

RELIGION AND SCIENCE THROUGH THE AGES: RESPONSE TO MARANGUDAKIS

by John Caiazza

Abstract. This paper is in response to an article by Professor Marangudakis in *Zygon* in which he presented a “grand narrative” that predicted the coming of a new “axial age” (Marangudakis, 2012). In his article, Marangudakis criticized parts of my article in *Zygon*, “Athens, Jerusalem and the Arrival of Techno-Secularism” (Caiazza, 2005). Two issues separate us: first, whether the Athens/Jerusalem dilemma can or should be overcome in a new axial age, and second, how benign future technological developments will be. Marangudakis thinks that the Athens/Jerusalem dichotomy will be overcome, whereas I think that the dichotomy should and will persist in future ages. I am suspicious of the future effects of current technologies, since they give political elites increased control over the individual, while Marangudakis generally applauds the new technologies (especially biotechnology). The Athens/Jerusalem dichotomy arises as an inevitable part of monotheistic religious belief.

Keywords: Athens/Jerusalem; axial age; John Caiazza; *eutopia*; grand narrative; Manussos Marangudakis; religion and science; techno-secularism; world history

The March 2012 issue of *Zygon* included an interesting article by Manussos Marangudakis, in which he refers to my article concerning the Athens/Jerusalem template and the arrival of what I termed “techno-secularism” (Caiazza 2005; Marangudakis 2012). Marangudakis is of two minds about my essay, since on the one hand he found it supported his thesis of a new age characterized by instrumentalism, utilitarian, and eudaimonism; however, he also found my version of techno-secularism “shortsighted, psychologically immature, and fearful of death.” In response, I assert that my point of view is not shortsighted but longsighted and that my expectations for the future are frankly more realistic than those of my critic. I also believe that the fact of inevitable death must always color our considerations of matters involving faith, but reason as well. As for “psychological immaturity,” I leave it for others to decide (Caiazza 2012, 95, 96; Marangudakis 2012, 114).

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The general reader of *Zygon*, however intrigued (or not) by this byplay, may wonder about the overall significance of this disagreement. The context of both Marangudakis's and my articles is to place the issues arising from "religion in an age of science" in a broad historical context, one that in my treatment extends to the early days of the formation of the Christian religion and in Marangudakis's case to the Neolithic age. Such "grand narrative(s)" Marangudakis explains, "divide world history into long periods according to the dominant perception of ultimate truth, of its sources and of the social action that is animated and inspired by that truth" (Marangudakis 2012, 97). Placing issues of religion and science in such broad historical contexts is derived ultimately from the tradition of "philosophy of history" as professed by Vico, Hegel, Collingwood, Toynbee, and Kuhn. Jaspers in particular should be mentioned as the first philosopher to formulate the "axial age" as that which began about 600 years BCE in which the arrival in human history of the universal recognition of the existence of a universal moral order was expressed in the pronouncements of Isaiah, Confucius, and Buddha (Jaspers, 1953).

In my version, the religion versus science debate is a restatement of a controversy that originates in the third century CE, when Tertullian expressed his disagreement with those educated Christians who sought an understanding of the content of their faith by means of Greek philosophy. In Marangudakis's view, however, there are a succession of ages that he calls "axial," a term I believe he overuses. In any case, the religion versus science controversy as represented by the apothegm "Athens and Jerusalem" he surmises will be swallowed up in the confines of a new age, enabled by mankind's ability to transform his very being by means of new technologies, especially biotechnology (Marangudakis 2012, 103–6). I disagree with Marangudakis's overly benign vision of the future, however.

But what is to be gained by putting the increasingly arcane disputes and solutions about religion and science in a broad historical context? Are both Marangudakis and Caiazza to be accused of "age-ism," *of overemphasizing historical context*? The advantages of a broad historical view are (1) to show that religion-science controversies are not new, since they can be related to controversies in times far past and projected into the future; (2) to show possible and likely historical causes of current controversies and issues; and (3) most importantly, to clarify the substance of religion/science issues. I believe that my own placement of modern religion/science issues in the context of the ancient issue of whether two sources of knowledge—revelation and philosophy—are required of the educated religious believer is a vital connection in these senses. I am not sure about Marangudakis's placement however, that relegates the Athens/Jerusalem template to the current "axial age" that is about to be overcome, whereas I think that it will remain a permanent fixture as long as human beings pursue both religious faith and scientific research.

Another profound source of disagreement between us lies in the nature of the emerging techno-secular age. I am deeply suspicious of it, since in my view, technology is overcoming both invaluable sources of knowledge brought by religion, particularly the revealed monotheistic faiths, and the sources of knowledge brought to mankind by modern empirical science (Caiazza 2005, 19–20). The resident of the techno-secular age in my view is foreclosed from the insights of both science and religion, to the detriment of her own personal development and of the culture in general. Marangudakis, on the other hand is hopeful if not convinced that a new axial age is emerging that will transcend the current age, in particular in terms of the Athens/Jerusalem divide. But here Marangudakis makes an assumption that is somewhat contradictory and ultimately false. He says regarding the Athens/Jerusalem divide that it has been the cause of Western “restlessness” but that has been a good thing and to “call the dilemma that has haunted generations of Western thinkers . . . fruitful would be an understatement” (Marangudakis 2012, 100). However, Marangudakis also argues that a new set of technologies, particularly biotechnology, will overcome the Athens/Jerusalem dilemma and, in the vein of prior utopian promises, overcome all social tensions, in which nonetheless the individual will become ever more prominent, thus completing what he claims is an inevitable historical progression (Marangudakis 2012, 106–10).

By now it would seem, given the history of the twentieth century, that utopian promises, even when characterized as “eutopian,” are a danger when put into practice by powerful states relying on all the new technologies now at their command, a historical conclusion that contradicts Marangudakis’s argument that new technologies are inherently freeing of human individuality. But my larger objection to his eutopian vision is that dissolving the Athens/Jerusalem dilemma in the projected new axial age would be a deleterious event. I am not a utopian thinker, so I regard the tension as extraordinarily fruitful, just as Marangudakis states, and in my view the Athens/Jerusalem dilemma will always be a permanent part of any future development of world culture as long as science and religion, or faith and reason, exist.

Furthermore, the Athens/Jerusalem dilemma is ultimately unresolvable (a critic of my article thought that I was too interested in conflict and war (Caiazza 2007; King 2005)) and indeed, I admit I am comfortable with conflict in this regard. However, the lack of resolution or even of resolvability of the Athens/Jerusalem dilemma is, for believers in the revealed monotheistic faiths—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—a reflection of the ontological differentiation between God as creator and the physical universe as his dependent creation. For Christian believers such as myself, the ultimate source of the Athens/Jerusalem dilemma lies in the mysterious duality of the person of Jesus the God/man.

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