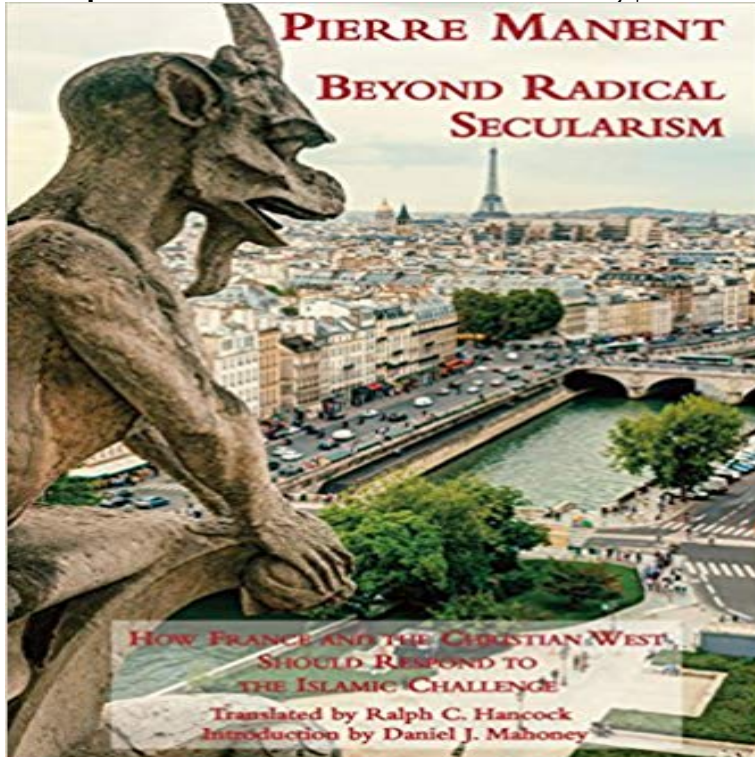


Beyond Radical Secularism: How France and the Christian West Should Respond to the Islamic Challenge



This is the book that took France by storm upon its publication in the fall of 2015. It was praised by some for its rare combination of tough-mindedness and moderation and attacked by others for suggesting that radical secularism could not provide the political and spiritual resources to address the Islamic challenge. The book is even more relevant after the Parisian terror attacks of November 13, 2015. It is a book that combines permanence and relevance, that addresses a pressing political and civilizational problem in a manner that will endure. Responding to the brutal terror attacks in France in January 2015, Pierre Manent has written a learned, passionate essay that reflects broadly and deeply on the political and religious situation of France and Europe. He freely acknowledges that the West is at war with fanatics who despise liberal and Christian civilization. That war must be conducted with prudent tough-mindedness. At the same time, serious thought must be given to the Islamic question at home and abroad. Concentrating on the French situation, Manent suggests that French Muslims are not entering an empty nation, defined by radical secularism and human rights alone. France has a secular state, as do all the nations of the contemporary West. That is a heritage to be cherished. But the Islamic question will not be solved by transforming Muslims into modern secularists devoid of all religious sensibility. It must be remembered that France is also nation of a Christian mark with a strong Jewish presence, both of which enrich its spiritual and political life. Manent proposes a social contract with Frances Muslims that is at once firm and welcoming. Rejecting radical secularism, the effort by certain laicists to completely secularize European society, to create a society without religion, Manent calls for a defensive policy that will allow Muslims to keep their mores,

save the integral veil and polygamy. In exchange, they must accept the fact that they live in a society of a Christian mark and they must stop hiding behind charges of Islamophobia. In liberal and Christian Europe, there must be total freedom of criticism, including criticism of the Islamic religion. Muslims must forgo funding from Arab Islamic states (not to mention extremist movements) and must recognize they are henceforth participants in the common life of the French nation. They must become citizens in a nation that does more than defend individual or communal rights, as crucial as those rights are. Beyond Radical Secularism also provides a luminous reflection on the necessary coexistence of the liberal state and a nation of a Jewish and Christian mark in a Western liberty worthy of the name. Europeans have succumbed to passivity in no small part because they reject the nation which is the indispensable framework of democratic self-government. They no longer have confidence in human action, in the elemental human capacity to put reasons and actions in common. That faith in individual and collective action ultimately depends on belief in the primacy of the Good, or in theological terms, in faith in a benevolent and Providential God. The West at its best combined the pride of the citizen and the humility of the believer. Europeans and Americans, too governed themselves in a certain relation to the Christian proposition. The nation was the instrument par excellence for combining the cardinal virtues courage, prudence, justice, moderation and the confidence which is specific to the Christian religion. A capacious sense of Europe and the West, one that acknowledges its Christian and Jewish mark, is ultimately necessary to face the Islamic challenge. The Jewish idea of the Covenant provides a powerful reminder of the ultimate ground of democratic self-government and of deliberation and action that respect limits while acknowledging the full range of human possibilities in a world where the good is not ultimately without transcendent

support. Only by recovering something of the European faith in a higher ground of freedom will the nations of Europe be able to muster the realism and the hope necessary meet the challenge of Islam.

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