

Reconfiguring the sacred: Artists, scientists and spiritualism before 1914

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The process of secularization is one which has preoccupied historians for over a century. Many still abide by an outmoded approach to the subject, derived from the writings of Max Weber. This school posits a single line from religious belief and practice to the demystification of the world. That old approach has the virtue of simplicity, but the vice of distortion. For it misses an alternative set of patterns I want to talk about today.¹

These patterns surround the attack on the conventional churches and the migration of the sacred out of the churches and into every life. In our own times the sacred is not dead, *pace* Nietzsche and Weber; it simply has left the churches, as men and women did in increasing numbers especially in Western Europe from the mid-nineteenth century onward.

The phenomenon of spiritualism shows how this was so. Spiritualism was an eclectic movement based on a belief in communication with the dead. It was both an attack on the central tenets of Judaism and Christianity and frequently affirmed women's powers and women's rights. It is hardly an accident that among the central figures of nineteenth-century spiritualism were Susan B. Anthony in the United States and Annie Besant in Britain and India.

Spiritualism was also an inverted form of Orientalism, a set of beliefs affirming the greater wisdom of Eastern religions, particularly in India, over the ossified and bureaucratized churches of Western Europe. Here was 'empire' returning the Western gaze, and offering not decadence but spiritual power. Spiritualism and anti-imperialism went hand in hand.

The key point in this literature is the extent to which a broad category of unconventional, artistic, and scientific thought represented a revolt against conventional configurations of the sacred. Given the turn of the Roman Catholic Church towards Papal authority and, in certain domains, Papal infallibility in the later nineteenth century, and given the conservative coloration of many Protestant churches, especially in Germany, the United States, and Britain, it is hardly surprising that a number of radical impulses challenged ecclesiastical pretensions to interpret sacred matters, to delimit spiritual quests to those they could control, and to frame fundamental practices of mourning the dead. What better way to criticize the churches than to strip them of their authority to mediate mourning and to establish rules and practices concerning the bereaved?

¹ For a similar critique, see Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

If individuals could contact the dead directly, then the intermediary position of the priest, the pastor, and even of the saints and Christ himself was called into question.

The second impulse behind spiritualist practices was feminist in character. An exclusively male clergy was an unmistakable target for women unwilling to accept a subordinate role in Victorian institutional life. While there were many feminists who were not spiritualists, most spiritualists, on the contrary, were feminists. They gave to women a privileged role in interpreting the signs of the unseen world, and in bringing indirectly messages back to the living from the dead.²

One way to configure a political space occupied by a surprising number of scientists and artists in the pre-1914 years is to see spiritualism as a language of political and social radicalism, more certain of what it rejected than what it proposed. Spiritualism was a heightened form of anti-positivism, a poetic response to the dull prose of visible, material 'facts' and to the staid conventions of Victorian religion and the rigid patterns it ordained within marriage and domestic life.

After 1914 this radical alliance fragmented. Votes for women came in a number of countries, but gender equality remained a very distant destination. The churches were disappointed when their hopes for a spiritual revival in wartime came to nothing; instead, the ranks of the faithful diminished even further. The wartime efflorescence of interest in communicating with the dead continued in the inter-war years, but it took on a private, rather than a public, political character. And with the increasingly embittered struggle for decolonization came a wish not for the mix of east and west but a final and formal separation between the two. The glue which held together the radical character of spiritualism dried up; instead, what had been an international fraternity of free thinkers, loosely knit in opposition to conventional religion and gender roles, turned into a quirky, peculiar, marginal and eclectic collection of mostly apolitical searchers for spiritual truth. Once the politics vanished, so did the heart and soul of what had been a century ago a vibrant, challenging social, scientific and artistic movement.

² Ann Braude, 'Radical spirits: Spiritualism and women's rights in nineteenth-century America', *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, viii, 3 (March 2005), pp. 132-3; Carol Lois Haywood, 'The Authority and Empowerment of Women among Spiritualist Groups', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, xxii, 2 (June 1983), pp. 157-66.

1. The revolt against the churches

Annie Besant's name is associated with both spiritualism and feminism. Both came out of her personal experience of narrow-mindedness and prejudice in mid-Victorian Britain. Born of a poor family in London, married at the age of 19, Annie was evicted from her home and marriage when she told her husband of her religious doubts. For a poor woman to speak her mind in this manner was a dangerous thing to do, but Besant was not a woman to avoid controversy.

Her entire life was spent in war against orthodoxy and patriarchy. In 1877, her name became a synonym for scandal among the conventional, in that she and her co-defendant Charles Bradlaugh were prosecuted in London for publishing a book advocating contraception. The book's author was another free thinker, Charles Knowlton. He was a Massachusetts physician, who put together a book offering, among other things, information on birth control. His American publisher, Abner Kneeland, went to jail for blasphemy in 1838 for having printed it. Besant and Bradlaugh published the book in England, and after a well-publicized trial, they were convicted of disseminating material likely 'to deprave and corrupt'. On appeal their conviction was quashed. The public fuss and comment generated by the trial helped circulate information on birth control techniques at precisely the time British fertility began to decline; the climate was ripe for such views. Shortly after the trial, Besant sallied forth to work on behalf of trade unionism and socialism, and was elected to the London School Board for a working-class district of London. It was at this time that she met Helena Blavatsky, and took up the cause of theosophy.

Theosophy was a home for a feminist freethinker like Besant. Blavatsky was a Russian mystic from a well-placed family; Sergei Witte, who served as Prime Minister after the turn of the century, was a first cousin. Blavatsky had fled an unconsummated marriage, travelling the world, and after a stay in Tibet, wound up in New York. She became well known as a medium, and helped found the Theosophical Society there in 1875. In 1882, she helped set up the international headquarters of theosophy in Madras.³ A decade later, she returned to England for medical care. Just before she died, she met Besant, who never forgot the encounter.⁴

³ Gertrude Marvin Williams, *Priestess of the occult, Madame Blavatsky* (New York, A. A. Knopf, 1946).

It would distract us considerably to trace the turns and obscurities of Blavatsky's theosophy, and the variations (and conflicts) over which her followers fought. Some elements can be observed in all these writings. Hindu beliefs about the mixing of the spiritual and material realms were common; so was the view that the surface, material presentation of the world is an illusion, if we see only that. Instead all living things have several layers or bodies 'with progressively more spiritual matter within every individual'. The notion of spiritual evolution was at the heart of this way of thinking, and it was up to those who could see such a possibility to spread the good word to those who were still mired in older ways.⁵

What it offered to women like Annie Besant was something like what Tolstoy termed 'a moral bath',⁶ enabling them to wash off the grime of Christian hypocrisy concerning sexual morality and the treatment of women. An interest in socialism, anarchism and the occult was to a degree a natural matter among Besant and other radicals.⁷ What could be more heterodox than to explore a mixture of Hindu and Buddhist ideas, and to see the East as living an inner life unknown to the crass, materialist West? After 1914, she took up anti-colonial agitation, becoming President of the Indian National Congress in 1917. There it all was: feminism, freedom of religious inquiry, and anti-colonialism.

Spiritualism embodied them all. Many people with what may be termed a libertarian temperament were drawn to it. What could not be seen could not be disproved. Only those with the courage to wonder could contemplate seriously the question of extra-sensory perception and communication after death. There were spiritualists who dabbled in the subject for a host of reasons, some considered, some absurd, and there were many who did not adopt Besant's other convictions. And to be sure there were charlatans among them too. But for our purposes, what we see in this alternative faith is the rejection of orthodox Christianity, the empowerment of women, and a commitment to the cause of the poor and the disenfranchised.

⁴ Annie Besant, *An autobiography* (London : T. Fisher Unwin, 1908); Anne Taylor, *Annie Besant: A biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Herbert Thurston, 'The Foundress of Theosophy', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, xx, 79 (Sept., 1931), pp. 421-35.

⁵ Peter Fingesten, 'Spirituality, Mysticism and Non-Objective Art', *Art Journal*, xxi, 1 (Autumn, 1961), pp. 2-6, quote at p. 3.

⁶ In *War and peace*, the term refers to the changed demeanor of Pierre after having witnessed the execution of Platon Karataev, and almost having been shot himself.

⁷ Rose-Carol Washton Long, 'Occultism, Anarchism, and Abstraction: Kandinsky's Art of the Future', *Art Journal*, xlvi, 1, *Mysticism and Occultism in Modern Art* (Spring 1987), pp. 38-45.

2. Scientific explorations

Charles Richet believed in all of the above. We have met him before, in our discussion of scientific internationalism and the peace movement. But perhaps more daring was his life-long championing of experimental research on what we now term para-psychology. Here was a polymath, a distinguished chemist, who won the Nobel prize for his research on anaphelaxis, and could have won another for work in serology, a member of the *Académie Française*, who still insisted on championing research on unconventional forms of communication and perception. Here were the fruits of 30 years of research.

1. There is in us a faculty of cognition that differs radically from the usual sensory faculties (Cryptesthesia).
2. There are, even in full light, movements of objects without contact (Telekenesis).
3. Hands, bodies, and objects seem to take shape in their entirety from a cloud and take all the semblance of life (Ectoplasms).
4. There occur premonitions that can be explained neither by chance nor perspicacity, and are sometimes verified in minute details.⁸

Richet was well aware that many colleagues scoffed at these findings, but his belief in scientific methods was sufficiently strong to enable him to stand on principles of observation and testing of findings, even when they appear absurd. ‘*A priori* negation is unwise and contrary to a true scientific spirit’, he insisted. ‘There is no contradiction between theories of Spiritism and the positive facts established by science’, and what was more, ‘Contemporary science is, at present, so elementary by comparison with the knowledge which mankind will one day possess, that all is possible, even that which seems to us most extraordinary’.⁹

What he asked his fellow scientists was to leave the question open to demonstration and falsification. ‘I absolutely refuse to admit the validity of that simplifying argument: “It is

⁸ Charles Richet, *Thirty years of psychical research being a treatise on metapsychics*, trans. Stanley de Brath (New York: Macmillan Company, 1923), p. 599.

⁹ Paris, Académie nationale de médecine, Fonds Richet, III, 3, B, 4. Richet, ‘Should spiritism be seriously studied?’, pp. 5-6.

impossible, because common-sense tells us it is impossible” Why impossible? Who has fixed the limit of what is possible and what is not possible? Let this consideration be carefully weighed; all the conquests of science and of industry were formerly looked upon as impossibilities’. ‘However improbable it may appear at first sight’, he insisted, ‘it is possible, without plunging into absurdities, to conceive of an intelligence which has not a brain as substratum’.

‘History shows us’, Richet noted, ‘that the science of the present day is constituted by facts which at one time appeared strange, unknown, and unfamiliar. There were those who found anaesthesia as impossible; or that measuring the rapidity of nerve-waves as quite beyond the powers of science’. Even Lavoisier believed that meteors could not have come from the sky and Pasteur ‘our great Pasteur’ affirmed that bodies possessing molecular dissymmetry would never be created by synthesis’.¹⁰

Driving his Republican, anticlerical convictions to the fore, Richet concluded: ‘Science is not a religion, and its votaries have no right to proceed as the devotees of religions have done, by pontifically declaring erroneous those doctrines it has not had the patience to refute by studious investigation’.¹¹ Richet never abandoned his open-mindedness on the question as to whether there were forms of cognition and communication in the unexplored parts of our brain. He was not a theosophist, but an agnostic, and awaited the results of trial and error in controlled experiments before reaching any conclusion about the subject.

Other scientists whose work was path-breaking in the later nineteenth century and early twentieth century were even more outspoken in their advocacy of spiritualism and the truth of the claims of what they termed psychic research. One of the pillars of the British Society for Psychical Research was William Crookes. He was a student of August Wilhelm von Hoffman, a pioneering German chemist brought to London to head a school of practical chemistry. Crookes was as publicly honored and as distinguished in Britain as Richet was in France. Crookes was knighted in 1897, was elected President of the Royal Society, and was named to the highest honor in the land, the Order of Merit in 1910. He too was a polymath, and made fundamental

¹⁰ Fonds Richet, III, 3, B, 4. Richet, ‘Spiritism’, p. 10.

¹¹ Richet, ‘Spiritism’, p. 18.

contributions to both physics and chemistry, discovering the element thallium, developing the use of cathode tubes, used by Röntgen to prove the existence of X-rays. For this discovery, the Nobel prize went to Roentgen not to Crookes. Crookes made other major contributions to spectroscopy and the study of radiation. He was a friend of the Curies, who were prepared to observe séances and took extensive notes while attending them. Their agnosticism was hardly surprising, since they were engaged in multiple explorations of radioactivity, the sources of which were unknown.¹²

They were not alone. Cromwell Varley, a pioneer in submarine cable technology, explored the phenomenon of spirit telegraphy.¹³ Sir Oliver Lodge was an applied scientist, credited today with the invention of the spark plug for the internal combustion engine. A professor of physics and mathematics at London, and later at Liverpool and Birmingham Universities, he made important contributions to the science of transmitting radio signals. He was a Fabian socialist, and President of the Society for Psychical Research from 1901-3. Like the novelist Arthur Conan Doyle, Lodge's interest in spiritualism antedated the war of 1914-18, but was deepened sharply by the loss of his son in combat. Efforts to reach out to the dead of the Great War highlighted late-Victorian preoccupations of many men and women of science.

3. Alternative geometries: Theosophy, the unseen and abstract art

It would be foolish to claim that there was one pathway or even one central pathway to abstraction in the visual arts. All I claim here is that theosophy was one door through which major artists passed through on their way to abstraction. And once through the threshold, the art could take them where it would. Theosophy and other explorations of heterodox approaches to the sacred, were permissive, rather than transformative, elements in the development of abstract painting in what I have termed the Blaue Reiter moment.

I have already referred to Kandinsky's interest in theosophy. While he was very respectful to Madame Blavatsky's ideas, the subject may have been configured differently for

¹² Denis Brian, *The Curies. A biography of the most controversial family in science* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), p. 397.

¹³ Richard Noakes, 'Cromwell Varley FRS, Electrical discharge and Victorian spiritualism', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, lvi, 1 (Jan. 22, 2007), pp.5-21.

him, through his deep knowledge of Russian iconography and religious traditions.¹⁴

Goncharova's work is included in the *Blaue Reiter Almanac*, and her paintings were figurative in character.¹⁵ There is as well in the Almanac an article on experiments in Russian art by David Burliuk, on the breaking down of academic limitations in art by a return and reinterpretation of 'barbaric' (meaning ancient, pre-Roman) art forms. Free drawing, 'the application of several points of view, and the 'treatment of the plane and its intersections' were what he had in mind.¹⁶ Some scholars add that Kandinsky had an interest in anarchism, which flourished in the late nineteenth century in Russia, and even survived the revolution before being liquidated by the early 1920s. It is clear that Kandinsky's debt to Rudolf Steiner, and to Steiner's reading of Goethe, as well as his interest in painting celestial sounds, were both deep and enduring. It would be unwise, though, to see Kandinsky's work as derivative or as being solely a reflection of theosophy or any one single philosophical engagement.¹⁷ He was simply too creative and eclectic to permit such heavy-handed interpretations.

The case of Mondrian is different again. His early interest in theosophy, also read through the lenses of Rudolf Steiner, and his membership of the Dutch Theosophical Society of Amsterdam is well documented. His exploration of cross motifs and other allusions to sacred perpendicularity appears to echo some of Madame Blavatsky's motifs.¹⁸ So did his belief in the utopian power of art. Here is what one American observer and friend said of him: 'he thought and dreamed of a universal art--pure, spiritual and transcendent. It was, in the end, to be so fine that, having induced a radiant harmony and balance throughout society, the need for painting itself would no longer be necessary.'¹⁹

The openness to theosophy is imbedded in this statement, but it does not prescribe a certain kind of art to find appropriate expression. Indeed in the first decade of the twentieth

¹⁴ Rose-Carol Washton Long, with John Bowlt, *The Life of Vasily Kandinsky in Russian Art: A Study of "On the Spiritual in Art."* (Oxford: Oriental Research Partners, 1980).

¹⁵ BRA, p. 195.

¹⁶ BRA, p. 79.

¹⁷ Sixten Ringbom, 'Art in "The Epoch of the Great Spiritual": Occult elements in the early theory of abstract painting', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, xix (1966), pp. 386-418.

¹⁸ Robert Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), pp. 193-4.

¹⁹ Bennett Schiff, 'For Mondrian, art was a path to the universal', *Smithsonian* (June 1995), pp. 19-22.

century, Mondrian painted Chrysanthemums as part of his theosophical speculations. Here is how one authority put it:

Sharing the fluid contours, the drooping leaves, and the astral effect created by the curving brush strokes that encase the flowers, these works express Mondrian's interest in Theosophy. The halo can be interpreted as an artistic re-creation of the flower's astral shell. Theosophical doctrine states that, as the material body of the plant decays, its astral, or supersensible, substance survives. Plant forms, especially flower blossoms, like human and animal bodies, may be said to recapitulate in microcosm the eternal cycle of birth, reproduction, decay, material death, and regeneration that Theosophy sees as the ruling principle of the universe.²⁰

On page 14, here is an illustration of the work in question. (Fig. 1) To Jane Neet, what Mondrian aimed at was here 'an abstract-real', 'one released from all naturalistic representation'.²¹ He painted many flowers in the 1906-14 period but he was also subject to the influence of Picasso and Braque during Mondrian's first period of residence in Paris. Influence is never one-dimensional in cultural history, and the virtues of humility cannot be overestimated in this (as in other) fields. What can be claimed with some degree of certainty is that Mondrian joined Kandinsky in framing some of his work before 1914 in terms of a spiritual quest, and that in this quest the language of theosophy was important to them both. If the 'sacred' is understood as a house of many mansions, then these artists were lodgers in this edifice for important periods of their lives before the Great War.²²

²⁰ Robert P. Welsh, 'Mondrian and theosophy', in *Piet Mondrian 1872-1944* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1971), pp. 35-51, at p. 39.

²¹ Jane Neet, 'Mondrian's "Chrysanthemum"', *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, lxxiv, 7 (Sept., 1987), pp. 282-303, at p. 286.

²² Mike King, 'Concerning the Spiritual in Twentieth-Century Art and Science', *Leonardo*, xxxi, 1 (1998), pp. 21-31.



Fig. 1. Mondrian, Chrysanthemum (1909), Gemeentemuseum, the Hague, Netherlands.

4. Vanguard and rank-and-file

In a sense, the great strength of the spiritualist temperament was also its most significant weakness. The capacity to go beyond the limitations of positivism, and to reconfigure vision to enable it to move beyond the surface of things, was both exhilarating and isolating. What I have termed the ‘canary’ principle applied here as it did in my discussion in my first contribution to this forum of the view that artists were seers in a romantic sense, that they could intuit or otherwise inhabit spheres of meaning unknown to the rest of us. The problem with this approach was that it left these seers isolated at moments of social or national crisis. How could seers get the rest of us to see and then to act at critical moments is a question without an easy answer, then as now.

There was a further danger which became very evident in 1914 itself. When the nation was in danger, the spiritual was hijacked effortlessly to serve the purposes of mobilization and the sacred cause of the defense of the Fatherland. Too many intellectuals and artists fell into the trap of seeing war as a test of essences, of national and even of racial differences, configured willfully by them into stereotypes: on the one hand, of German culture facing British materialism or French decadence; on the other hand, of monstrous brutality finally exposed behind the mask of German ‘Kultur’. It is all too easy to poke holes in such arguments, but the fact that they did not deflate even when exposed to rational analysis tells us something about the nearly intoxicating nature of invocations of the spiritual in national emergencies.

1914 was one such emergency. The phenomenon of war enthusiasm, or *Kriegsbegeisterung*, literally the spiritualization of war, was evanescent. It lasted for a brief moment only, and had appeal in urban centres and among students,²³ but that moment was more than sufficient to enable us to see what dangers lay in the escape from the material world into a higher realm. Freud and Haber and Planck and even Thomas Mann and Max Weber succumbed to the temptation to spiritualize the cause of their side at the outside of the war.²⁴ On the French

²³ Jeffrey Verhey, *The spirit of 1914 : Militarism, myth and mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

²⁴ Roland N. Stromberg, *Redemption by war: The intellectuals and 1914* (Lawrence, Kansas: Regents Press of Kansas, 1982).

side, Charles Richet put aside his pacifism to help as he could in the defense of the nation.²⁵ British spiritualists like Conan Doyle and Oliver Lodge did the same.

The effect of the Great War on spiritualism was therefore mixed. On the one hand, it gave the conventional churches a lease of life and a burst of patriotic vigor. On the other hand the sheer weight of bereavement overwhelmed the churches and stimulated an even greater tendency for people in mourning to seek comfort outside of the churches and with the aid of those who claimed to be able to bring messages to them from the dead.²⁶

The impulse to create abstract art was in no sense reducible to a spiritualist enterprise. Kandinsky and Klee carried on their interrogations of geometries, internal and external, as did many other artists who endured the war like Braque in uniform or Picasso, who as a Spaniard never joined up. Apollinaire, of Polish origin, did so, and received French nationality for his efforts, but he died in November 1918 of the Spanish flu.²⁷ Klee was Swiss, but he too saw his duty as leading him to accept military service.²⁸ Whatever their wartime trajectory, the pre-1914 constellation of cosmopolitan freethinkers in art and science was gone forever.

Some scientists like Richet continued to suspend disbelief about parapsychological possibilities. Others turned their backs on such conjectures. Some artists found in surrealism another way to explore automatic writing and similar intriguing phenomena. But the essentially romantic view of the pre-1914 period, that artists were seers, and that they could lead a spiritual revolution, was a casualty of the war and of the Bolshevik revolution and its aftermath. Kandinsky said this in 1912 about the Blaue Reiter group: 'Each one of these artists, who can see beyond the limits of his present stage, in this segment of spiritual evolution is a prophet to those surrounding him and helps to move forward the ever obstinate carload of humanity'.²⁹ A decade later such optimism had been blown away.

The revolt against the churches continued too, but in a manner which led not to what I have termed a reconfiguration of the sacred, but rather to indifference about it. The invocation of eastern religious wisdom as a means of pointing out the thinness of Western theology has

²⁵ Paris, Académie nationale de la médecine, Fonds Richet, VI, 2, A, 2, 'Représailles', 1914.

²⁶ Winter, *Sites of memory*, ch. 3.

²⁷ Annette Becker, *Guillaume Apollinaire, une biographie de guerre, 1914-1918-2009* (Paris : Tallandier, 2009).

²⁸ O.K. Werckmeister, *The making of Paul Klee's career, 1914-1920* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989).

²⁹ As cited in Fingesten, 'Spirituality', p. 4.

survived in various forms to this day, but it has lost its politically radical core. Spiritualism was one such radical cause, one which grew before the Great War, and flared up like a nova in its wake, after which it slowly and steadily faded away. In the 1900s, sacred heterodoxy mattered because sacred orthodoxy was still massively present in each of Europe's churches. Sixty years later that was no longer the case.³⁰

Perhaps one other reason why spiritualism receded from serious discussion is that it was a product of a late nineteenth-century era of conjecture, a free market of ideas, which vanished when all the other components of liberalism also vanished. No free market in population after 1924; no free market in capital after 1915; no free market in goods after 1915 either. What Eric Hobsbawm has termed the 'age of extremes' had no room for such intellectual daring.³¹ After a few heady years Soviet Communism and later German National Socialism pushed aside or expelled the free thinkers of this essentially 19th century world, and killed many of those who stayed behind. Others migrated to new worlds. In Europe, as Yeats put it, the center would not hold, nor did spiritualism and a host of other heterodoxies.

Instead artists continued on their own paths, by and large unaccompanied by their scientific and political fellow travellers in the old spiritualist communion. Theosophy helped abstract artists open new doors, but once they passed through them, such artists like Mondrian and Kandinsky had myriad reasons for continuing their explorations. Origins do not equal outcomes, here as elsewhere.

Perhaps it is time, nonetheless, to evoke such a past precisely to help bring together free-thinkers again, not with the same preoccupations or obsessions, to be sure, but in the search of other impossible dreams, equally 'unimaginable' today: like a world in which there is no hunger; or one in which human rights exist and are enforced. Or one in which war is only a distant, archaic memory of a vanished age. Are these utopias any less imaginary than were voices from the beyond? I wonder.

³⁰ Callum G. Brown and Michael Snape (eds), *Secularisation in the Christian world : essays in honour of Hugh McLeod* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Pub., 2010); Callum G. Brown, *The death of Christian Britain: understanding secularisation, 1800-2000*. (London: Routledge, 2009).

³¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *The age of extremes: A history of the world, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage, 1996).

