If all the signs are to be believed, the century that lies ahead of us will, *among other things*, be characterized by the power of religion. After the end of secular ideologies, the great world religions are returning as powerful guides of how to lead one’s life, as guarantors of cultural identity and as creative powers of religiously influenced policy. This also applies to non-western Christianity, which will soon comprise over a billion believers.

The tragedy about Western European Christianity is that in spite of such a return of the religions, it will not take a place in public that will afford it any influence – as far as we can see. The fact that Christianity has lost its cultural power and that secularity has been allowed to take its place is too deeply rooted in history and continues to exert too much of an influence at the present time for even the slightest suspicion of a reversal of this process to seem justified.

When analyzing the present situation in Germany, one of the most astonishing observations to be made is that this finding does not unsettle people’s minds in the least. Among others, it is particularly today’s cultural intelligentsia – who are free to dedicate themselves to reflecting on the situation and fate of
the social and cultural conditions of our nation – who seem completely un-
moved by this erosion of Christianity. As far as religion is concerned, they
seem to have found themselves a nice little place at the liberal center from
where they mildly criticize religion or remain indifferent towards it. They
consider the question about the future of European Christianity unimportant
since the matter is deemed to be closed or of a secondary nature. This issue
has a meaning only for those rare remnants of society who still cling to their
Christian background and Church.

Admittedly, such convictions, which reflect the mood of the Enlightenment
and partly continue the tradition of the religious criticism of the nineteenth
century, have by now themselves become strangely antiquated and stale. For
one thing, such an attitude of Euro-centric conceit makes people close their
eyes to the worldwide return of the religions as an influencing and politi-
cally realistic factor. In addition, it also renders them helpless since they lack
any sort of reference system and thus do not know how to deal with this
development. What is more, in Europe itself, the remaining traces of religious
criticism rooted in the Enlightenment or religious indifference will no longer
be mental attitudes enabling people to face the new developments either. This
will become true, at the latest, when the religion that has long since started
immigrating to Europe and is absolutely sure of itself will increasingly gain
public standing and recognition – namely Islam.

However, apart from these facts, it is important to realize: For the time
being, the decisive cultural question is actually not about the future of Euro-
pean Christianity but about the future of European civilization itself. More
precisely: What future does European civilization have? Where is it head-
ing since its original religion, which used to shape it, has let itself become
culturally marginalized?

To at least keep asking such questions, even without finding an answer, is
what our memory compels us to do if we think about the fact that almost all
“Western” world views and images of humanity, that is, the sum of all we
by now refer to as Western “values,” originated in our Christian past. This
does not mean mere reverence for a heritage exhibited in museums that has
lost its meaning for our lives. It rather implies learning to see that civiliza-
tions and thus also societies are certainly also very much characterized by the
ideas, conceptions of the world and images of humanity that are generally
accepted and predominant in them. Let it be repeated once more, the reason