foucault defines Modernity as an assemblage of attitudes, rather than as a period that can be characterized by a single descriptor

⁹¹ Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Politics of Truth*. Ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth (New York: Semiotexte, 1997).

⁹² *Ibid.*, 104.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

like reason or science. Later in the essay, Foucault tempers this distinction between describing the Enlightenment as an attitude or period with the reminder that "[w]e must never forget that the Enlightenment is an event, or a set of events and complex historical processes, that is located at a certain point in the development of European societies."⁹⁶

For Kant, Enlightenment was a positive escape from tutelage, and for Foucault Enlightenment was a kind of blackmail that set the conditions of its own debate and too readily put reason in service of political power. Rather than being suspicious of Enlightenment's own determination of attitudes that would be for or against it, critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer wholeheartedly oppose Enlightenment, calling it "totalitarian" in their landmark work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.⁹⁷ The Frankfurt School understands modern people as subjects of reason, being subjected to reason itself as a form of symbolic governance, ironically opposite to the spirit of *sapere aude*. The first chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* develops a rich theory of the major characteristics of the Enlightenment period. For Adorno and Horkheimer, the concept of Enlightenment is characterized by a rejection of history, a rejection of myth, and a "disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy."⁹⁸ More than that, for Adorno and Horkheimer Enlightenment thinking promotes the principles of domination and control, the association of knowledge with power, the rise of technological and instrumental reason, and the reduction of language to "neutral counters."⁹⁹ The reductive nature of Enlightenment thinking, for Adorno and Horkheimer, diminishes mystery and promotes a kind of rationality characterized by utilitarian ethics and

⁹⁶ Ibid., 121.

⁹⁷ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1989).

⁹⁸ Ibid., ix, xvi, 3.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 4-5.

totalitarian absolutes.¹⁰⁰ In the assessment given by Adorno and Horkheimer, the calculative rationality of the modern era springs from the emphasis on science and mathematics that began with the disenchanting and demythologizing attitudes of the Enlightenment. Placing systematization over narrative or culture, this type of rationality uses reason instrumentally, as a means to the end of progress.¹⁰¹

The critical analysis of the Enlightenment from Kant, to Foucault, to the Frankfurt School tends to define Enlightenment in terms of freedom, liberty, autonomy, individualism, rationalism (instrumental, utilitarian), disenchantment, and demythologization. This critical tradition problematizes any perspective that would uncritically uphold the goals of reason and progress in an effort to derive a normative ethic from the Enlightenment. This critical discourse, however, has also been accused of critiquing Enlightenment without being sufficiently grounded in the history of the Enlightenment period (for example, when Adorno and Horkheimer critique Enlightenment rationalism they ignore the positive aspects of the Enlightenment period). The critique of Enlightenment reason as a normative ideal necessarily rejects perspectives that prioritize reason over religion. In a similar way to this normative critique, contemporary cultural historians reject descriptions of the Enlightenment period that prioritize reason over religion. Bolstered by the two-pronged critique of history and theory, the Rational Religion of the middle and later Collegiant groups serves as an example of how the early Enlightenment remained religious in many respects. Whereas the critical theorists explored above critique the normative

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰¹ A more contemporary voice in the debate on the philosophical discourse of modernity, rather than the debate on the question of Enlightenment, is the philosopher Charles Taylor. In his book *The Malaise of Modernity* Taylor identifies three cultural indications of malaise in the modern era: (1) Individualism (free choice, liberty, rights, and being freed from the constraints of traditional authority), (2) Instrumental Reason (utilitarian thinking, the measure of efficiency, industrial and technologically driven rationality, all related to a general sense of disenchantment and decline), and (3) the loss of freedom on a political level via personal isolation (Tocqueville's soft despotism in which the facade of freedom is kept up while an "immense tutelary power" looms). Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Toronto: Anansi, 1991), 1-9.

ideal of reason in Enlightenment thinking, the cultural historical perspective developed below critiques the use of reason as a central characteristic of the Enlightenment period.

The Second Reformation

According to Fix, the Collegiants "acted as a conduit by way of which many of the ideas of the sixteenth-century Radical Reformation entered the ideology of the Second Reformation of the seventeenth-century."¹⁰² As a hinge between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Collegiants were also part of another smaller reform movement called the "Second Reformation of the seventeenth century." The moderates of the Second Reformation understood themselves "as carrying the work of the first Reformation to its logical conclusion by working within the established churches to purify and perfect them."¹⁰³ Fix writes further that "[t]he Second Reformation groups accused the established churches of abandoning spiritual principles and compromising with the secular world on important matters of theology, morality, religious life, and political involvement."¹⁰⁴ Representative of this Second Reformation, "[t]he Collegiant movement responded with disappointment to the perceived failure of the Reformation project, and identified a lack of authenticity and integrity in the churches that it produced."¹⁰⁵

The reaction against the Reformation on the part of the Second Reformation had some of the same qualities of the broader Reformation that encompassed it.¹⁰⁶ Much like the earlier Reformation, the Second Reformation was divided into a moderate wing and a radical wing. Fix writes that the moderate wing of the Second Reformation "was represented in the Netherlands by

¹⁰² Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 51.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

¹⁰⁶ Some scholars of European history now argue for a "long European Reformation" that began 150 years before the common origin story of Luther nailing the ninety-five theses to the door at Wittenberg. See Peter G. Wallace, *The Long European Reformation: Religion, Political Conflict, and the Search for Conformity, 1350-1750* (London: Palgrave, 2004), 1.

a movement within the Dutch Reformed church that historians have called the Further Reformation (*Nadere Reformatio*)."¹⁰⁷ Fix writes of this particular collection of groups.

The radical wing of the Second Reformation in Holland consisted in a group of reformers called by Kołakowski "nonconfessional Christians," referred to by Lindeboom as "*Stiefkinderen van het Christendom*" (step-children of Christianity), and called by C.B. Hylkema "*Reformateurs*." While the *Nadere Reformatie* worked for a renewal within the established Reformed church, the small sects and individual reformers who made up the radical Second Reformation wanted a total and immediate restoration of apostolic Christianity in all of its forms, even if this meant a rejection of all established churches.¹⁰⁸

With an emphasis on purity, and a disappointment with previous attempts at the establishment of the true Church, the early Collegiants rejected confessional restraints, thereby joining the radical wing of the Second Reformation.

The Radical Enlightenment

The connection that the Collegiants formed between the Reformation and the Enlightenment is strengthened by the work of historian Jonathan Israel, who locates the genesis of the greater "Moderate Enlightenment" of eighteenth-century France in the smaller "Radical Enlightenment" that began in the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century. Israel distinguishes between two streams in the movement of the Enlightenment, arguing that the smaller Radical Enlightenment greatly influenced the larger Moderate Enlightenment. Whereas the larger Moderate Enlightenment is more familiar to scholars of the Enlightenment, for Israel the smaller Dutch Radical Enlightenment was a much more important and influential force in determining the Enlightenment period as a whole.

According to Israel, the Moderate Enlightenment was upheld by state power and defined by the drive "to conquer ignorance and superstition, establish toleration, and revolutionize ideas,

¹⁰⁷ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 49.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

education, and attitudes by means of philosophy but in such a way as to preserve and safeguard what were judged essential elements of the older structures, effecting a viable synthesis of old and new, and of reason and faith."¹⁰⁹ The period of the Moderate Enlightenment was a "struggle for middle ground [that] remained inconclusive" from 1730 through 1750.¹¹⁰ As the Moderate Enlightenment sought to unify political power and Christian faith, the Radical Enlightenment eventually disrupted the struggle for middle ground and overtook the Moderate Enlightenment between 1780 and 1790, and influenced it from that point on.¹¹¹ This radical stream of Enlightenment thinking begins early for Israel (well after the spread of Collegiant groups in the Dutch republic up to 1640).

From its origins in the 1650s and 1660s, the philosophical radicalism of the European Early Enlightenment characteristically combined immense reverence for science, and for mathematical logic, with some form of non-providential deism, if not outright materialism and atheism along with unmistakably republican, even democratic tendencies.¹¹²

Whereas the Moderate Enlightenment understood faith and reason to be compatible, the Radical Enlightenment was not inclined to negotiate and compromise on matters of faith and reason, and on the urgency of reform. Israel writes furthermore that

the Radical Enlightenment, whether on an atheistic or deistic basis, rejected all compromise with the past and sought to sweep away existing structures entirely, rejecting the Creation as traditionally understood in Judaeo-Christian civilization, and the intervention of a providential God in human affairs, denying the possibility of miracles, and reward and punishment in an afterlife, scorning all forms of ecclesiastical authority.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750*. (London: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Here I have also drawn upon the summary provided in Douglas H. Shantz, "Religion and Spinoza in Jonathan Israel's Interpretation of the Enlightenment" in *Religious Minorities and Cultural Diversity in the Dutch Republic*, Ed. August den Hollander et. al. (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 210.

¹¹² Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 11-12.

¹¹³ Ibid., 11.

In his review of Israel's *Radical Enlightenment*, historian J.B. Shank summarizes Israel's position by identifying three major contributions that "constitute an important challenge to existing Enlightenment scholarship."¹¹⁴ First, Israel identifies Spinoza as a major, if unappreciated, influence upon the greater Moderate Enlightenment through the smaller Radical Enlightenment. Second, Israel moves the geographical centre of the Enlightenment from France to the Dutch Republic, the latter of which he identifies as the primary location of the Radical Enlightenment. Third, Israel moves the chronology of the Enlightenment resulting in a "reorientation toward the final third of the seventeenth century."¹¹⁵ On this third point, Israel himself writes that "there is an urgent need for Enlightenment historians to put much more emphasis on what was happening before and down to the 1740s."¹¹⁶

The Critique of the Radical Enlightenment

Following his summary of Israel's three positive contributions, one major criticism that Shank identifies is a "frustrating traditionalism and maddening dismissal of an entire generation of newer Enlightenment scholarship."¹¹⁷ This critique is shared by historian Dorinda Outram, who writes about it explicitly at the end of her book *The Enlightenment*, and by historian Dena Goodman whose focus on the importance of feminist historiography is antithetical to Israel's method.¹¹⁸ In *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* Goodman writes of the method of cultural history, which greatly contrasts with Israel's approach.

A cultural history of the French Enlightenment is not simply an intellectual history with a new name or even a broadening of intellectual history's field of inquiry from a small

¹¹⁴ J.B. Shank, "Review of Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750*." *H-France Review*. Vol. 2. No. 26. (February, 2002): 106.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 6.

¹¹⁷ Shank, "Review of Jonathan Israel," 105.

¹¹⁸ Outram, *The Enlightenment*, 144.

canon of elite texts to a wider range of cultural materials. Unlike intellectual history, cultural history does not assume that ideas, or even those who articulate them, are the primary subject matter of historical inquiry. Rather, cultural history focuses on social and discursive practices and institutions: both the ground on which particular discursive actions take place and those actions themselves. Ideas are not of a different order from the practices and institutions that constitute them....¹¹⁹

Goodman advocates for a cultural historical approach that takes into account the available range of cultural materials, rather than a history of ideas approach that focuses on intellectual trends and their proponents. The scholarship of Goodman and Outram could not be more different than Israel's methodology. In the words of Shank, Israel is "not generally inclined to treat texts and ideas in terms of their political, institutional, or gender context."¹²⁰ Instead, Israel not only resurrects the older history of ideas approach characteristic of Peter Gay or Paul Hazard, but explicitly understands the values of the Enlightenment as normative.¹²¹

Given this study's concern for the history of the Enlightenment and the specific place of the Collegiants in that history, Goodman's description reflects the practices and ideas found in the Collegiant group. One example of this connection in the Collegiant group is the reciprocal relationship between the idea of religious and social diversity and the practice of free prophecy. Another example is the reciprocal relationship between theological anticonfessionalism and the practice of baptism into the universal Christian Church. These two examples, which will be examined in more detail in Chapter 3, show that the Collegiants lend themselves to study from the perspectives of both social history and the history of ideas because of their interlocking beliefs and practices. Understanding the history of Collegiant ideas and the leaders who purported them is as essential as understanding the history of Collegiant practices, such as how they conducted their meetings and how they developed their discursive norms. Because of this

¹¹⁹ Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), 2.

¹²⁰ Shank, "Review of Jonathan Israel," 106.

¹²¹ Shantz, "Religion and Spinoza in Jonathan Israel's Interpretation of the Enlightenment," 211.

dual need, the history of the Collegiants could greatly benefit from a critical appropriation of the perspectives of both Israel and Goodman.

Whereas Shank, Outram, and Goodman critique Israel from the standpoint of method, historian Douglas H. Shantz critiques Israel's reductive reading of the role of religion in the early Enlightenment. First of all, Shantz points out that Israel's treatment of religion is one of the most significant problems with his work, going so far as to say that Israel "does not take seriously the positive religious dimension of the Enlightenment, as a movement fundamentally inspired by and aligned with religion."¹²² Shantz opposes Israel's critique of the acceptance of religion by the moderate Enlightenment, instead affirming the significance of Dutch and German religious traditions in the development of the Enlightenment.¹²³ Historians such as David Sorkin and Jennifer Powell McNutt share this critique of Israel's reductive treatment of the religious elements of the Enlightenment, arguing that religion was in fact an integral part of the Enlightenment movement.¹²⁴ This recovery of the role of religion in the history of the Enlightenment joins with the critique of Enlightenment thinking provided at the beginning of this chapter, and thereby securing the importance of Collegiant Rational Religion.

The Collegiants in the Radical Enlightenment

While the Collegiants are not usually included in the Enlightenment period proper, Israel's revision of the geography and chronology of the Enlightenment places the movement at the temporal and spatial origins of the Enlightenment. Writing years earlier than Israel, Fix states

¹²² Ibid., 208.

¹²³ Ibid., 209.

¹²⁴ Historian David Sorkin writes that "[c]ontrary to the secular master narrative, the Enlightenment was not only compatible with religious belief but conducive to it. The Enlightenment made possible new iterations of faith. With the Enlightenment's advent, religion lost neither its place nor its authority in European society and culture." In *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna*. (London: Princeton University Press, 2008), 3. For a similar argument see Jennifer Powell McNutt, *Calvin Meets Voltaire: The Clergy of Geneva in the Age of Enlightenment, 1685–1798*. (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 8-17.

that the "Collegiants and their thought formed a bridge between the providential Christian worldview of the Reformation era and the rational and secular outlook of the early Enlightenment."¹²⁵ Because of where they are situated historically, the Collegiants help problematize long-held assumptions about what characterizes the Enlightenment period. They do this by showing the strength of religious influence in the Enlightenment period in general, given their influence in the Dutch Republic in the late seventeenth century.

The Collegiants also strongly challenge the way that Israel divides up the Radical and Moderate Enlightenments. Because the Radical Enlightenment begins in the Dutch Republic between 1650 and 1660 the Collegiants are indisputably placed within its bounds. The Collegiants belong to the time period and geographical location of the Radical Enlightenment, yet they challenge Israel's division between the Radical Enlightenment and the Moderate Enlightenment. Both the Radical Enlightenment and the Collegiants indeed rejected institutional structures and church authority; however, where Israel characterizes the Radical Enlightenment as being opposed to religion, Collegiant Rational Religion maintained the blended compatibility of Spiritualist and Rationalist influences in a way that extended beyond mere deism.¹²⁶ Thus, the Collegiants remained a part of the time and place of the Radical Enlightenment while also challenging Israel's characterization of the Radical Enlightenment as an anti-religious trajectory.

In yet other ways, Collegiant values such as freedom of thought and toleration align with the values that Israel attributes to the greater Moderate Enlightenment. This correspondence between the Collegiant movement and the greater Moderate Enlightenment is present despite the fact that the sources of Collegiant values are not French but Dutch, and not from the eighteenth century but from the seventeenth century. Furthermore, the fact that the Collegiants maintained

¹²⁵ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 23.

¹²⁶ See Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 11-12.

the values of the Moderate Enlightenment concurrently with their religious convictions shows that the Enlightenment was not necessarily defined by the incommensurability of faith and reason in general, or Spiritualism and Rationalism in the particular case of the Collegiants.

Despite these significant incompatibilities, Israel explicitly identifies the Collegiant movement with the Radical Enlightenment. Emphasizing the heterodox nature of all Collegiants, Israel states that they were "disproportionately prominent in Dutch intellectual debate owing, above all, to the special emphasis they placed on the intellectual and spiritual freedom of the individual."¹²⁷ Israel provides his own summary of the movement:

The Collegiants might almost be described as an anti-Church, avowedly shedding all traditional accoutrements of ecclesiastical authority and power, as well as traditional notions of doctrinal orthodoxy. Joining the Collegiants, in contrast to other Churches, entailed no particular confessional allegiance or forms of outward observance or discipline, beyond a doctrinally vague, albeit usually fervent, commitment to Christian ideals. No one, whatever their views, was excluded from their midst, provided they accepted their manner of meeting and conducting their services... Their 'colleges' could rightly claim to surpass any other Christian community known in Europe in their ability to accommodate a wide spectrum of theological and philosophical opinion.¹²⁸

Israel's summary of the Collegiants accords with the characteristics that Fix and Kołakowski attribute to the group, namely the themes of anticonfessionalism, anticlericalism, and free-speech. Directly following the summary quoted above, Israel describes a major Collegiant schism that occurred following the transition from their middle blended period to their late Rationalist period.

Nevertheless, so fraught was the general intellectual atmosphere by the quarter of the century, and so acute their own internal *crise de conscience*, that finally it proved impossible any longer to sustain their traditional forbearance and unity in diversity. Such was the dissension gripping the movement, in the wake of the New Philosophy, that they

¹²⁷ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 342. See also Jonathan Israel, "Spinoza and the Religious Radical Enlightenment," in *The Intellectual Consequences of Religious Heterodoxy 1600–1750*. ed. Sarah Mortimer and John Robertson (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 182.

¹²⁸ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 342.

increasingly succumbed to bitter internecine strife and finally, in the 1680s, to the open schism which took many years to heal.¹²⁹

This summary of the Collegiant schism, known also as the Bredenburg dispute, implies that the contradictory forces of Spiritualism and Rationalism were too incompatible to maintain in tension, and were the eventual cause of the Collegiant schism. Discussed further in Chapter 3 below, the Bredenburg dispute was a confrontation between the Collegiant Jan Bredenburg and his detractors that culminated in 1686 when the Collegiant movement began to splinter, beginning with the colleges in Amsterdam and Rotterdam and subsequently spreading outward. The splintering of the Collegiant group late in its history corresponded with both the rising influence of Rationalism and the corresponding view amongst the colleges that faith and reason were no longer compatible, but contradictory.

Here, two possible views of Collegiant Rational Religion emerge. On one hand, the blending of reason and faith developed in the first chapter above suggests that Spiritualist faith and the Rationalist reason were truly compatible during the Collegiant movement, therefore resulting in a stable equilibrium of Rational Religion. On the other hand, Israel implies that Collegiant Rational Religion did not involve real compatibility and accord, but rather an unsustainable underlying tension. If we accept Israel's argument that the Collegiants were destined for schism because of their internal crisis of conscience, then their flirtation with Rational Religion becomes merely a stepping stone towards an inevitable Rationalism. This teleological reading of reason as the determining factor of the Enlightenment movement misses the role of religion in the Enlightenment period that Shantz, Sorkin, and McNutt emphasize.

However, if we accept the blended paradigm, then the cause of the late Collegiant schism and ensuing Rationalism cannot be located in the attempt to hold together opposing viewpoints

¹²⁹ Ibid., 343.

because this holding-in-tension was a sustainable practice. Instead of locating the cause of the Collegiant schism in the tension between Spiritualism and Rationalism the following two chapters investigate the possibility that Collegiant Rational Religion became unsustainable under the strain of the logical rules of distinction associated with the Rationalist influence.

The teleological reading of the Collegiant trajectory, from Spiritualism through the middle blended period to Rationalism, does not hold up under Shantz's critique. Furthermore, the teleological interpretation of the Enlightenment as an unstoppable movement toward rationality does not hold up under historical or theoretical critiques outlined above. Strongly challenging the identification of Enlightenment with progress towards the end point of rationality, contemporary thinking about both the *concept* of Enlightenment and the *period* of the Enlightenment serve to further decouple the Enlightenment from the *telos* of pure reason and rationality. This decoupling is required in order to secure the importance of the blended middle period of the Collegiants, and to critique the reductive reading of the role of Rational Religion in the history of the Collegiants.

Chapter 3

The Collegiant Transition to Rationalism

As the seventeenth century drew to a close, the defining features of Rational Religion lost their hold on the Collegiant group. As the Collegiants transitioned further and further toward a completely Rationalist perspective, they lost many of their defining characteristics, including their tolerant and accepting approach to disagreements and disputes. The loss of Rational Religion as a major influence on the Collegiant group due to the rise of Rationalism as an exclusive perspective, resulted in the disappearance of many key characteristics of Collegiant identity.

Characterizing the Collegiant Group

The task of characterizing the Collegiant group is difficult because of their interior diversity and because of how the group changed over time. Rather than defining the Collegiants by focusing on one particular characteristic, it is preferable to draw upon several defining features in order to account for the inner diversity of the group. Furthermore, rather than defining the Collegiants by the linear and teleological movement from Spiritualism to Rationalism, the following defines the group by way of a constellation of intertwining ideas and practices that unfolded and changed over time.

Fix tends to define the Collegiants through the use of key themes like tolerance and freedom of thought and key practices like free prophecy and the open format of Collegiant gatherings. Similarly, but not identically, Kołakowski's most detailed description of the Collegiant movement is summarized in four thematic parts.

The Collegiant movement embodies the highest social level of nonexclusive religious consciousness. The negative idea represented by the lack of belief in the existence of a

visible "true" church allows all of the distinguishing characteristics of the movement to be subordinated to this idea on the level of doctrine. These were (1) the absence of any clear limits to membership, allowing people from any denomination (even non-Christians) to participate in religious observances, therefore allowing a person attending the Collegium to belong simultaneously to another congregation (this was highly unusual in the history of religious groups and meant renouncing any claim to the confessional "individuality" of one's own group); (2) complete equality of the faithful in religious life and the universal right to a voice (the "freedom of prophecy"); (3) the absence of the institution of priest in any form; (4) the absence of any sacraments which would by themselves sanctify.¹³⁰

Kołakowski first defines the Collegiants as exhibiting a "nonexclusive religious consciousness" in which there is no singular visible manifestation of God's 'true' church. This characterization is shared by H.W. Meihuizen who states that the Collegiants understood themselves as "a voluntary organization of 'interdenominational Christendom.'"¹³¹ Kołakowski's characterization of the Collegiants is then split into four parts: (1) open membership, allowing for people of any (or no) tradition to belong to the group, (2) freedom of speech, (3) anticlericalism, and (4) lack of sacramental sanctification. The four categories that I employ below differ slightly from Kołakowski's in an effort to also include the characteristics upheld by Fix.

1. The Collegiants were *interiorly diverse* in both belief and practice. There were many groups of Collegiants in the Dutch Republic (Amsterdam, Leiden, Rotterdam, etc.), and within those groups there were a wide variety of theological and social influences (Mennonites, Socinians, Remonstrants, etc.).

2. The Collegiants were *anticonfessional* in their belief that confessions were an unfaithful reduction and limitation of faith. Their practice of baptism into the universal Christian Church accordingly did not include a standardized confession with which to assure uniformity in group identity.

¹³⁰ Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 1)," 270.

¹³¹ Meihuizen, "Galenus Abrahamsz."

3. The Collegiants were *anticlerical* in both their belief that apostolic succession was an imposture, and their rejection of hierarchical leadership. This theological belief was reflected in their practice of sharing their interpretations of scripture and experience from the floor of their meetings.

4. The Collegiants valued *freedom of expression* in the domain of belief, and *freedom of speech* in their corresponding practice of free prophecy. This is distinctive because the group did not merely include a wide variety of members with different viewpoints, but encouraged the freedom needed to maintain this interior diversity.

1. Interior Diversity

The Collegiants were *interiorly diverse* in both belief and practice, and so scholarly efforts to define the group must struggle with the tension between the interior contradictions of the group and the exterior unity that the term "Collegiant" names. There were many groups of Collegiants in the Dutch Republic, including those in Amsterdam, Leiden, and Rotterdam. Each of these groups had their own leaders and their own interior social diversity. A defining feature of the Collegiant group was not only that many of their groups held different views and practices, but that this plurality was a part of their normative self-understanding of what the life of faith ought to be.

The interior diversity of people grouped under the name "Collegiant" exceeds any unified or homogenous singularization in a name, to the point where Kołakowski writes that "the boundaries of 'Collegiantism' cannot be determined precisely, because of the lack of clear criteria for membership and the absence of a homogeneous organization."¹³² He states further that "it is

¹³² Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 1)," 272.

impossible to cite any clear criteria which would make it possible to determine under any circumstances whether a given individual could be taken as a Collegiant or not."¹³³

The interior diversity that Kołakowski emphasizes is constitutive of both the descriptive history of the Collegiants and their normative vision. On one hand, the group remains diverse because of its constitutive diversity, but on the other hand the group is unified because of the common affirmation of this diversity. Even within each specific college there were many different religious influences, including Mennonites, Socinians, and Remonstrants. Each of these groups had their own confessional and ecclesial traditions, yet they gathered under the Collegiant name.

The conditions that permitted Collegiant interior diversity were national, economic, and religious. Kołakowski writes that "Dutch public life in the seventeenth century was distinguished by its immense sensitivity on the question of religious tolerance, understood here as the voluntary acceptance of the existence and spread of opinions which one does not share."¹³⁴ Furthermore, Kołakowski claims that "the Collegiants' belief constitutes the most highly developed manifestation of this sensitivity."¹³⁵ The cultural and political atmosphere of tolerance within the Collegiant group was further encouraged by the diversity of the Dutch Republic, which owed much of its own existence to the diverse populations attracted to it by its strong trade economy.¹³⁶

To take a broader historical perspective, because of Israel's revision of the geography and timeline of the Enlightenment, it is now evident that the Collegiants were situated at the beginning of an important civic development: the public sphere. In his book *The Structural*

¹³³ Ibid., 271.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 266.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 55.

Transformation of the Public Sphere, social theorist Jürgen Habermas examines the expansive change in civic sociability that occurred in the creation and transformation of the public sphere in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹³⁷ Habermas understands the public sphere to be present when "the sphere of private people come together as a public."¹³⁸ This public sphere was born out of a "political confrontation" between the group of private individuals that composed the public sphere, and the public authorities who regulated civil life.¹³⁹ For Habermas the "rational-critical debate" permitted by the beginnings of the bourgeois public sphere challenged the narrative of domination that had existed in feudal societies, thereby beginning the "process of the polarization of state and society."¹⁴⁰ This polarization is an essential precursor to Kant's distinction between the public and private use of reason, and so for Habermas "[t]he line between state and society, fundamental in our context, divided the public sphere from the private realm."¹⁴¹

The term "civic sociability" is often used to describe this open atmosphere of debate and critical exchange that characterized the public sphere. Habermas associates this civic sociability with the French salon culture that he characterizes in three major ways: (1) the disregarding of status, and the inclusion of all people in social discourse, (2) the conversion of culture into a commodity, and (3) the inclusive principle that allowed culture to become "an object of discussion" in its own right.¹⁴² In addition to the French salon culture, these principles accord with the major characteristics of the Collegiant movement. The Enlightenment public sphere linked together the formerly private realm of opinion with the newfound sites of civic

¹³⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. trans. Thomas Burger. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 36-37.

sociability.¹⁴³ These sites included salons, coffee shops, learned societies, book clubs, and Masonic lodges.¹⁴⁴ While France is traditionally referred to as the central example of this type of civic sociability, the Dutch Republic is also a central point of reference for the beginnings of public discourse.¹⁴⁵

Predating in the French bloom in civic sociability, the Collegiants were (1) oriented toward the inclusion of diverse people groups, (2) enmeshed in the Dutch trade in cultural goods such as books and tulips, and (3) the Collegiants understood their discussions to be a cultural activity with its own social dignity and civic importance.

While Habermas identifies both Great Britain and France as important locations of civic sociability in the early days of the public sphere, he does mention the importance of the Dutch Republic as a significant site of trade and commerce. He writes that "[w]ith the emergence of early finance and trade capitalism, the elements of a new social order were taking shape," and this formative process involved "the rise first of Dutch centers for staple goods (Bruges, Lüttich, Brussels, Ghent, etc.) and then of the great trade fairs at the crossroads of long-distance trade."¹⁴⁶ Habermas makes this connection between the advance in trade and commerce in the Dutch Republic and the beginnings of the public sphere, and emphasizes the development of print culture, and the consequent emergence of a literate public. He writes that during that time "one spoke of the 'world of readers' (*Lesewelt*), or simply of the world (*Welt*) in the sense still used today: all the world, *tout le monde*."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ For more on the history of civic sociability in Habermas and Koselleck see Anthony J. La Vopa, "Conceiving a Public: Ideas and Society in Eighteenth-Century Europe (Review Essay)." *Journal of Modern History* 64 (March 1992): 79-116.

¹⁴⁴ Outram, *The Enlightenment*, 20-21. See also Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 59.

¹⁴⁵ See Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (Lafayette, Louisiana: Cornerstone, 2006).

¹⁴⁶ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 14.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

Andrew Fix writes that apart from their "regular meetings, however, the Collegiants often held separate and less formal gatherings for discussion of a wide variety of religious, moral, and philosophical topics. At these meetings the most controversial topics of the day were addressed."¹⁴⁸ In addition to discussing controversial topics, Fix writes, "Collegiant toleration allowed for a wide variety of opinions on the minutiae of doctrine, which the Collegiants regarded as the adiaphora of religion. Despite such differences of detail, however, the Rijnsburgers [early Collegiants] never lost their sense of being members of a unified and distinctive brotherhood of kindred spirits."¹⁴⁹ The idea that some matters were adiaphora – things that God neither requires nor forbids – aligns with Kołakowski's attribution of nonexclusive religious consciousness to the Collegiant group. This idea that some theological questions did not require answers challenges later Collegiant Rationalism because it suggests that there is no need to choose between spiritual and rational perspectives. As the Collegiants became more influenced by Rationalism, the blending of perspectives permitted by the idea of adiaphora was replaced by a perspective that valued answers more than questions.

The interior diversity of the Collegiant group is evident in two further ways. First, Fix writes that the Collegiants did not create grand systems, but instead kept "written record of intellectual transition itself; the struggles, the give and take, the contradictions, the difficult process of disillusionment and adjustment that marked the intellectual journey of a group of intensely serious and deeply pious thinkers toward a new concept of religious truth."¹⁵⁰ This seriousness, not mobilized toward the creation of all-encompassing and totalizing systems, is an important characteristic of the Collegiant group. For the Collegiants, the stakes were high, and the issue of religious truth and moral action were paramount, and yet they rejected grand

¹⁴⁸ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 52.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

explanatory frameworks and binding confessions in favor of dialogue and discussion. The maintenance of diversity within a context in which the stakes were so high is significant and deserves consideration in contemporary debate.

Second, the Collegiants were discussion-oriented intellectuals who belonged to neither the lower nor upper class. They were, in the words of Fix, "educated and well-read professional people who maintained a serious interest in intellectual and religious developments as well as an intense religious piety and moral seriousness."¹⁵¹ The somewhat wealthy existence of most Collegiants also ensured the sort of disposable income necessary for the purchase of books and tracts, as well as the kind of literacy needed to read them.¹⁵² This sociability reflects the mixed social makeup of the more familiar coffee shops, masonic lodges, and libraries of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.

2. *Anticonfessionalism*

The Collegiants were *anticonfessional* in their belief that written confessions were a dangerous reduction of Christian convictions. Kołakowski defines the Collegiants as an example of "nondenominational Christianity" who saw discussion and tolerance as virtues, and understood sectarianism and dispute as kinds of unfaithfulness.¹⁵³ Their anticonfessional nature encouraged a plurality of beliefs and rejected the restrictiveness of confessions. For the Collegiants, Kołakowski writes "Satan supports the multiplication of confessions."¹⁵⁴ Fix corroborates this thesis, stating that "the central characteristic of the Collegiant movement was

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 159.

¹⁵³ Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 1)," 263.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

its opposition to ecclesiastical authority and its desire for individual liberty and equality in religious life."¹⁵⁵

The Collegiant practice of baptism into the universal Christian Church was the practical extension of the theological rejection of confessions. Collegiants baptized their members into the universal church, rather than into a particular congregation, and they allowed those being baptized to develop their own personal confessions rather than asking them to conform to a standard confession.¹⁵⁶ Kołakowski writes,

The religious community proclaims itself a secular institution, called to strengthen collectively its religious values, but deprived of any charismatic glory of a religious group in its ideas, activities and rituals. Even baptism by immersion — introduced in order to emphasize the group's feeling of being related to apostolic times — not only had a purely symbolic value, with no sanctifying function, but did not even serve as an act by which one joined a Collegiant community. Baptism was also not a condition of being involved in congregations; persons who underwent baptism were witnessing by this that they were ready, on their own responsibility, to become part of Christianity "in general" — the loose gathering of Collegiants did not want to equate themselves with being Christian. The community thus had no general act which would put the seal on entrance into its ranks. It lived in the form of loose association, having a fluid framework.¹⁵⁷

The Collegiants understood themselves as a secular organization because of the absence of the "charismatic glory" that constituted the true church. In general the Collegiants did not understand sacraments to be important, and it appears that they did not understand the supper or baptism to have any metaphysical consequences when they were practiced. Baptism then, was a way to witness to one's own personal faith, rather than a condition or expectation for membership.

On the topic of membership, the Collegiant leader Galenus believed that baptism was "a publicly given proof of the acceptance of Christianity, [in which] one joins the general Christian Church and not any particular congregation."¹⁵⁸ This practice of baptizing members into the

¹⁵⁵ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 51.

¹⁵⁶ Meihuizen, "Galenus Abrahamsz."

¹⁵⁷ Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 1)," 271.

¹⁵⁸ Meihuizen, "Galenus Abrahamsz."

general Christian church rather than an individual congregation was common to the Collegiants and was also practiced occasionally by the anticonfessional Doopsgezinden.¹⁵⁹

3. *Anticlericalism*

The Collegiants rejected the priesthood and hierarchical leadership, although these two rejections were not necessarily identical. Although all Collegiants rejected priests and the apostolic authority that came with them, the Collegiants did have their own kind of minimal hierarchical leadership evident in the fact that their leaders (Galenus Abrahamsz, Pieter Balling, etc.) were influential personalities who led the colleges in making decisions.

The Collegiants were *anticlerical* in their belief that apostolic succession was not granted to clerics. Kołakowski describes that, for the Collegiants, "Priests were called idlers who wanted to pursue an idle life at the cost of the congregation."¹⁶⁰ This anticlerical attitude shows the significant sixteenth-century Anabaptist and Spiritualist influences on the Collegiant group. Like the Anabaptists, the Collegiants rejected the power of the clergy, and "[i]n place of the established congregations they proposed a Christianity without formal church structures, a universal Christianity above doctrinal divisions and a regeneration of religious life through individual piety and moral purity."¹⁶¹

Both Kołakowski and historian J.C. van Slee characterize the Collegiant group as anticlerical and focused on freedom of speech. Although both Kołakowski and van Slee are hesitant to reduce one characteristic to the other, it is evident that Kołakowski favors

¹⁵⁹ See Anna Voolstra, "Membership Required? The Twofold Practice of Believer's Baptism within Mennonite Lamist and Zonist Congregations during the 17th and 18th Centuries," in *Religious Minorities and Cultural Diversity in the Dutch Republic: Studies Presented to Piet Visser on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*. Ed. August den Hollander, Alex Noord, Mirjam van Veen, and Anna Voolstra (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

¹⁶⁰ Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 1)," 265.

¹⁶¹ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 51.

anticlericalism as the primary characteristic of the Collegiant movement, and van Slee favors freedom of expression as the primary characteristic of the Collegiant movement. In his summary of their differing approaches, Kołakowski notes van Slee's rejection of anticlericalism as the defining feature of Collegiant thought and practice, and describes how van Slee sees anticlericalism as a means to the end of freedom of expression. Although Kołakowski admits that the two defining factors have "exactly the same meaning," and that the difference between the two is reducible to a "matter of semantics," he does continue to favor the adjective "anticlerical" when describing the Collegiant group.¹⁶² While Kołakowski is likely inclined to see the group as defined by their anticlerical orientation because of his personal anti-authoritarian political convictions, van Slee is likely opposed to defining the Collegiants based solely on anticlericalism because of his Mennonite background and confessional historiography. It is likely that freedom of expression and anticlericalism were both significantly definitive of the Collegiant movement, and it is possible to see the two as complementary descriptors rather than competitive descriptors, especially given that anticlericalism is a negative characteristic and freedom of speech is its inverse positive characteristic.

4. *Free Prophecy*

The Collegiants valued both *freedom of expression* in the domain of belief, and *freedom of speech* in their corresponding practice of free prophecy. The idea that one should be free to express dissenting views corresponded with the practice of free prophecy in Collegiant meetings. Fix writes that "[n]othing was more fundamental to both the theory and the practice of Collegiant religious life than free prophecy."¹⁶³ Kołakowski writes that with the Collegiants "a new type of

¹⁶² Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 1)," 266.

¹⁶³ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 162.

congregation came into being, one whose essential quality was based originally on absolute freedom of speech in religious matters."¹⁶⁴ This principle of freedom of speech was a central tenet of the faith held by the early Collegiants, and a central point of reference for their later Rationalism. Fix writes further that "[n]o one was censured for their beliefs in college meetings," indicating the central role of free speech in both the formal times of reflection and the informal discussions associated with the Collegiant meetings.¹⁶⁵ The ritual associated with these general convictions about freedom and dialogue was that the Collegiant groups "met two or three times a week in a church or a private home, where the members prayed, sang hymns, read, and discussed Scripture and debated religious reform."¹⁶⁶ Within these meetings, if a person felt convicted to speak, they would freely share an interpretation of a scripture text or an experience.¹⁶⁷ According to Fix.

College meetings were held once a month on a Sunday. They began with a prayer, followed by the reading of a scriptural text and the interpretation of the text by free prophecy. Meetings closed with a final song and a prayer. This remained the basic pattern for all Collegiant meetings in Warmond and Rijnsburg as well as in the many other colleges that soon arose throughout the United Provinces. Most college meetings featured a succession of four, five, or more lengthy prophecies that often caused meetings to last meetings to last far into the night.¹⁶⁸

To avoid any suggestion of clerical authority, no podium was used. Each speaker addressed the meeting from his seat among the congregation. The meetings usually closed with prayer and a song.¹⁶⁹

In these contexts, freedom of expression was highly valued, which accorded with the anticlerical disdain for apostolic or ordained leadership. Fix writes that "[t]he Collegiants insisted upon conducting their meetings in such a way that allowed everyone to have an equal voice, and

¹⁶⁴ Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 1)," 266.

¹⁶⁵ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 42.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

ensured that no one person would exert special authority upon the group."¹⁷⁰ This negative and critical posture toward authority was then manifest in the positive practice of sharing their ruminations on scripture, prophecy, and experience. The practice of free prophecy began as an extension of the early Collegiant belief that "by meeting without a preacher and by giving each member the freedom to speak during the service, the college was conforming more closely to apostolic Christian practices than did the services of the established churches."¹⁷¹ The attitude was such that the group was expressing their anticlerical and anticonfessional beliefs through the practice of free prophecy, and doing so because they understood it to be faithful, rather than an expression of enlightened freedom.

The Spinoza Circle: Pieter Balling and Jarig Jelles

A pronounced movement toward Rationalism characterized the later days of the Collegiant group, and unlike the period of Rational Religion, this kind of Rationalism was not compatible with, or even tolerant of, the fading Spiritualist influence. The initial stages of this movement toward Rationalism are evident in the work of Pieter Balling (d. 1669?) and Jarig Jelles (1620-1683). Balling and Jelles were part of the so-called "Spinoza Circle," a group of thinkers who gathered around the person and work of Baruch Spinoza. Kołakowski is quick to deny any strong connection between Balling and Jelles and the Collegiants, and he also claims that the two were not all that close with Spinoza. Fix, on the other hand, considers them to be important and influential Rijnsburgers,¹⁷² and the much more recent work of historian Wiep van

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 162.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 38.

¹⁷² Compare Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 2)," 393 with Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 215. Later, Kołakowski nuances his position, stating that "differentiation between Christian reformers and free-thinkers requires a certain degree of caution" (394).

Bunge supports the idea that Jelles and Balling were influential in Collegiant circles, and can therefore rightly be called Collegiants.¹⁷³

Pieter Balling was an educated merchant who could speak several languages including Spanish, Latin, and Greek. Apart from having translated some of Spinoza's work into Dutch, little else is known about his biography.¹⁷⁴ Fix writes that Balling was

a member of the Amsterdam college and of the United Mennonite congregation and close friend of both Galenus and Spinoza, [who] wrote two substantial works during 1663 to 1664 in defense of Galenus's ideas. In these works Balling took a purely secular and uncharismatic view of the Mennonite church. In his opinion, any religious association in the corrupt world of his day could be nothing more than a gathering of like-minded people freely confessing their similar beliefs.¹⁷⁵

Fix states that Balling took a "purely secular and uncharismatic view" of the church, calling to mind the definition of Enlightenment as disenchantment and demythologization. At the same time, however, Balling was given to Spiritualist references to the "inner light," affirming a "mystical, nondiscursive contact with God, who dwells in every person in the form of an inner light."¹⁷⁶ Balling's theology is complex and cannot be reduced to names like "Spiritualism" or "Rationalism." Instead, for Balling, God remains a mystery that can be met in experience, but not contained in language. Kołakowski writes that, for Balling, "knowledge of God precedes knowledge of created things."¹⁷⁷ This knowledge of God is found in experience rather than study, and yet his work "contained unmistakable rationalist elements," according to Fix.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Wiep van Bunge, "Spinoza and the Collegiants," in *Spinoza Past and Present: Essays on Spinoza, Spinozism, and Spinoza Scholarship* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 51.

¹⁷⁴ Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 2)," 396 ff. Cf. Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 199-200.

¹⁷⁵ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 111.

¹⁷⁶ Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 2)," 397.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 398.

¹⁷⁸ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 200.

Balling's major work, *The Light upon the Candlestick*, refers to the "Light of Truth, the true Light which enlighten every man that cometh into the world."¹⁷⁹ This Light "is a clear and distinct knowledge of truth in the understanding of every man, by which he is so convinced of the Being and Quality of things, that he cannot possibly doubt thereof."¹⁸⁰ This short treatise on the inner light uses Spiritualist language while also describing the Light of Truth using terms that appear to be inherited from Spinoza's metaphysics ("Being and Quality"), thereby associating Balling with the Rational Religion of the Collegiant group. According to historian Ruben Buys, Balling's short treatise was strongly influenced by the much earlier combination of Spiritualism and Rationalism found in the work of sixteenth century Dutch author Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert. Buys writes that "Coornhert, writing in the second half of the *sixteenth* century, is, ironically enough, far *more* explicit in this exact equation [of the inner Light with Reason] than Balling."¹⁸¹ By deepening the connection between Balling and Coornhert, Buys' article shows in detail how the combination of Rationalist and Spiritualist influences run much deeper in the Collegiant movement than Fix or Kołakowski describe in their work.

More is known about Jarig Jelles than Pieter Balling. Jelles worked as a grocer in Amsterdam and later left his store to study metaphysics and religion.¹⁸² Whereas Spinoza's influence is more subtle in Balling's *The Light Upon the Candlestick*, its influence on Jelles' work is pronounced, especially in Jelles' 1684 *Confession of the General and Christian Faith* (*Belydenisse des algemeenen en christlyken geloofs*). Reflecting his Rationalist leanings, for

¹⁷⁹ Pieter Balling, "The Light Upon the Candlestick," Trans Benjamin Furley. 1663. Web. 27 Feb 2015. <http://universalistfriends.org/candle.html#3>.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. Cf. Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 2)," 398.

¹⁸¹ Ruben Buys, "'Without Thy Self, Oh Man, Thou Hast No Means to Look for, by Which Thou Maist Know God.' Pieter Balling, the Radical Enlightenment, and the Legacy of Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert." *Church History and Religious Culture* 93 (2013), 368.

¹⁸² Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 2)," 403.

Jelles, "Sin is the result of ignorance, and liberation from sin is the result of knowledge."¹⁸³ According to Kołakowski, "if Jelles asserts the 'rational' character of communication with God with such force, his acquaintance with Spinoza bears the responsibility," and he refers to Jelles' *Confession of the General and Christian Faith* stating that "the formulas which speak of the divine wisdom that was revealed most abundantly in Jesus were taken almost entirely from the *Theological-Political Tractate* [of Spinoza]."¹⁸⁴ Kołakowski continues, describing how Jelles "wrote his texts in some sense translating metaphysical terminology into a language that morally pure people and the intellectually weak could associate with traditional religious images."¹⁸⁵

This blending of Spiritualist concerns and Rationalist language serves as evidence that both Balling and Jelles belong to Collegiant Rational Religion. Furthermore, both Balling and Jelles support the thesis that the blending of Spiritualist and Rationalist influences was a sustainable compatibility rather than a brooding discontinuity that would eventually result in the victory of one side or the other.

The Collegiants and the Mennonites

Another group that influenced the Collegiants and exhibited the combination of Spiritualist and Rationalist influences was the Mennonites. Fix writes that "Anabaptist Mennonites were the first group to be attracted in large numbers to the colleges,"¹⁸⁶ and he extends his treatment of the relationship between the two overlapping groups in an essay called "Mennonites and Collegiants in Holland 1630-1700."¹⁸⁷ Mennonites were attracted to the

¹⁸³ Ibid., 405.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 408.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 41.

¹⁸⁷ Andrew Fix, "Mennonites and Collegiants in Holland, 1630-1700." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 64 (April 1990): 160-177. See also a more recent iteration of this article, "Mennonites and Rationalism in the seventeenth century" in *From Martyr to Muppy (Mennonite Urban Professionals). A Historical Introduction to*

Collegiant meetings and represented a large part of the movement's membership throughout the Dutch Republic.¹⁸⁸ Galenus remains a major connecting point between the Collegiants and the Mennonites, alongside other preachers like Pieter Langedult in Haarlem and Laurens Klinkhamer in Leiden. Fix explains that, under the influence of Galenus, "many other Mennonites joined the college, and Collegiant ideas entered the United Mennonite congregation."¹⁸⁹ Presenting his evaluation of the War of the Lambs, Fix writes that "Collegiant ideas led to damaging divisions within the congregation and eventually caused a schism that ripped apart the entire Dutch Mennonite church."¹⁹⁰

This schism was rooted in a divide between conservative and liberal perspectives within the United Mennonite congregation and was exacerbated by the anticonfessional openness of Collegiant thought. The War of the Lambs was motivated in part by a Collegiant request to use the Mennonite chapel for Collegiant meetings. Galenus' support of this action led to a deep polarization that unleashed "a flood of pent-up hostility on the part of Galenus's critics, who accused him of trying to smuggle heretical ideas into the congregation."¹⁹¹ The Mennonite concern for keeping heretical ideas out of the congregation conflicted with the Collegiant openness to divergent perspectives, and this made reconciliation very difficult, if not impossible. Despite this tension, Galenus remained sensitive to both his Lamist home and his Zonist opponents throughout his life.¹⁹²

Cultural Assimilation Processes of a Religious Minority in the Netherlands: the Mennonites, ed. Alastair Hamilton, Sjouke Voolstra und Piet Visser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994).

¹⁸⁸ Fix, "Mennonites and Collegiants in Holland," 163.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁹² Meihuizen, "Galenus Abrahamsz."

Fix's assessment of the Collegiant influence on the Mennonites is that "it is difficult not to conclude that the influence was primarily harmful."¹⁹³ This assessment is problematic because it understands the tensions and disagreements that Collegiant ideas caused as harmful, betraying a negative disposition towards conflict. In a similar way, historian Samme Zijlstra holds up the Collegiants as an example of how extreme tolerance and anticonfessionalism can lead to "anarchy" and the loss of group cohesion.¹⁹⁴

Instead of negatively evaluating the anarchic influence of the Collegiants on the Mennonites, the present study finds that Collegiant ideas were a generative irritant on the skin of the Mennonite churches, causing them to re-evaluate the tenets of their faith. Whereas Fix assesses the influence of the Collegiants on the Mennonites as damaging, he understands influence in the opposite direction in much more positive terms. Fix states definitively that "[t]he Mennonite influence on the Collegiant movement was substantial and important," adding that "Mennonite ideas concerning pacifism, baptism, government service and practical piety were very influential within the Collegiant movement."¹⁹⁵ The history of the Collegiants is inextricably intertwined with the history of the Mennonites in the Dutch Republic. Although most Mennonites were not themselves Collegiants, the reciprocal influence between the two groups was significant.

The influence of both Collegiants and Mennonites on the rising Enlightenment culture in the Dutch Republic was also significant. In a 2009 essay, Piet Visser writes of the "prominent roles that were played by a great number of Doopsgezinden during the era of the Dutch

¹⁹³ Fix, "Mennonites and Collegiants in Holland," 176.

¹⁹⁴ Samme Zijlstra, "Anabaptism and tolerance: possibilities and limitations" in *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age*, ed. R. Po-Chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop, 112-131 (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 130.

¹⁹⁵ Fix, "Mennonites and Collegiants in Holland," 176-177.

Enlightenment."¹⁹⁶ Historian Michael Driedger's essay, "An Article Missing from the Mennonite Encyclopedia: 'The Enlightenment in the Netherlands'" speaks to the renewed interest that the study of Dutch Mennonites has found in recent English scholarship.¹⁹⁷ In his chapter Driedger proposes that scholars change their priorities in the discourse on Mennonites and the Enlightenment. He states that "A useful paradigm shift could begin by asking, not how Mennonites were affected by the Enlightenment and the revolutionary era, but rather how they contributed to them."¹⁹⁸ Historian Ernst P. Hamm explores one answer to this question in his work on Mennonite participation in "many aspects of the commercial, cultural, and intellectual life of the Republic, and in doing so participated in the broader changes sweeping across early modern Europe."¹⁹⁹ Hamm continues, "Mennonites of whatever stripe were all 'in the world' even if some felt more strongly than others that they need not be 'of the world.'"²⁰⁰ The realities of enculturation and assimilation, criticized in the older historiography, are now a source of rich scholarly investigation by confessional and nonconfessional historians alike. Hamm concludes, in this vein, stating that "there is no reason to doubt that they [Mennonites] believed new knowledge could and should be employed to change the world for the better"²⁰¹ Examples of this involvement in the scientific, political, and cultural advances in the seventeenth century Dutch Republic include the study of natural knowledge at the Amsterdam seminary (including subjects

¹⁹⁶ Piet Visser, "Enlightened Dutch Mennonitism: The Case of Cornelius van Engelen," in *Grenzen Des Täufertums / Boundaries of Anabaptism. Neue Forschungen*. Ed. Michael Driedger, Anselm Schubert, and Astrid von Schlachta. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009), 370. Recent scholarship has also distinguished between *Doopsgezinden* and Mennonites. Visser writes: "I distinguish *Doopsgezind / Doopsgezinden* from *Mennoniet*, or *Mennonite*, which better reflects the Dutch contemporary distinctions. *Doopsgezind*, or baptism-minded (*taufgesinnt*), referred to the mainstream, more liberal branches, whereas *Mennoniet* was predominantly applicable for Anabaptist/Mennonite orthodoxy and conservatism." (370).

¹⁹⁷ Michael Driedger, "An Article Missing from the Mennonite Encyclopedia: 'The Enlightenment in the Netherlands,'" in *Commoners and Community*. Ed. C. Arnold Snyder (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 2002)

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁹⁹ Ernst, P. Hamm, "Science and Mennonites in the Dutch Enlightenment." *Conrad Grebel Review* 30.1 (Winter 2012), 6.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

from astronomy to physics), the deep involvement of Mennonite gardeners in the tulip trade, and the book trade in cities from Amsterdam to Groningen.²⁰²

The Collegiant involvement with both the Spinoza Circle and the Mennonites shows how the Collegiants were involved with diverse intellectual and social groups. The public nature of Collegiant discourse, spanning religious and secular spheres, allowed the group to sympathize with Balling and Jelles' reading of Spinoza in tandem with the doctrine of the inner light, and the religious contribution to the Enlightenment made by the Mennonites who pioneered advances in publishing, charity, natural sciences, and pedagogy. Visser writes that the "intelligentsia of the Dutch dissident churches, dominated by the Remonstrants and the Doopsgezinden, were crucial for the introduction, accommodation and acceptance of enlightened ideas and cultural and social changes."²⁰³ This social commitment to public life, characteristic of the Dutch dissident churches that the Collegiants were connected with, "aimed at the cultural, intellectual and especially the moral improvement of the nation."²⁰⁴

Collegiant Rationalism: Jan Bredenburg and Daniel Zwicker

Whereas the overlap between Collegiants and Mennonites demonstrates an appreciation for the world alongside the desire to change it, the world-affirmation of this Rational Religious perspective was eclipsed by the Rationalism that dominated the final years of the Collegiant group. This Rationalism is represented in partial form by the thought of Jan Bredenburg, and, in fuller form, the thought of Daniel Zwicker. Bredenburg wrote that "[r]eason and belief are both

²⁰² Ernst Hamm, "Mennonites, Science and Progress in the Dutch Enlightenment," in *The Global and the Local: The History of Science and the Cultural Integration of Europe*. Ed. M. Kokowski. (Proceedings of the 2nd ICESHS Conference. Cracow, Poland, September 6-9, 2006), 652-656.

²⁰³ Visser, "Enlightened Dutch Mennonitism," 372.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

realms of truth, each in its own way."²⁰⁵ Fix argues that Bredenburg's exemplary statement on the compatibility of reason and belief, and, by extension, the influences of Spiritualism and Rationalism, represents the fulfillment of Collegiant Religious Rationalism. Bredenburg's position was unique because he saw reason as an independent source of truths that existed "alongside the truths of divine revelation."²⁰⁶ Rather than seeing reason and belief as irreconcilable, or seeing reason and belief as really the same thing, he understood the two epistemic measures as distinct but complementary. Despite reason and revelation being "contradictory," Fix writes that Bredenburg understood each to be "independent, valid, and autonomous sources of religious truth."²⁰⁷

Fix divides Bredenburg's thought into two phases: an early Spinozist phase characterized by a "rationalist approach to religious knowledge,"²⁰⁸ and a later phase in which he responded to critics by stating that the rational and nonrational could co-exist despite being contradictory.²⁰⁹ Under this model, reason "yield[s] to a higher order of knowledge," meaning that "a person might believe something to be true based on revelation while at the same time he rationally understood it to be false."²¹⁰ Some Collegiants were concerned that Bredenburg's "failure to reconcile the truths of reason with those of revelation would inevitably lead to the rejection of revealed truth, and for this reason they declared war on the idea of reason as a source of religious truth."²¹¹ Bredenburg's opponents within the Collegiant group then tried to force him to choose between reason and belief as sources of truth.²¹² This resulted in the "Bredenburg Controversy," which began as a debate between Bredenburg and the Collegiant Frans Kuyper, and then spread

²⁰⁵ Quoted in Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 215.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 216.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid., 225.

²¹² Ibid., 225-226.

and affected the whole Collegiant movement.²¹³ Kuyper charged Bredenburg with being a Spinozist and accused him of denying the existence of God. The additional accusation of atheism "deeply offended Bredenburg, who considered himself a pious Christian."²¹⁴ Following the discussions in Rijnsburg in 1672, the debate continued, and came to a head in 1685 when "the regents of the Oranje-Appel, the orphanage in which the college held its meetings, barred both supporters and opponents of Bredenburg from the building."²¹⁵ The next year, the Bredenburgers and their opponents found other accommodations, and the Amsterdam college "thus experienced the first and only schism in its history."²¹⁶ Although this dispute took place in 1686, it would take another 100 years for the Collegiant movement to disappear.²¹⁷

Fix offers the following summary of the Bredenburg dispute:

The thought of Jan Bredenburg represented the climax of Collegiant rationalism and the culmination of a long intellectual odyssey that took the Rijnsburgers from spiritualism and millenarianism through stages of rational religion and rational spiritualism before arriving at a largely secular philosophical rationalism.²¹⁸

This suggests that the Collegiants dissolved because they could not take the final step beyond their ideological confinement, and that they were merely "transitional" figures on the way to Spinoza's Rationalist Enlightenment.²¹⁹ Fix writes that "[t]he final step to a completely secular rationalism was a step that neither Bredenburg nor the other Collegiants could take" and that the biblical tradition of the Rijnsburgers "formed a limit beyond which most Collegiant thinkers could not venture."²²⁰ Fix emphasizes that the Collegiants "were unable to abandon completely

²¹³ Ibid., 226.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 229.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ The split itself cannot be blamed for the disappearance of the Collegiant group, although it appears to be a symptom of the problems that would lead to the loss of group cohesion.

²¹⁸ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 239. Wiep van Bunge writes that "[o]nly around 1800 did the Rijnsburgers cease to exist as a movement." See Van Bunge, "Spinoza and the Collegiants," 53.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 244-245.

²²⁰ Ibid., 244.

the old for the new" and that although they "set the stage for the final breakthrough into a new worldview" they "could not make this breakthrough themselves."²²¹

Instead of collapsing into Rationalism under the weight of the contradictory influences of Spiritualism and Rationalism during the blended period, a strong explanation for the Collegiant movement to full Rationalism is present in a small detail of the Bredenburg dispute. As Bredenburg's simultaneous affirmation of faith and reason became too dissonant for his opponents they "called on him to choose between the two rival sources of truth."²²² This represents a significant movement away from compatibility and blending, toward a perspective that eventually saw Spiritualist faith and Rationalist reason as incompatible and contradictory. Whereas Bredenburg's opponents exemplify an early form of this perspective, another Collegiant thinker demonstrates this tendency more explicitly.

Daniel Zwicker (1612-1678) was a doctor from Danzig who associated with the Socinians and the Polish Brethren and disputed with the Collegiants after moving to Amsterdam in 1657.²²³ In addition to participating in Collegiant gatherings, Zwicker also gathered a small group of followers around himself.²²⁴ Kołakowski writes that Zwicker "experienced the 'rationalist' pressure to an even greater extent than did those described earlier, as evidenced by the fact that he actually attempted to apply the general slogan [of rationalism] to his own arguments."²²⁵ Zwicker understood human reason to be "the most effective tool for achieving the changes needed in religious life," including the tasks of scriptural interpretation and the

²²¹ Ibid., 245.

²²² Ibid., 225-226.

²²³ Robert Friedmann and Nanne van der Zijpp. "Zwicker, Daniel (1612-1678)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1959. Web. 27 Feb 2015.

[http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Zwicker,_Daniel_\(1612-1678\)&oldid=79113](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Zwicker,_Daniel_(1612-1678)&oldid=79113).

²²⁴ Peter G. Bietenholz, *Daniel Zwicker 1612-1678. Peace, Tolerance and God the One and Only* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1997), 30-31.

²²⁵ Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 2)," 411.

restoration of the "true doctrine" of the church.²²⁶ Most importantly, in his work on Christ's two natures, Zwicker proposed that "Christ could not have had both a human nature and a divine nature... because nobody could have two different natures at one and the same time."²²⁷ The proof that Zwicker offered for this Rationalist and anti-mystical interpretation was found in a principle that he named "the rule of distinction."²²⁸ This principle held that "It is impossible to predicate two contrary things of one subject at the same time."²²⁹ Instead of taking a mystical approach, Zwicker employed logical argumentation, maintaining that "any doctrine that contradicted reason was 'impossible and false'", and furthermore that "without reason, heresy would overwhelm the church."²³⁰

Zwicker's rule of distinction is exactly the sort of influence that led to the Collegiant rejection of the compatibility of contradictory perspectives, and his thought is a marker of the Collegiant transition from comfort with adiaphora to increasing polarization. The logical perspective promoted by Zwicker's rule of distinction represent a kind of thinking that understands opposing viewpoints as incommensurable contradictions, and contradictions as unsustainable. This Rationalist approach also contributed greatly to the dispute between Bredenburg and Kuyper, which eventually contributed to the Collegiant schism, and the decline of the major Collegiant characteristic of tolerant free discussion.

²²⁶ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 131. See also Bietenholz, *Daniel Zwicker*, 274.

²²⁷ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 131.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

Chapter 4

Rethinking the Secular with the Dutch Collegiants

With the secular as the concept in question, and the early Enlightenment as the cultural and historical context, this study has explored the thought and practices of the Collegiants in order to uncover historical resources for the task of rethinking the origins and history of the contemporary concept of the secular. The majority of this study has presented the ways in which the Collegiants exhibited both religious and secular characteristics, while also exceeding the boundaries of the contemporary categories of religion and the secular. Insofar as particular Collegiants such as Galenus Abrahamsz and Pieter Balling were representative of the group, the Collegiants remained both secular and religious at the same time, thereby challenging not only the division between sacred and secular, but also challenging the concept of the secular itself. By articulating how the Collegiants challenge the concept of the secular and complicate the distinction between religion and the secular, this chapter endeavors to rethink the secular by focusing on the coexistence of Spiritualist and Rationalist influences within the Collegiant group, understanding that historical Spiritualism and Rationalism do not directly map onto contemporary concepts of faith and reason, or religion and the secular.

Contemporary cultural studies, philosophy, and theology each contest and debate the category of the secular.²³¹ These scholarly discourses on the secular, and in particular the "postsecular" position, reject the popular assumption that the secular is a straightforward and unbiased concept. Following from this rejection, many contemporary critiques of the secular

²³¹ For two landmark interventions see Talal Asad, "What Might an Anthropology of Secularism Look Like?" in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), and Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007).

respond to the widespread identification of secularization with modernization by endeavoring to rethink the genealogy of the secular as a concept.

Contrary to the contemporary assumption that the secular provides a *value-neutral* and *ahistorical* basis for culture and politics,²³² the Collegiants historically demonstrate that the boundary line between religion and the secular is more permeable than stable. While the contemporary concept of the secular quietly asserts itself as the default metaphysical position, a non-teleological reading of Collegiant Rational Religion leads to the conclusion that there is nothing inevitable about the enlightened victory of the secular over religion. Instead of being an unconditioned and unbiased concept, the Collegiants show that the secular is a concept that restricts thinking by imposing artificial limits. Furthermore, while the contemporary concept of the secular claims to have always underpinned good public discourse,²³³ the Collegiants demonstrate that a public sphere can thrive in a context that is simultaneously religious and secular. It follows that because the Collegiants represent a culturally rich discourse that is both religious and secular, the secular cannot serve as the sole measure of good discourse.

Collegiant Rational Religion serves to critique secular claims to both ahistoricity and value-neutrality. First, the Collegiants demonstrate that the secular is not value-neutral by showing that the use of reason (a primary vehicle of secular sensibility) can be oriented toward both religious and non-religious ends. Collegiant Rational Religion used reason to both interpret spiritual experience (therefore shoring up what we would call the religious perspective) and to disenchant the biblical text (lending support to what we now call the secular perspective). This two-sided orientation of reason in Collegiant Rational Religion period allowed them to blend

²³² See, for example, the popular article by Julian Baggini, "'A secular state must be neutral' – what does that mean exactly?," *The Guardian*, February 16, 2012. Accessed December 31, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/feb/16/what-mean-secular-state-neutral>.

²³³ Ibid.

together Spiritualism and Rationalism, thereby making complementary what often appears to be contradictory. This combination and blending calls into question the contemporary divide between the secular and religion in two significant ways. On one hand, the two-sided orientation of reason shows the contemporary reader that reason, and therefore the secular, is not a value-neutral term that expresses a singular truth. Instead, reason and the secular are oriented toward particular political ends, and each term can be used to serve the interests of those with discursive power. On the other hand, the two-sided orientation of reason allowed for the blending of Spiritualism and Rationalism in Collegiant Rational Religion, thereby demonstrating that reason can be positively mobilized toward dialogical and discursive ends.

This leads to the second complication: the Collegiant story historicizes the link between reason and the secular. While many philosophers and theologians understand reason to be aligned with the secular, for better or for worse, Collegiant Rational Religion understood reason to accord with the Christian religion. The rationality of the Christian religion and the rationality of the natural sciences did not conflict in Collegiant Rational Religion because the Collegiants did not think of reason as a monolithic singularity. In Collegiant Rational Religion, rationality was a faculty employed in the service of both religion and the natural sciences, whereas the dominant attitudes of late modernity understood reason as a singular perspective intolerant of religion. This profound reversal of the alignment of reason from the early Enlightenment to the present should cause us to rethink the relationship between Christianity, religion, and the secular. The Collegiants disrupt the secular claim to ahistoricity by exceeding and negating the opposition between religion and the secular, and showing how the association of reason with the secular was rooted in early Enlightenment Rationalism.

The Secular, Secularization, Secularism

Understanding the conceptual constellation of the *secular*, *secularism*, and *secularization* is important for the purpose of critiquing the supposed neutrality and ahistoricity of the concept of the secular. Any reference to secularity implicates the relationship between (1) the philosophical and theological concept of the secular, (2) the descriptively-oriented historical secularization thesis, and (3) the prescriptively-oriented political position of secularism. This tripartite description follows the work of sociologist José Casanova, who writes that "[r]ethinking secularism requires that we keep in mind the basic analytical distinction between 'the secular' as a central modern epistemic category, 'secularization' as an analytical conceptualization of modern world-historical processes, and 'secularism' as a worldview and ideology."²³⁴

The concept of the secular is defined by its emphasis on worldly and temporal life concurrent with its rejection of religious categories. Put differently, although the secular is often defined by its negation of religion, it has also been defined by more positive characteristics such as an affirmation of worldly and temporal life rather than otherworldly or eternal life. The secular is a metaphysical and epistemological indicator that has a reciprocally constitutive relationship with both the historical secularization thesis, and the political ideology of secularism. Like Casanova, the cultural anthropologist and philosopher Talal Asad divides his book *Formations of the Secular* into the categories, secular, secularism, and secularization in an effort to address the question: "What is the relationship between 'the secular' as an epistemic category and 'secularism' as a political doctrine?"²³⁵ Although Asad is concerned with how the political aims of secularism are underwritten by the problematic way of knowing that the secular

²³⁴ José Casanova, "The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms," in *Rethinking Secularism*. ed. Craig Calhoun et al. (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), 54.

²³⁵ Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 1.

promotes, this study is concerned with the ways in which the concept of the secular has its own genealogy informed by both political ideas about secularism, and historical ideas about secularization.

Being concerned with the concept of the secular requires understanding the discourse on the concept of the secular, the historical secularization thesis, and the political ideology of secularism. Each of these three parts of secularity have been critiqued from within their own discourses in the following ways: (1) the contemporary perspective of the *postsecular* in the Continental Philosophy of Religion challenges the philosophical and theological concept of the secular by critiquing the idea that the secular is a neutral ground that underpins the construction of religion, (2) the contemporary perspective of *social differentiation* challenges the descriptive and historical secularization thesis by accounting for the ways in which religion has remained an active force throughout the Enlightenment period, and (3) the political critique of secularism (*postsecularism*) challenges the prescriptively oriented political position of secularism by arguing for a political ethic that takes seriously both religious and secular interests in the public sphere.

The Concept of the Secular

Although present theologies, philosophies, and critical theories each address the non-neutrality of the secular with different vocabularies and epistemologies, each discourse critiques the assumption that by subtracting religion from both the public sphere and the state, the neutral ground of secularity can be achieved (an assumption characteristic of the New Atheism, to name

one example).²³⁶ Joining this trans-disciplinary effort to both historicize and problematize the secular, the present study challenges the assumption that the secular is the teleological culmination of the so-called progress brought by the Enlightenment. The disciplinary formations of theology, philosophy, and critical theory are each helpful in the aforementioned tasks, and these vocabularies call the concept of the secular into question from a variety of theoretical perspectives.

The theological discourse that best informs the present postsecular inquiry is the debate between the Continental Philosophy of Religion and Radical Orthodoxy. Both perspectives critique the secular, holding that the secular is not a neutral perspective that is revealed when modern thinking attempted to clear away religious delusion. Furthermore, both perspectives understand the secular to be imagined, and therefore constructed, by modern consciousness. However, in critiquing the supposed neutrality of the secular, Radical Orthodoxy tends to posit the centrality of the Christian narrative in its place with an almost imperial force.²³⁷ Although it helpfully critiques the supposed neutrality of the secular, the perspective of Radical Orthodoxy reproduces the imposture that it critiques by triumphantly asserting the truth of Christianity over and against not only the secular, but against all other religions and perspectives.

On the other hand, the Continental Philosophy of Religion, as represented in the edited collection *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern: New Essays in Continental Philosophy of*

²³⁶ The "New Atheists" traditionally refer to Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins, and Sam Harris. The related advocacy group, the "Secular Coalition for America," rejects religious influence in public policy.

²³⁷ John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock write that for Radical Orthodoxy "every discipline must be framed by a theological perspective; otherwise these disciplines will define a zone apart from God, grounded literally in nothing." This quotation is drawn from the introduction to *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*. ed. John Milbank et al. (London: Routledge, 1999), 3. Because of this confrontational theological position towards other scholarly disciplines like philosophy and cultural studies, I identify Radical Orthodoxy as a conservative stance that provides a helpful critique of the secular, but not a helpful method for the purpose of this study. The first reason for this rejection is that Radical Orthodoxy begins by limiting the value of the so-called 'secular world,' and the second reason for this rejection is the epistemologically imperialist way in which it denies inherent legitimacy to other vocabularies and discourses than its own.

Religion, critiques both the secular and religion, while also critiquing the violent methodology of Radical Orthodoxy. Whereas Radical Orthodoxy is concerned with maintaining the boundaries between theology and other disciplines, the Post-Secular Philosophy of Religion is concerned with treating these boundaries as always already intercontaminated. For Radical Orthodoxy the boundary between philosophy and theology, for example, is only permeable by theology, and only insofar as theology appropriates the vocabulary of philosophy for theological purposes. Milbank claims that "theology saves reason and fulfils and preserves philosophy, whereas philosophy left to itself, brings itself... to its own end."²³⁸ Contrary to this view, the position espoused by the postsecular Continental Philosophy of Religion risks the opposite discursive violence when it reacts to the misuse of philosophy by theologians. The editors of *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern* write that some contributors to the volume "chart the sometimes destructive effects of the recent theological contamination of philosophy" whereas others "experiment in the possibility of an aggressive alternative: a complementary philosophical contamination of theology."²³⁹ On one hand some thinkers in the Continental Philosophy of Religion seek to insulate philosophy from the contaminant of theology – a position that mirrors Radical Orthodoxy insofar as it fears that philosophy is a foreign contaminant instead of a dialogue partner. On the other hand, other contributors argue for "a complementary philosophical contamination of theology."²⁴⁰ It is this complementary position that I proceed from because it grants dignity to the explanatory and discursive disciplines of both philosophy and theology, and the perspective of religion and the secular. By putting the Collegiants in dialogue with one

²³⁸ John Milbank, "Knowledge: The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi," in *Radical Orthodoxy*, 37.

²³⁹ Anthony Paul Smith and Daniel Whistler, "Editor's Introduction: What is Continental Philosophy of Religion Now?" in *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern: New Essays in Continental Philosophy of Religion*. Ed. Anthony Paul Smith and Daniel Whistler (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2010), 2.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

particular but representative thinker in the Continental Philosophy of Religion (Daniel Colucciello Barber), I hope to seek the intercontamination of religion and the secular in such a way that avoids supremacy and triumphalism on either side.

The Secularization Thesis

The concept of the secular has long rested upon the identification of the secular with reason, and the identification of reason with human progress. Connected with the idea that human progress corresponded with increasing rationality and increasing secularity, the thesis that long governed sociological thinking about the role of religion in the public sphere was that modernity entailed secularization. Secularization is a theory that describes social phenomena in the historical movement from early modernity to the present day, expecting that religious adherence would decline as industrial society progressed. The secularization thesis, as it has been called, has been contested on the grounds that the identification of secularization with modernization fails on two levels: the first flaw is that the secularization thesis contains an implicit normative element, and the second is that the secularization thesis does not correspond to the historical evidence.²⁴¹ Instead of fading from view, religion has seen a resurgence, often continuing apace in new and differentiated manifestations. The secularization thesis has been contested on historical and sociological levels as simply not being reflective of the modern realities of religious adherence, and has been retracted by its main proponent, the sociologist Peter Berger, who states, "by the late 70s or early 80s—most, but not all, sociologists of religion

²⁴¹ Mark Bahnisch, "Sociology of Religion, Secularization and Social Theory" (paper presented at the Australian Sociological Association Conference, University of New England, December 4-6, 2003), 3.

came to agree that the original secularization thesis was untenable in its basic form, which simply said modernization and secularization are necessarily correlated developments."²⁴²

In sociology, the idea that religion would decline as modernity progressed has recently given way to a sense that the identification of secularization with modernization was a mistake (exemplified in the work of sociologists José Casanova and David Martin).²⁴³ Instead, it has become evident that religion remains in various formations throughout the modern (or postmodern) world. The perspective of *social differentiation* accounts for this reality and appropriately critiques the secularization thesis. Whereas the original hypothesis of secularization maintained that there was a strict correspondence between the growth of industrial societies and the decline of religion, this new perspective of social differentiation provides a more nuanced explanation of the shifts in religious observance.

In his address at the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference in October 2014, "Religious Divisions After the Reformation: A Spur to Secularization?,"²⁴⁴ historian Benjamin Kaplan discussed analyses that link secularization and the Protestant Reformation, as exemplified by Brad Gregory's recent book *The Unintended Reformation*. Calling secularization "the master narrative of western history," Kaplan outlines three versions of the secularization thesis: (1) the decline and disappearance of religion, (2) the privatization and marginalization of religion, and (3) the differentiation of religion and its expressions.²⁴⁵ It is the last of these three variants on the secularization thesis that Kaplan addresses and takes seriously. Following David Martin's work

²⁴² Charles T. Mathewes, "An Interview with Peter Berger," *The Hedgehog Review* (Spring & Summer 2006): 152.

²⁴³ See José Casanova, "The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms," in *Rethinking Secularism*. Ed. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen. (London: Oxford University Press, 2011) and David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards A Revised General Theory*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005),

²⁴⁴ Benjamin Kaplan, "Religious Divisions After the Reformation: A Spur to Secularization?" (paper presented at the annual meeting for the 16th Century Society, New Orleans, Louisiana, October 2014).

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

in his book *On Secularization*,²⁴⁶ Kaplan calls social differentiation "the viable core" of the secularization thesis, understanding social differentiation to be a movement towards the compartmentalization and privatization of the role of religion in the lives of its adherents. Social differentiation, as Kaplan understands it, involves a movement away from the ubiquitous influence of religion upon people's lives, meaning that the social role of religion no longer conditions the total experience of life. However, this exit of religion from both the political sphere and the public sphere does not necessarily entail the total loss of religion or its influence. Instead of decline, religion became differentiated and found new personal and corporate expressions without being marginalized. David Martin locates the beginnings of this theory in Talcott Parsons' work in the 1960s which understood social differentiation as the "separating out of each social sphere from ecclesiastical control" and he summarizes this perspective as "the increasing autonomy of the various spheres of human activity."²⁴⁷ This critique of the secularization thesis, and the resulting view that religion remains an influential cultural domain, further resists the conflation of reason and the secular, and challenges the narrative of human progress. The result of this critique is that the concept of the secular must be opened to more radical critique because arguments in support of secular epistemology can no longer rest on a descriptive historical sociology that once proclaimed the demise of religion.

The Politics of Secularism

The three terms with which we are concerned – the secular, secularism, and secularization – determine one another in inconsistent and uneven ways. For example, the political consequence of the cultural acceptance of the secularization thesis is that arguments for

²⁴⁶ Martin, *On Secularization*, 20.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 20 and 123.

secular reason equate progress with the continuation of secularization. Most often, secularism is a prescriptive political doctrine that seeks to prevent religious influence in the political sphere, and to a lesser degree in the public sphere. This position is seen most clearly in the domestic policy of a nation such as France. Defined by a sharp distinction between the religious and political spheres, in France the normative ethic of *laïcité* (secularity) extends to a ban on religious garb (such as the hijab) in French public schools.²⁴⁸ And yet, secularism is not a singular politic. Instead, secularism is as interiorly diverse as the concept of the secular. Some varieties of secularism merely seek to maintain strong boundaries between the religious and public spheres, while others (such as the aforementioned example) actively seek to eliminate the influence of religion on the policies of the state.

The philosopher Jürgen Habermas critiques the political program of secularism from the standpoint of *post-secularism*, which calls into question the conceptual underpinning of the secularist position. Habermas opposes the dominance of secularism in the political sphere and argues for a political ethic that takes seriously both religious and secular interests in the public sphere. Habermas writes that "[t]he awareness of living in a secular society is no longer bound up with the certainty that cultural and social modernization can advance only at the cost of the public influence and personal relevance of religion."²⁴⁹ This description of postsecular society is matched with a critique of the polarization that Habermas describes as "a cultural relativism beefed up with a critique of reason on the one side, and a rigid secularism pushing for a critique of religion on the other."²⁵⁰ The way out of this impasse, for Habermas, is not the relegation of religion to the private sphere (as in the case of French *laïcité*), and not merely increasing the

²⁴⁸ See Nabila Ramdani, "Laïcité and the French veil debate," *The Guardian*, May 23, 2010. Accessed April 10, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2010/may/23/france-veil-ban-burqa>.

²⁴⁹ Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society," *Sign and Sight* (Fall 2008), 20.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

political influence of religious minorities. Instead, Habermas argues for a "learning process" on the side of both the secular and the religious.²⁵¹ This learning process involves just the sort of mutual recognition that was argued for above in the debate on the status of the secular as a theological and philosophical concept. It is this spirit of dialogue between supposedly incommensurable ideas that the Collegiants embody, and so the remainder of this study will show how the Collegiant group exemplifies the critiques of the secular outlined above.

The Collegiants, the Secular, and the World

In his programmatic article "Postsecularism," Anthony Paul Smith writes that "in order to understand the postsecular we are led from the get go to the question of the secular."²⁵² Beginning to define the term, Smith writes that "the postsecular first names the relativizing of the secular."²⁵³ Smith defines the secular as a kind of colonial and imperial power, and he defines the postsecular as a critical resistance to that power. For Smith, "[t]he postsecular is parasitic upon the secular."²⁵⁴ This parasitism is definitive because the postsecular both depends upon and stands against the secular.²⁵⁵ Furthermore, Smith draws upon the work of Talal Asad, by first distinguishing between the concept of the secular and the political doctrine of secularism, and then by sharing in Asad's argument that the "'the secular' is conceptually prior to the political doctrine of 'secularism.'"²⁵⁶ This is what Smith refers to as "the conjugated secular," in other words the "naming the conjugation of the epistemological concept and the political project."²⁵⁷

This postsecular critique finds its most sophisticated contemporary expression in the

²⁵¹ Ibid., 28.

²⁵² Anthony Paul Smith, "Post-Secularism: Introduction" in *Reading the Abrahamic Faiths: Rethinking Religion and Literature*. ed. Emma Mason (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 222.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 16. Quoted in Smith, 223.

²⁵⁷ Smith, "Post-Secularism," 225.

work of Daniel Colucciello Barber, most recently a fellow at the ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry. Neither a philosopher nor theologian proper, Barber mediates and combines the critical grammars of philosophy and theology in two major works (*On Diaspora* in 2011 and *Deleuze and the Naming of God* in 2014), and in a series of articles and critical reviews.²⁵⁸ The work of Barber represents the more balanced perspective within the Continental Philosophy of Religion. Although the proponents of Radical Orthodoxy greatly risk repeating the problems that they themselves critique (proclamations of neutrality and victory), and some thinkers in the postsecular Continental Philosophy of Religion repeat this problem in reverse (seeking to insulate philosophy from theological contamination), Barber affirms secular and religious truths without presuming that he does so from a neutral ground outside of the influence of both perspectives.²⁵⁹

For Barber, the secular is certainly something invented or imagined, and so his critique can be readily categorized as postsecular. This "invention of the secular" is critiqued by Barber because it engages in "the installation of a transcendent plane that, in presenting itself as a universal aim, enables the hegemony of a particular position."²⁶⁰ This passage exemplifies the way in which Barber's position is defined by his commitments to world-affirmation, immanence, and the critique of transcendence. For Barber and his interlocutors Talal Asad and Gil Anidjar, the goal is to affirm the *dignity* of the world without privileging a particular way of *naming* that world, and thereby exercising a discursive power play.

²⁵⁸ Daniel Colucciello Barber, *On Diaspora: Christianity, Religion, and Secularity* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2011) and *Deleuze and the Naming of God: Post-Secularism and the Future of Immanence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

²⁵⁹ The secular claims to affirm the world *as it is*, and in doing so posits itself as the default position. While the object of critique is the same (the imposture of secular authority), the way in which that critique proceeds differs. On one hand Radical Orthodoxy replaces the power of the secular with its own power, and on the other hand the Continental Philosophy of Religion seeks to diminish this power from without. Neither position is sufficient for the task of treating philosophy and theology as equally legitimate discursive vocabularies.

²⁶⁰ Barber, *On Diaspora*, 100-101.

This formulation contains an implicit linkage of epistemology, ontology, and ethics. Barber's ethics rests on the critique of power, and evaluates ontological and epistemological claims based on whether discursive power is abused or used well. For example, colonial and imperial ways of knowing damage epistemological and ontological claims by dehumanizing individuals or cultural and religious groups. Barber's epistemology rests on the idea that right knowing can only follow from a dialogical understanding of discourse rather than an adversarial model that would dominate less powerful perspectives. Ways of knowing that are hegemonic tend to proceed from the assumption of their own victory, and therefore reduce and sometimes oppress minority perspectives. This epistemological ethics correlates with ontology through the act of naming. When we assign a name (signifier) to a thing in the world (signified) we are not only engaging in an epistemological action of knowing, but we are doing something both politically and ontologically significant. Barber's critique of power extends to ontology through his affirmation of the world (the signified thing that is named) over and against the names that we assign to things in the world. Barber's wants to ensure that the worldly thing that is named remains more primary than the name assigned to it, and this is what he means when he refers to world-affirmation. This is because what is named is infinitely richer than names can contain, meaning that the thing exceeds the name and the name does not exhaust the thing it describes. The immanence of the worldly thing must always come before the transcendental discourses that seek to limit that immanence with imperialistic and colonial ways of naming. The criteria of world-affirmation is applied all across the board for Barber, meaning that both established religion and established secularity are found to be deficient because both set themselves up as transcendental worldviews that seek hegemony over the world that they attempt to explain and engage with.²⁶¹

²⁶¹ This critical posture towards religion and the secular, adopted by Barber and others, is not necessarily a

Both Radical Orthodoxy and the Continental Philosophy of Religion quite rightly critique the claim that the secular is ahistorical and neutral, although they draw different conclusions from this critique. A consequence of the critique of both Radical Orthodoxy and the Continental Philosophy of Religion is that, because the secular is not a neutral base-line, we are not able to simply position ourselves against it (from a confessional 'religious' position), *and* we are not able to build a thought-world upon it (from a nonconfessional 'secular' position). Acknowledgment of these two parallel critiques forms the basis on which Barber builds his theory.

Diaspora

Neither concerned for nor restrained by the concerns of philosophy or theology, Barber's first major work focuses on the topic of 'diaspora.' Typically naming the remnant of a displaced people group, and connoting a connection to the people of Israel (when used in the context of Christian theology), diaspora takes on a new meaning in Barber's work. Diaspora names a way of thinking, a way of understanding, and an ontology, that acts as "a concept and not a sociological descriptor."²⁶² Barber distinguishes between understanding diaspora as a characteristic of a particular thing and understanding diaspora as a determiner of being and existence, and he develops this ontology of diaspora through both a unique philosophy of immanence and an

new phenomenon. As mentioned above, the critique of religion offered by Ludwig Feuerbach resonates significantly with Barber and his associates. In Karl Barth's introductory essay to Feuerbach's book *The Essence of Christianity*, Barth describes Feuerbach as "more theological than many theologians" who inaugurated a "philosophically grounded negation to all theology, but an antithesis no better grounded on philosophy than on theology itself." (Karl Barth, "An Introductory Essay," in *The Essence of Christianity* by Ludwig Feuerbach. Trans. George Eliot. [New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957], xi). Feuerbach's affirmative "yes!" to "worldly experience" seeks "the transformation and dissolution of theology into anthropology" (xiii, xiv.). This reduction of theology to anthropology is also an elevation (*Aufhebung*) of anthropology to the level of theology, and this bidirectional movement is very similar to the position taken up by Barber, as described above (xv).

²⁶² Barber, *On Diaspora*, 103.

exploration of "Christianity, religion, and the secular."²⁶³ In order to understand Barber's postsecular position it is vital to first understand his concepts of diaspora and immanence.

For Barber, "diasporic immanence" names an ontological theory in which "the cause of being and the effects of being...belong to the same plane."²⁶⁴ This ontological view removes any transcendental reference point and places all causes and effects on the same level in which "each being is co-constitutive of every other being."²⁶⁵ The result of this emphasis on immanence is the tension between "namelessness" and "excessive signification."²⁶⁶ While namelessness refers to the aforementioned idea that it is impossible to assign a proper name to particular beings or being-as-such, Barber admits that it is nonetheless necessary to engage in the act of naming both being-itself and particular beings. Excessive signification refers to the aforementioned idea that, while names can be assigned to particular beings or being-itself, these names do not exhaust what they signify. Each name is a reduction, meaning that the 'world' that is signified always exceeds the name that is signifying. For Barber, namelessness and excessive signification are related by a "reciprocal relay" that is generative and creative, provided that it does not crystallize into either the rejection of naming or an over-confidence in naming.²⁶⁷

Barber holds that immanence "begins as a manner or relation... in which neither term can be made utterly prior to the other."²⁶⁸ Rather than accepting a relation between immanence and transcendence that subordinates the immanence of the world to a transcendental reference point, Barber understands an immanent relation to be one in which the two terms are "mutually constitutive."²⁶⁹ Instead of privileging cause over effect, for Barber "the being of the cause and

²⁶³ Ibid., x.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., xi.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., xi.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., xi.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., xi.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 1.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

the being of the effects belong to one plane of immanence."²⁷⁰ Being "irreducible and autonomous," immanence expresses itself in such a way that problematizes the procedure of assigning a name to a particular identity (such as the world), so much so that "immanence, properly speaking, is nameless" despite the unavoidable nature of naming.²⁷¹ Barber is also concerned to avoid setting up namelessness as a transcendental criterion for all phenomena. Namelessness is not a rule that seeks to prevent any confidence in naming, but rather it is a paradox in which the imagined or "fictive" nature of all names stands in immanent relation with the excessive and irreducible nature of the world that human beings attempt to name.²⁷² The two dangers of immanence then, are "letting namelessness transcend names" and "making names transcendent to the nameless."²⁷³ Letting namelessness transcend names results in a kind of paralysis in which we stop naming things because names place such restrictive limits on things. On the other hand, making names transcendent to the nameless falls into the trap of misusing epistemological power by setting up particular names as final and complete signifiers of that which they signify. In addition informing his work on Christianity, religion, and the secular, this critical vocabulary also assists Barber in his interdisciplinary mediation between philosophy and theology.

Mediating between the discourses of philosophy and theology, Barber develops a typology that explains the problems and potentials of both perspectives. First, Barber defines "Philosophical Delimitation" as the "primacy of a purely philosophical structure" which subordinates theology to philosophy.²⁷⁴ In this view "theological discourse is understood as a specific borrowing or deployment of a more fundamental and generic mode of thought that is

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 2.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 5, 6.

²⁷² Ibid., 8.

²⁷³ Ibid., 9.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 11.

properly philosophical."²⁷⁵ Second, Barber defines "Theological Particularism" as "the primacy of theological discourse in its particularity."²⁷⁶ This view refuses to argue from a fundamental transcendental position, instead affirming the inherently subjective nature of theological assertion. Third, Barber defines "Theological Ontology" as the position that holds that "the desire to think being, or any universal horizon, is to be affirmed, but that this desire may only be fulfilled through theological discourse."²⁷⁷

Barber critiques each position, stating first that his standard of immanence accords with the critique of transcendence of Theological Particularism, but notes the tendency of Theological Particularism to forget that the system of signification that it rests upon is "fictive" and "contingent."²⁷⁸ Second, Barber's key category of immanence aligns with the perspective of Philosophical Delimitation on a basic level because it positions itself theologically in relation to philosophy, but Barber holds that Philosophical Delimitation falls short when it sets up philosophy as the arbiter of truth over theology.²⁷⁹ Lastly, Barber's perspective of immanence appreciates the corrective that Theological Ontology provides for Theological Particularism, but he cannot follow Theological Ontology all the way because it rests upon the same sort of transcendent assurance as Philosophical Delimitation.²⁸⁰ This discursive critique of philosophy and theology, which owes a great deal to the suspicion of power characteristic of the postmodern perspective, is analogous to his critique of Christianity and the secular.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 13.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 14.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 16.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 15-16.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 13.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 17.

Christianity

This ontological view of the relationship between being, language, and immanence undergirds Barber's postsecular position in such a way that permits him to be critical of both theology and philosophy, and religion and the secular. To see the relationship between Christianity, religion, and the secular through the lens of diaspora is to affirm the creative and constructive good of difference. In other words, a diasporic view of Christianity, religion, and the secular is "to see differentiability as an advantage" because "if Christianity is diasporic then it can never exist in isolation from its others" (such as the other Abrahamic faiths and the varieties of atheism and agnosticism).²⁸¹ Instead of understanding otherness and difference as enemies of identity, Barber argues that both Christianity and the secular must understand that what they have named 'Christianity' and 'the secular' exceeds the boundaries of those names. Barber seeks to "propose a diasporic account of Christianity without simultaneously claiming that this diasporic Christianity accords with some ahistorical essence of Christianity."²⁸² In this way he avoids setting up historical essence as a transcendental reference point and measure, thereby linking his critique of transcendence with his ontological position. Barber writes that,

immanence insists on the proper namelessness of being, it also insists on the excessive, improper signification that is produced with the same necessity by which being remains nameless. Any discourse on Christianity, then, should be understood as an instance of this signification that is both improper to the namelessness of immanence and constructively expressive of the very same immanence.²⁸³

For Barber, being itself cannot be contained or exhausted by names. Because of this ontological claim, Christianity is not a master narrative with privileged access to the immanent world, but rather Christianity is one discourse and narrative alongside others such as the secular, or the other Abrahamic faiths. Proceeding with an implementation of his diasporic approach, Barber

²⁸¹ Ibid., xii-xiii.

²⁸² Ibid., 33.

²⁸³ Ibid., 34.

concerns himself with the conceptual lineage "from the Christian invention of religion to the modern opposition between religion and the secular."²⁸⁴ Barber argues that the apostle Paul's institutionalization of Christianity under the indistinction "neither Jew nor Greek" fundamentally and irreversibly changed the meaning of the category of religion.²⁸⁵ Barber writes that, after Paul, "[r]eligion no longer names the practices that mediate a certain ethno-cultural existence; it begins instead to name one's relation to a newly born spiritual plane," and this plane is Christianity.²⁸⁶ The newfound ability to be a follower of Christ in spite of cultural identity (Jew or Greek), means that a new category has to be invented, a category that we call religion.²⁸⁷ Barber writes, with reference to Daniel Boyarin's book *Border Lines*,²⁸⁸ that Christianity sets itself up as the fulfillment of the category that it has necessitated: "the distinctive characteristic of *true* religion is *right belief* – in other words, orthodoxy. Christianity, as it becomes a new kind of identity, carries with it a new way of defining identity."²⁸⁹ The boundaries that define Christian belief in modern Protestantism often rest on the distinction between orthodoxy and heresy²⁹⁰ – a distinction that is fixated on the personal assent to propositional truth-statements. This simplistic binary situation, set up by the emphasis on right belief and truth against heresy and heterodoxy, is symptomatic of a deep power problem – the very same power problem that Barber critiques philosophically when he affirms immanence and critiques transcendence.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 89.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 89-90.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 90.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 91.

²⁸⁸ Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

²⁸⁹ Barber, *On Diaspora*, 91.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 93.

The Secular and the Postsecular

Barber's understanding of the relationship between Christianity, religion, and the secular is essential if we are to understand his postsecular position, and his critique of the secular. Barber writes that

Christianity established itself by establishing religion (such that it became the fulfillment of religion); the secular established itself by opposing itself to religion and thus to Christianity as well (though in a problematically equivocal sense). I argue that the secular should be seen not as a successful resolution of these prior inconsistencies, but rather as yet another innovation in a series of inconsistencies.²⁹¹

In the same way that Barber describes the Christian invention of religion (via Boyarin), he also describes the invention of the secular. Barber critiques both positions, in a way similar to Foucault's critique of Enlightenment blackmail, because they set up "a position of judgment" and a transcendent "plane of reality in which such a position becomes normative."²⁹² He calls this the "fundamental continuity between Christian religion and the secular," noting that, while the content of the two differs, the epistemic mode of assertion remains the same.²⁹³ Barber critiques the idea that "the secular functions to emancipate us from Christianity or from religion as such" and instead argues that both the secular and the religious fail to provide an "immanent affirmation of the world" by virtue of their transcendental imposture.²⁹⁴ The affirmation of the world that Barber argues for is a kind of affirmation that seeks to understand the world without dominating it by using names to limit and quash the excesses of what they name.

²⁹¹ Ibid., xiii.

²⁹² Ibid., 100-101.

²⁹³ Ibid., 101.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 102.

World-Affirmation

In his review "The Act of Criticism and the Secular" Barber states that "the secular cannot function as an unproblematic point of reference."²⁹⁵ Barber then outlines several possible critical directions after the critique of the secular. He writes that some thinkers critique the secular because of its complicity in "colonial, imperial, and racial modes of power," while others state that "the value of the secular ultimately resides in its critical power" (such as in the book by Stathis Gourgouris that Barber reviews).²⁹⁶ Amongst these options, the discourses and vocabularies that both religion and the secular use to name the world each have an inherent dignity.²⁹⁷ This conviction aligns with both the Collegiant commitment to diversity and tolerance and with Barber's critique of the misuse of discursive power in the transcendental postures taken up by both religion and the secular. In particular, both Barber's critique and the openness of Collegiant discourse are aligned on the question of what defines the world.

The trajectory of Collegiant thought moved through several discrete attitudes pertaining to the affirmation of the world. Whereas the early Spiritualist Collegiants rejected the present world because of their millenarian apocalyptic expectation, Collegiant Rational Religion significantly affirmed the world of culture and society. Collegiant Rational Religion critiqued confessional boundaries, rejecting confessions in a way that is philosophically similar to Barber's rejection of discourses that arrange themselves as transcendental measures of other discourses. Whereas Collegiant Rational Religion aligns with Barber's world-affirmation, the later Collegiant Rationalism falls under Barber's critique of transcendence because of way Rationalism sets up reason as a dominant category. Those who advised Bredenburg to choose

²⁹⁵ Daniel Colucciello Barber, "The Act of Criticism and the Secular." Review of *Lessons in Secular Criticism*, by Stathis Gourgouris. *Los Angeles Review of Books*. August 14, 2014. <http://lareviewofbooks.org/review/act-criticism-secular>

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

between Spiritualist faith and Rationalist reason reinforced the authority of the dominant discourse of Rationalism. Toward the end of the history of the Collegiant group, this dominant discourse of Rationalism began to see itself as incommensurable with Christian faith. This is partially exemplified by Zwicker's rule of distinction in which "[i]t is impossible to predicate two contrary things of one subject at the same time."²⁹⁸ For Zwicker these two contrary things were the two natures of Christ. However, this principle represents a larger movement in Collegiant thought away from compatibility toward incommensurability.

Collegiant Rational Religion combines two viewpoints that today we understand to be separate. In the same spirit as Collegiant Rational Religion, Barber seeks to show how Christianity and the secular are both already unified by their concern for the world. Barber critiques both contemporary secular and religious perspectives for their failure to be truly world-affirming by pointing out how both proceed from the assumption that their position is the neutral ground of reality, when each perspective is in fact constructing itself as a transcendent standard. In his essay "Epistemological Violence, Christianity, and the Secular" Barber writes that the work of Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder has been well recognized for its political potential, but not for its radical affirmation of the secular as the site of the gospel. Despite the fact that the term "secular" is used in opposition to the "church" in Yoder's work, Barber describes the way in which Yoder affirms the original secular meaning of the term 'gospel' as 'good news' or *evangelion*. Barber argues that,

primacy must be granted to the secular, and that the opposition between religious and secular occludes theological truth. Faced with such an opposition, theology sides with the secular, because at bottom the secular retains—at least in this instance—two qualities that are essential to the gospel: that it is good news for *the world*, and that it is good news for people in general rather than for private individuals....²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, 131.

²⁹⁹ Daniel Colucciello Barber, "Epistemological Violence, Christianity, and the Secular," in *The New Yoder*. Ed. Peter Dula and Chris K. Huebner, 271-293 (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2009).

Here Barber associates both the secular and the religious with the goal of world-affirmation, via the gospel. Because of the world-oriented nature of the gospel, Barber claims that Christianity is faithful when it affirms the good that the secular seeks to name (but not in such a way that positions Christian discourse as the transcendental assurance of a final name). For Barber, the secular cannot be rightly identified with reason because reason is so often used as an absolute reference point against which every particular claim must position itself. Instead, Barber decouples the secular from reason, claiming instead that the secular represents an attempt at naming the world that is outside of the language of religion.

The radical move that Barber makes occurs when he joins together Christianity and the secular by showing how the true concern of both perspectives is "the world." Holding both Christianity and the secular to the same standard of world-affirmation, Barber seeks to assure that the affirmation of the world is pursued in such a way that places the richness of the object of concern before the limits or excesses of the names that are assigned to it. This concern for the object rather than the name is very much in line with both the Collegiant spirit of anticonfessionalism, and the Collegiant rejection of the idea of the one true church. Kołakowski writes that the Collegiants "have taken anticonfessionalism to its most highly developed form and do not regard themselves as bound by even irenic 'general Christianity,' but want to conduct their religious life their own way, independent of all collective names."³⁰⁰ This Collegiant desire to be free of names further accords with Barber's critique of namelessness and excessive signification.

Barber affirms that the secular is the concern of the religious, and being its concern, the secular should be affirmed by the religious. He writes that "what matters for theology is the

³⁰⁰ Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 2)," 394.

world—though this is not the same as saying that theology affirms the world as it is presently expressed, given that the community of disciples is distinct by way of its nonconformity with preestablished patterns of existence."³⁰¹ Barber states that "[t]o affirm immanence is not to affirm the below against the beyond, it is to refuse such an opposition."³⁰² Being world-affirming, therefore, is not a wholesale assent to the injustices and violence in the world, but rather an attempt to problematize the boundary between religious names and secular names, and to show that these vocabularies overlap in both their metaphysical object and in their political goals.

Barber writes that "the conceptual opposition between the secular and the religious must be displaced" especially given that "secularism tends to present us with a false binary whereby we must choose either the restriction of religion or the potentiality for becoming opened up by the liberation from religion."³⁰³ The Collegiants displaced this distinction between the secular and religion in the seventeenth century by combining the mystical inner life of Spiritualism with the Rationalism of Spinoza.

Pieter Balling's work, *The Light on the Candle Stick*, serves as a striking example of this combination. A representative selection reads:

Things are not for words, but words for things – if therefore we understand things aright and as they ought, by words, it must be by such as are fit to imprint the things themselves in those to whom they should occur, and then it were enough (to make known our thoughts to others as we conceive them) only to make use of such words. But forasmuch as we find the matter in this case far otherwise, and that two men speaking or writing the same words, may nevertheless have different, yea, sometimes contrary thoughts, the disability of performing this fitly by words or discourse, is clearly inferred. Nor may we at all wonder at it, seeing we know to what a perpetual change languages are subject, even such that the very words may be changed from their pristine signification. And the imperfection is so great, that whosoever should have invented them, such as now they are in use, we should certainly believe that he had little or no knowledge of those things that are thereby intended to be signified. So that if we would better express things unto

³⁰¹ Barber, "Epistemological Violence, Christianity, and the Secular," 273.

³⁰² Barber, *On Diaspora*, 27.

³⁰³ Barber, *On Diaspora*, 142.

another by words and speeches, we had need find new words, and consequently a whole new language: But that would be a toyle and labour indeed.³⁰⁴

Balling emphasizes that the purpose of words is to name things, assuring the reader that limitations and contradictions in language are to be expected. Rather than resulting in a "pristine signification," words are imperfect vessels that are invented by the ignorant and reinvented as needed. Barber's reciprocal relay between namelessness and excessive signification serves the same purpose as the passage from Balling, namely to assert the fictive and constructed nature of language. Common to both Barber and Balling is the idea that the proper concern of language is the world. Barber upholds world-affirmation, and Balling states correspondingly that words are for things and not the other way around. Applied to the discourse on the secular, whereas the secular indicates a concern for the world, both Barber and Balling seek to align language with the immanence of things in the world, rather than reducing things in the world to the limits of a fixed transcendental vocabulary such as religion or the secular. In this way both the aims of Balling and other Rational-Religious Collegiants, and the aims of Barber's project, have contemporary consequences for postsecular discourse.

Giving up Universality

Another way in which Barber's critique aligns with the historical example of the Collegiants is found in the fact that the Collegiants intentionally divested themselves of the claim that they were the universal church, therefore separating themselves from the transcendental posture of power that Barber critiques. In their early period, the Collegiants remained confident in the inherent rightness of their own position, in such a way that would not stand up to Barber's critique of epistemological violence. However, as the Collegiants developed their form of

³⁰⁴ Balling, "The Light upon the Candlestick."

Rational Religion, their critique of church and world remained, but their toleration of different beliefs increased in tandem with their rejection of confessions.

Kołakowski was interested in the Collegiants for this very reason, and he contrasts religious groups that are defined by exclusivity with religious groups that are defined by openness or acceptance. Proposing a refined typology of religious groups, Kołakowski argues that the Collegiants hold a unique position in the sect-church distinction, and joins in the tradition in the history of ideas of theorizing the sect-type established by Ernst Troeltsch and Max Weber. Troeltsch's influential distinction between church and sect is that,

The Church is that type of organization which is overwhelmingly conservative, which to a certain extent accepts the secular order, and dominates the masses; in principle; therefore, it is universal, i.e. it desires to cover the whole life of humanity. The sects, on the other hand are comparatively small groups; they aspire after personal inward perfection, and they aim at a direct personal fellowship between the members of each group. From the very beginning, therefore, they are forced to organize themselves in small groups, and to renounce the idea of dominating the world. Their attitude towards the world, the State, and Society may be indifferent, tolerant, or hostile, since they have no desire to control and incorporate these forms of social life; on the contrary, they tend to avoid them....³⁰⁵

For Troeltsch the church-type seeks to conserve itself by claiming universality, whereas the sects do not strive for self-preservation and instead seek inward spiritual perfection. Defined by their being a gathered community, the sects "renounce the idea of dominating the world."³⁰⁶ This definition is characteristic of the Collegiant group, given their sectarian ancestry, communal focus, and intentional denial of the presence of the one true church in the world. The free church avoidance of state control, and the "indifferent, tolerant, or hostile" attitude taken towards "the world" is characteristic of the Collegiant early period. In this case the "world" indicates the realm of the state, but also defines the more general desire for domination and control that defines the

³⁰⁵ Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*. Volume 1. trans. Olive Wyon (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 331.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

church-type. Troeltsch's typology aligns, on this point, with that of Weber when he defines the Anabaptists in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

A strict avoidance of the world, in the sense of all not strictly necessary intercourse with worldly people, together with the strictest bibliocracy in the sense of taking the life of the first generations of Christians as a model, were the results for the first Baptist communities, and this principle of avoidance of the world never quite disappeared so long as the old spirit remained alive.³⁰⁷

Again, the rejection of the world remains definitive of the free church tradition insofar as the world refers to the state and that which is detestable in culture. Troeltsch's definition of the church and sect types is important because of how the critique of power begins to manifest itself in the refusal of the one true church, as exemplified by Collegiant leaders such as Galenus.

Like Troeltsch and Weber, Kołakowski theorizes a similar distinction between inclusive and exclusive Christian groups. On one hand there are groups that believe themselves to hold exclusive access to the divine, and these groups are defined by their claim to be the one true church. On the other hand there are groups that "consciously give up any claim to being the 'one true church,' and state this position in no uncertain terms."³⁰⁸ Kołakowski proposes "a division of Christian sects into those which are exclusive and those which are not. In this case 'exclusive' refers to those who believe that they are the 'one true church,' while those that are not exclusive are those who reject this assertion."³⁰⁹ This proposal comes just before his claim that "[t]he Collegiant movement embodies the highest social level of nonexclusive religious consciousness."³¹⁰

In this context, Kołakowski's claim is even more powerful. Not only does the Collegiant group represent a significant inclusiveness, but as was argued earlier, this inclusiveness remains

³⁰⁷ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Scribners, 1958), 145-146.

³⁰⁸ Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 1)," 270.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

properly definitive of the group. The Collegiants intentionally gave up claims to universality, making them an important historical correlate to Barber's critique of discourses that proceed from a transcendent position of power. Barber implicitly critiques the objectivity favored by the church-type, and affirms the subjectivity favored by the sect-type. The Collegiants serve as an ideal example of the sect-type because part of their identity is the divestment of all claims to universality, whether in confessions or in the claim to be the one true church.

Church and World

A final example of the connection between Barber's work and the Collegiants is found in Galenus' encouragement to the church to resist the temptation to "become immanent" or "transform itself into a monster cut off from the rest of the world, content to cultivate its own perfection."³¹¹ This world-affirming perspective is certainly more in line with the values of the Enlightenment and Modernity than a separatist or purist treatment of the two-worlds model.³¹² For Galenus the ideal form of Christian faith is, in the words of Kołakowski, "completely reduced to moral functions, but also unrestrained as an educational institution which aspired to external activity, enlivened by the apostolic spirit but free of fanaticism."³¹³ This shows that the secularization of religious truth is certainly operative in the reduction of faith to morality, and this affects how the divide between church and world functioned for Galenus. A more nuanced distinction between the church and the world also found in the work of Galenus is helpful in dis-identifying Enlightenment from secularization because it shows further how the term 'world' has many meanings. Kołakowski writes further that,

³¹¹ Ibid., 288.

³¹² "Their kingdom is not of this world; they are pilgrims on earth and do not therefore want to interfere with the earthly authorities. These two kingdoms—earthly and Christian—should not meet, as they are based on opposing principles." Ibid., 390.

³¹³ Ibid., 288.

For Galenus, the word "world"—in the pejorative sense, *mundus immundus*—refers to godless and evil people and their actions, but not natural reality, as such. If one understands in this way the call to "separate oneself from the world" and to feel sympathy for the "spirit of the world" which has penetrated into the reformed churches, then it is easy to understand that these do not refer to the program of a sect which turns away from all "worldly" arrangements with scorn. It likewise does not mean one turns away from social life and everyday work and attempts to cultivate spiritual qualities in ascetic practices.³¹⁴

This attitude, which is a kind of secularity, nuances Galenus' position on the distinction between church and world because it allows the separation of the meaning of the word 'world' into the positive role of culture, and the negative moral term of evil. This allows for a positive understanding of culture without a wholesale encouragement of "godless and evil people and their actions."³¹⁵

More broadly, Kołakowski identifies two streams in the Protestant mindset: "the condemnation of the 'world' along with the ecclesiastical institutions, and the opening up of the ecclesiastical institutions to the 'world' by giving them a secular character."³¹⁶ Although the former tendency is evident in the early Collegiant attitude toward the world, the latter is representative of Collegiant Rational Religion and its affirmation of the worlds of culture, science, and politics. This affirmation of the worlds of culture, science, and politics is what gives the Collegiant group their depth and breadth, allowing them to challenge contemporary thinking by demonstrating that religion and the secular can indeed be understood as complementary perspectives that mutually fulfill one another.

³¹⁴ Kołakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion (Part 1)," 289.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 291.

Conclusion

The Collegiants were a hinge between the Christian worldview of the Reformation era and the so-called "secular" worldview of the Early Enlightenment. Being at this juncture the Collegiants demonstrated how these two perspectives could be held together, at least for a time. The Collegiants are instructive for contemporary thinking about the divide between religion and the secular because they demonstrate how a community can be both religious and secular at the same time. The Rational Religion that developed midway through Collegiant history is often passed over in the scholarship on the group, but the teleological inevitability of the victory of reason does not adequately describe the Collegiant movement, especially given the critique of the Enlightenment periodization provided by both the critique of Israel and the critique of Enlightenment thinking from Kant to the Frankfurt School. These two concurrent critiques – one historiographical and one philosophical – help to situate the importance of Collegiant Rational Religion in the scholarship on the Radical Enlightenment.

In their development of Rational Religion, the Collegiants were defined by interior diversity, anticonfessionalism, anticlericalism, and free prophecy. These defining characteristics, which accord significantly with contemporary postsecular critique, were lost in the transition to Rationalism. Instead of emphasizing the compatibility between faith and reason that permitted the Dutch Mennonite and Spinozan connections, Collegiant thought eventually embraced the aspect of Rationalism that privileged distinctions rather than compatibilities. The Bredenburg dispute marked a turning point in which Rationalism superseded Rational Religion in the Collegiant group. The particular moment when Bredenburg was forced to choose between faith and reason exemplified the greater principle that Zwicker called the rule of distinction, a rule that

emphasized disjunction over conjunction, and the rule of reason over the compatibility of faith and reason.

The story of the Collegiants resonates with contemporary postsecular critique, as represented by the thought of Daniel Coluciello Barber. Understanding that the secular is intertwined with secularization and secularism (and the critiques of secularization and secularism), the Collegiants align well with the present postsecular critique because of their affirmation of the world, their divestment from claims to universality, and their suspicion of names. Kolakowski writes that the Collegiant movement "proclaims itself a secular institution, called to strengthen collectively its religious values, but deprived of any charismatic glory of a religious group in its ideas, activities and rituals."³¹⁷ However, the secular nature of the Collegiant group goes deeper than their lack of charismatic glory. Given Barber's argument that both the secular and religion are faithful when they affirm the immanent world before any transcendent names, it is surely the case that the Collegiants are secular in this deeper sense, and also religious in this deeper sense. As a group that functioned as a "loose association" and a "fluid framework" the Collegiants speak directly into present conversations about pluralism, tolerance, and multiculturalism.³¹⁸ In the present postmodern situation, characterized by the collapse of grand narratives,³¹⁹ there can be no better resource for understanding the crumbling distinction between religion and the secular than the Collegiant group who combined religion and secularity over 350 years ago. Because they were a self-avowedly Christian and secular organization the Collegiants teach us that the secular is historical and not value neutral, and that we have never been purely secular.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 271.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ See Fredric Jameson, "Introduction," in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, by Jean Francois Lyotard, vii-xxi. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1984).

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