

VATTIMO, NIHILISM AND SECULARISATION: THE 'TROJAN HORSE' EFFECT OF CHRISTIANITY

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HERMENEUTICS, HISTORY, AND THE NIHILISTIC PROCESS OF WEAKENING

Hermeneutics as the philosophy of interpretation, rather than as a branch of another discipline such as biblical study, has become the *koine* of late-modern philosophy, according to the philosopher Gianni Vattimo. The moment in history when hermeneutics has arisen is after the death of God, the "event" in which it is no longer possible, if one has read the signs of the times, or a lot of Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, and Wittgenstein,¹ to believe in epistemic foundations or certainty; this is nihilism, the self-devaluing of the highest values, an understanding of the term that permeates Vattimo's philosophy and which he borrows from the start of Nietzsche's *The Will to Power*. The death of God, for Vattimo, is an announcement of the consummation of this nihilistic process, even if this process is construed as indefinite in order to avoid positing a metaphysical nothing (Vattimo, following Heidegger, characterises metaphysics as violent due to it silencing debate by drawing back to fixed first principles). The religious proscription of lying turned out to be a lie, and the stability afforded by monotheism to society gave rise to science and technology, rendering God superfluous.² The security of monotheism may not be needed, but science and technology have challenged the privileged status of humankind. Like the Copernican revolution, man is rolling from the centre towards X,³ to use one of Vattimo's favourite Nietzschean terms for the late-modern experience. This feeling of a lack of epistemic stability reflects the Heideggerian analogue of the death of God, the end of metaphysics. Vattimo realises that Heidegger would not have classified himself as a nihilist, for the latter in Heidegger's eyes was the flattening of Being onto value that is the result of the forgetting of Being. Nevertheless, Vattimo reads Heidegger in a nihilistic sense, that Heidegger's understanding of Being as an historical opening ("event") is a rejection of the notion of absolute truth and violent metaphysical first principles ("violent," Vattimo thinks, because they silence questioning). The history of nihilism can be summed up by a lengthy aphorism from Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols* frequently cited by Vattimo: "How the Real World Finally Became a Fable."⁴ Vattimo follows Heidegger's reading of the text in which Plato's eternal, transcendent world of forms became historicised by Christianity in the promise of

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heaven to come, but this promise became interiorised by Descartes and Kant when the idea of knowledge was interrogated in a quest for certainty, before the positivistic approach to scientific inquiry, the last bastion of objective truth, became devalued when it became clear that such inquiry is not disinterested. With the ending of the real world also ended the apparent world and therefore this history concludes in nihilism.

If there is no real world, apparent world, absolute truth or value, or certainty, surely everything is just will to power, letting the strongest interpretation win? Less aggressively (or more optimistically), will nihilism lead only to cultural relativism? Against these interpretations of the philosophical situation of the late-modern, Vattimo has written that “hermeneutics is not just antifoundationalism plus interpretations in conflict. It also entails a philosophy of history...that views hermeneutics as the result of a ‘nihilistic’ process, in which metaphysical Being, meaning violence, consumes itself.”⁵ For the past twenty years, Vattimo has referred to this process as ‘secularisation’, and that “We are headed for secularization, another name for which is nihilism, the idea that objective Being has gradually consumed itself.”⁶ Normally secularisation means the abandonment of the sacred, and more colloquially the reduction in importance of the religious in the public arena. Indeed, Vattimo realises that religion had been banished in this sense due to the dominance of the semantic field of positivism before the event of the death of God; Vattimo follows Nietzsche in his unpublished essay “On Truth and Lies in an Extra Moral Sense” in holding that there is no reality, so language has to be metaphorical.⁷ Before the end of metaphysics, one semantic field of metaphors dominated at any one time. After the death of God, the liberation of metaphors made it possible for Vattimo to return to religion. Despite Vattimo thinking he has returned to Christianity, a religion he abandoned some thirty years earlier in the 1960s, it is not really religion to which Vattimo has returned, for he distinguishes “religion” – and all the institutional accoutrements about which he for the most part has nothing good to say – from “faith.”⁸ Nevertheless, Vattimo regards this faith he has recovered as the missing piece of a philosophical puzzle that is “too good to be true.”⁹

What is this puzzle, and why does Vattimo think that his excellent solution is “secularisation”? Although hermeneutics is, for Vattimo, the appropriate and logical *koine* for a philosophy in the light of the event of the death of God, it was mentioned above that he did not think it should entail that “anything goes.” Hermeneutics should neither be an overly aggressive domination of one interpretation over others, nor a passive, laissez-faire acceptance of interpretative plurality. The latter would leave philosophy politically and ethically toothless. As for the former, “strong” interpretations could well be due to reactive nihilism, a Nietzschean term for how some individuals and groups react to the event of the death of God. If other “metaphors” are liberated by the event of the death of God then all sorts of discourses may be released; some people may use this freedom as an opportunity to reassert their own identity now the univocal standard of rationality has been dissolved. Strong religious, ethnic, and political identities may assert themselves in an exclusionary sense now that they no longer need to measure up to a single rational standard. Vattimo sought a normative criterion for adjudicating between interpretative claims. Moreover, he also needed a rational basis for making a persuasive case against reactive nihilism, particularly when strong claims drew upon transcendent principles. Vattimo’s tactic has been to ground hermeneutics in an historical foundation by seeing it as the end of a process. This process is one of weakening, hence Vattimo’s philosophical “style” of “weak thought.” Weakening cannot be a dialectical overcoming, both because the traces of metaphysics are inescapably bound up with the language and tradition that constitute the horizon for experience and interaction (Nietzsche’s dictum that we cannot get rid of God until we get rid of grammar) and because a new beginning itself would be metaphysical insofar as it would either assert a new foundation in the Cartesian sense or would be an assertion of nothing. The latter point is why Vattimo insists that weakening has to be an indefinite process.

Rather than overcome metaphysics, one can only “twist” it. *Verwindung* is a Heideggerian term employed extensively by Vattimo to refer the inescapability of the traces of metaphysics to which we must be resigned by virtue of the linguistic traditions into which we are thrown, while nevertheless realising the need to heal ourselves from the violence of metaphysics by distorting and altering these traces. Vattimo performs a *Verwindung* on secularisation, as well as on the Christian tradition as a whole when he is searching for a normative criterion for hermeneutics beyond the “style” of weakening in the history of the West. Indeed, while Vattimo already

has ways to ground hermeneutics historically (Heidegger's notions of *Ge-Stell/Ereignis*, Nietzsche's death of God and fabulation of the world), it is through the Christian concept of charity (*caritas*) that Vattimo thinks he has his hermeneutic criterion. *Caritas* is the basis that guides, limits, and endows secularisation as a nihilistic process of weakening which eventuates in the death of God and the philosophy of hermeneutics as its corollary in the late-modern.¹⁰

This paper first argues negatively that Vattimo's account of the secularisation process, for which he realises he owes a significant debt to Wilhelm Dilthey, does not yield the kind of ethical principle he desires. Secondly, it offers a positive argument for how Vattimo could ground an historical ethic of weakening out of a process of secularisation by emphasising what Pierpaolo Antonello has called the "Trojan Horse" effect of Christianity: Christianity poses as a religion and a philosophy and weakens both by mixing the characteristics of each.

THE PLACE OF SECULARISATION IN THE HISTORICAL GROUNDING OF HERMENEUTICS

How does Vattimo relate secularisation to the essence of Christianity, and why does *caritas* emerge as the normative criterion for hermeneutics? Vattimo sees *caritas* as the flip side to the Christology coin of *kenosis*. The latter term normally refers to the account of God divesting himself of his power to become Jesus Christ in St Paul's "Christ hymn" of Philippians 2:5-11. Vattimo cites Philippians 2:7 once,¹¹ but he is more interested in the general idea of *kenosis* indicating that God has a tendency for weakening,¹² in which he sees a "family resemblance" to the history of Being as weakening: Having recognized its family resemblance with the biblical message of the history of salvation and with God's incarnation, Vattimo thinks "philosophy can call the weakening that it discovers as the characteristic feature of the history of Being secularization in the broadest sense."¹³ The term "secularisation" tends to be used a lot by Vattimo to refer to this process of weakening and to the examples of it he gives, such as Max Weber's recognition that capitalism is the secularisation of the Protestant work ethic.¹⁴ In order to understand how this process of secularization has its origin and impetus in Christianity, the message of Jesus seems less important for Vattimo than Jesus' message, such as his message of calling humans to be God's friends, not servants.¹⁵ The message of Jesus as the incarnation alone, even conceived as *kenosis*, would be insufficient grounding for hermeneutical nihilism historically. Luca D'Isanto, in his "Introduction" to *Belief*, interprets Vattimo's use of the kenotic Christological model as indicating that Being enters into becoming in order to be endlessly reinterpretable, grounding hermeneutics historically in this way.¹⁶ This interpretation is elegant and in keeping with Vattimo's philosophical schema. However, D'Isanto, like Vattimo, overlooks the difficulties this interpretation encounters when faced with the *Wirkungsgeschichte* (Gadamer's notion of "effective history," the traces of traditions that reach us today) of Christianity that include traces of doctrines such as the "Trinity" in particular, not to mention the related problem of the actual text of Philippians 2. The latter refers not only to the glory of the risen Christ (of which Vattimo is silent), but also his obedience to the Father, a point noted by other scholars commenting on Vattimo's understanding of Christianity, such as Kevin Hart.¹⁷ Indeed, the figure of the Father presents a difficulty for Vattimo in the sense that taken together, the doctrine of the Trinity read back into Philippians 2 indicates that Being has not emptied itself wholly into becoming, as the Father remains apart from the Son. No-matter whether there comes a point in time in which, as is the case in the late-modern, hermeneutics has become the *koine* of philosophy, there always remains that which transcends becoming: God the Father. It is no coincidence that Vattimo has implied that God the Father, the Old Testament God that has been surpassed by the Son and Spirit, is a metaphysical idea.¹⁸ Moreover, although Vattimo's language at times hints to the contrary, he would not entertain the notion of a literal *kenosis*, for Vattimo states "*Resisto all'idea che io possa fare una teo-logia solo se penso che la teologia sia un discorso descrittivo rigoroso*" ("I resist the idea that I can create a theology only as a rigorously descriptive discourse").¹⁹ Reducing Vattimo's theology to a description of entities that come to presence, of describing a thing that is "actually" there in the measurable, metaphysical sense, would go down the route of Death of God theology, of God dying by emptying himself ever more into history in a vaguely Hegelian manner.²⁰

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However Vattimo conceives of *kenosis*, its significance for him is that it is a process that removes the sacral character of religion. Here Vattimo draws upon the thought of René Girard, the anthropologist who inadvertently “re-Christianised” Vattimo when the latter reviewed Girard’s book, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*,²¹ and was impressed with his notion of the “natural sacred.” Natural religions are founded upon the need to make victims to keep order in society. The mimetic drive in humans to desire what the other has escalates until violence threatens to consume society. A sacrificial scapegoat is killed to prevent the society’s destruction. Over time this becomes ever more ritualised and “assumes a sacral and divine character.”²² Girard sees the Old and New Testaments as intended to reveal what Girard calls the “victimary mechanism”; the person of Jesus was put to death because of his message of love which revealed this mechanism. Following Feuerbach and Marx, Vattimo thinks that when divinities are created, they often carry within them the psychological burden of a thirst for revenge. Vattimo expands Girard’s concept of the “natural sacred” to include this kind of vengeful deity. The latter has all the traditional attributes of the onto-theological, metaphysical God, such as omnipotence, absoluteness, eternity and transcendence. This move allows Vattimo to make a link between “secularization—the progressive dissolution of the natural sacred”²³ and Heidegger’s notion of metaphysics as the history of the weakening of Being. Vattimo has even gone so far as to say that his reading of Girard has helped him “complete” Heidegger.²⁴ Even if this is going too far, in Vattimo’s mind there is a clear parallel between the two thinkers, as is clear from his statement that “[f]or both Girard and Heidegger, the emancipatory meaning of history—the salvation that takes place in it—is related to a self-consumption of the violence that characterises natural religion or, in Heidegger—the metaphysical oblivion of Being.”²⁵

Vattimo has shown surprise and disappointment that Girard has not developed his ideas into a theory of secularisation. Girard has avoided doing so not only in view of his profession as an anthropologist and his own Christian faith, but also because he has changed his ideas a lot over the years.²⁶ As a result, Vattimo has taken the liberty to do so himself. Secularisation is emancipation through the weakening of strong structures, whether they be “naturally religious” or metaphysical; both have “violence” at their core. The Christian message acts as a blueprint for hermeneutical nihilism, a stimulus that grounds late-modern hermeneutics and functions aetiologically in terms of allowing “continuity” in a history of weakening,²⁷ as well as preventing the event of the death of God being understood as some sort of rupture born out of transcendence acting in history. What does “continuity” mean in this context? From Vattimo’s writing it is unclear whether he sees secularisation as running parallel to, inspiring, causing, or being part of the same thread as the history of Being as a history of weakening. Following his reading of Heidegger, Vattimo reads the history of Being as having a nihilistic vocation beginning with Plato, before Christ, seemingly ruling out the two histories of weakening as running parallel, although cryptically Vattimo reads *kenosis* as extending back to the story of creation.²⁸ In terms of “inspiring” the history of Being as weakening, Vattimo has referred to the Christian message as a “stimulus” for the end of metaphysics.²⁹ As for a “causal” relationship, Nancy Frankenberry can write that “Vattimo’s narrative is distinctive for asserting a causal relationship between the Christian message of *kenosis*...and philosophical antifoundationalism, antiessentialism, and the collapse of capital-T Truth.”³⁰ Vattimo has also written that secularisation is the process in which the “Lord of the Bible” is both the author and effect.³¹ Frankenberry further notes that the Christian message of charity is the “point of convergence between philosophy’s downward path and the historical transmission of Christianity,”³² which implies that hermeneutical nihilism and Christianity are part of the same history, and Vattimo has talked of the history of the weakening of Being as a “transcription” of *kenosis*.³³ Unhelpfully, all of these interpretations of “continuity” have some basis in Vattimo’s philosophy of secularisation. In short, Vattimo has an intuition about how the postmodern condition of hermeneutical nihilism has its origin and guiding thread in Christianity, and he has located these interpretations of “continuity” primarily in the way the message of the incarnation in Girard’s work relates to the history of weakening. However, in terms of developing this intuition through a persuasive explanation of how this relationship should be understood, Girard’s ideas do not lend themselves to a detailed theory of secularisation as Vattimo thinks they do. All they indicate is that the core of the Christian message is the unmasking of the natural sacred, not how this message has come to light today. Indeed, a cursory glance at the history of Christianity would indicate that the victimary mechanism was alive and well for the majority of the centuries since Christ’s death. Vattimo tries to explain this away by drawing upon Wilhelm Dilthey’s

thoughts on Augustine; influential Christian figures at the end of Roman Empire had to make compromises in order to preserve any kind of law, learning and culture at all.³⁴ If Jesus's revelation of the victimary mechanism became buried, it was due to political factors such as these.

The potential of Dilthey's thought is arguably greater than Girard's when it comes to how Vattimo turns his anti-violent interpretation of Christianity as [?] a theory of secularisation in some of his later works into his return to religion. Remaining with Augustine, in *After Christianity* Vattimo draws upon his interpretation of Wilhelm Dilthey's view, in *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, on Christianity's role in the history of ideas, namely that Christianity's distinctive contribution was the principle of interiority. Whereas the ancients, according to Vattimo's reading of Dilthey, were interested in the natural world and therefore founded a principle of objectivity based on this focus, the event of Christianity "shifts the attention of thought inward, putting at the center the will rather than the intellect."³⁵ This is due to the inner unity of faith among Christians.³⁶ Dilthey was particularly interested in Augustine, in whom there existed a conflict between the "interiorising" principle of Christianity (which he expressed through the relation of his soul with God) and the Greek concern with the natural world or, in the case of Augustine, ideas external to oneself (the Platonic influence on Augustine). Vattimo believes that this conflict between the interior and exterior occurs throughout the history of Christianity.³⁷ Taking Dilthey's insight and running with it, Vattimo places this conflict centre stage in the history of European thought and relates it to "Heidegger's vision of metaphysics' survival and dissolution"³⁸ and Nietzsche's phrase that "there are no facts, only interpretations."³⁹ What Vattimo fails to spell out sufficiently is *how* Heidegger's "hermeneutic ontology" and Nietzsche's nihilism "draw the extreme consequences from this principle" of interiority,⁴⁰ although Vattimo may presume familiarity among his readers with Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's notion of the will. Through this principle of interiority, objectivity may lose its "weight," as Vattimo points out,⁴¹ but then Descartes and Kant illustrated how subjectivity could be just as metaphysical, the nihilistic vocation of metaphysics culminating in Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power's value-positing.⁴² Perhaps Vattimo expects his readers to be able to join the dots among his influences. Certainly the exterior/interior dichotomy has a family resemblance [?] to Vattimo's favourite story of how the world became a fable, from Plato down to positivism via Christianity and the Cartesian ego. The final stage, positivism, dissolves when it is realised that the objective world is dependent upon the human as measurer, but that the measurer is historically situated, interested, and manipulated by technology to want things that are not natural.⁴³

What one cannot find in Nietzsche or Heidegger, though, is Vattimo's view that this principle of interiority is a call for friendship,⁴⁴ linking back not only to Jesus's message (John 15:15), but also to who Jesus is. God is no longer the authoritarian parent demanding servitude and sacrifice, but is instead the friend of humans who reveals violence for what it is: the naturalistic is violent, so turn inwards. Vattimo, in his interview "A Prayer for Silence," states that "Augustine's turn inwards is already a step forward with respect to the notion of objective truth, because once you turn inward you must also try to listen to others like you."⁴⁵ This is Vattimo's much-maligned interpretation of the Christian virtue of *caritas*. For Vattimo, "in the place of truth we have put charity,"⁴⁶ and this is why Dostoyevsky would choose Christ over truth⁴⁷ and is also why we would say today that Plato is a better friend than truth. Charity is, for Vattimo, the limit of secularisation. That is, charity is what cannot be secularised, and is therefore also the principle of weakening expressed as a normative criterion for adjudicating between interpretations. *Prima facie*, it would appear as though Vattimo has created an absolute, something that would be at odds with his theory in which an absence of absolutes is precisely the point. This has led critics of Vattimo, such as Carravetta,⁴⁸ Depoortere,⁴⁹ and Jonkers,⁵⁰ to accuse Vattimo of hypocrisy at worst, or inconsistency at best. These critics are being uncharitable to Vattimo because they are overlooking the fact that he has admitted that there are "gaps" in his argument.⁵¹ Instead, one should look harder to see what he is trying to do. On one level, *caritas* is the nihilistic process of weakening that Vattimo refers to as secularisation; reading the "signs of the times," interpretation is in accordance with this process in virtue of being situated in the late-modern. Insofar as Vattimo, following Heidegger, holds to the human condition as one of "thrownness," of having a pre-understanding based on a horizon that, in this case, is the irreducible plurality of interpretations as the nihilistic outcome of a history of weakening, then this reading of *caritas* is justified. However, as shall be discussed below, Vattimo seems to imply that "interpretation" not only indicates a historically-situated pre-

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understanding, but also involves an interpretative act, implying some kind of positive ethic that needs to be derived. This reading of Vattimo indicates that he is seeking an ethic, not just a way of describing a historical process. Moreover, in the above quotation from “A Prayer for Silence,” it has just been shown that in at least some parts of Vattimo’s thought (the times when he is most intent on showing *how* secularisation has taken place), charity is based on the principle of interiority culminating in the death of God/end of metaphysics. If one realises the provisionality and contingency of oneself based on one’s own subjectivity, then one should recognise that one cannot hold one’s own opinions with certainty and that, as a consequence, there must be other people, or *Daseins*, like oneself—historical, contingent subjects—to whom it is worth listening. This is why Vattimo, when defending his notion of *caritas*, refers to it as a form of “categorical imperative,”⁵² and it is no coincidence for Vattimo that the categorical imperative was an Enlightenment version of Jesus’s love commandment. Therefore, Vattimo’s *caritas* is not a substantial, cognitive ethic, but a formal commandment that is the ethical corollary of the principle of interiority that has led to secularisation as the realisation of the essence of the Christian message.

VATTIMO’S NOTION OF SECULARISATION AS A REPEAT OF ENLIGHTENMENT ANTHROPOCENTRISM

To recap, in the 1990s Vattimo felt a post-religious return to faith which he somewhat misleadingly referred to as his “return to religion.” He was led back to religion by Heidegger and Nietzsche, for he realised he was interested in these thinkers because of his Christian upbringing. Religious concepts, like overtly metaphysical notions and terminology, are unavoidable and cannot be overcome, but only “twisted.” To confront his heritage Vattimo needed not only to effect a *Verwindung* of religion, but also to establish an historico-ethical basis for hermeneutics to prevent both an “anything goes” approach to interpretation or a reactive nihilism based on a ghettoising approach to identity. To this end, Vattimo utilises Girard to bring together the violence of metaphysics and the violent, “naturalistic” and ontotheological aspects of religion he finds distasteful. Girard’s theory does not readily yield a theory of secularisation, so Vattimo turns to Dilthey’s reading of the history of Christianity as the turn inwards. Although vaguely worked-out, Vattimo brings together the notion of Jesus revealing in his person and words the violence of the natural sacred through his call to turn inwards through faith, loving your neighbour like you would love yourself. This message of interiority has slowly dissolved not only the natural sacred, but also its explicitly metaphysical correlate through the history of the weakening of Being, reaching its culmination in Nietzsche’s philosophy of the will to power and the dissolution of Being into value. This indefinite nihilistic process of secularisation has as its impetus and limit the formal principle of *caritas*.

Where Vattimo may be going wrong is his emphasis on the turn inwards as the historical ground for *caritas*. Although Vattimo writes, “once you turn inward you must also try to listen to others like you,”⁵³ he has argued extensively against the idea of a strong subject, and “turning inward” presumes a subject. Following Heidegger, Vattimo thinks that the end of metaphysics is also the end of humanism. One can no longer believe in the certainty of a subject in the Cartesian or Kantian senses. If friendship has taken the place of truth, why ground this in the principle of interiority? The whole interior/exterior distinction, even if it had purchase in Christianity’s origins, should not convince today if Vattimo is right about the event of the death of God/end of metaphysics. On a number of occasions Vattimo refers to the “transappropriation” of subject and object in the Heideggerian notion of *Ge-Stell*,⁵⁴ noting that these metaphysical appellations have become imputed one to another in the world of modern technology, leading to the dissolution of the subject. Continuing to speak along the lines of “subject” and “object,” “interior” and “exterior” betrays an enduring metaphysical tendency at odds with the end of metaphysics. In fairness to Vattimo, this is partially his point, that one cannot overcome metaphysics dialectically because we still have grammar and tradition. This is why Vattimo continues to speak of what Erik M. Vogt has called a “weakened subject,”⁵⁵ one that has been on a “crash diet,”⁵⁶ a subjectivity which is not to be conceived as an immutable essence present within history as a “soul” but a historically grounded *Dasein* involved in a network of communications. This subject is Vattimo’s *Übermensch*, a figure who, developing an unpublished fragment of Nietzsche’s, is “most moderate,”⁵⁷ like the figure mentioned in

Nietzsche's second *Untimely Meditation*, rummaging through the theatrical costume box of history, putting on and taking off myriad masks. Through this casual attitude one would ironically distort, "weaken," or "twist" the strong structures associated with these historical traces of metaphysical subjectivity.

Apart from acting "ironically" through mask-wearing moderation, what is the normative difference between humanism in its "strong" form (upon which categorical imperatives have been built insofar as the human being has been regarded as the apex of rationality, aside from angels and God in some of humanism's more theological guises) and Vattimo's *Übermensch* in relation to his charitable categorical imperative? If one is meant to consider other *Übermenschen* "like you," listening to them and bearing them in mind when one makes one's own hermeneutical choices, what about others "not like you," such as the natural world or people not engaged in "weak thought"? Charity is then limited to things capable of language, of interrogating their own being, at best, or only to fellow weak-thinking crash-diet subjects at worst. For instance, Vattimo would ban the wearing of the chador in public because it is a symbol of strong thought;⁵⁸ should people be excluded if they fail to "read the signs of the times" by continuing to hold their traditions strongly? That Vattimo implies people can choose whether or not to read the "signs of the times" (that is, recognise that we are now living after the death of God), indicates, as Gavin Hyman points out, that Vattimo's crash-diet subject is stronger and more metaphysical than he would care to admit; it is an agent, not a play of forces, a subject in the "nominative" rather than the "accusative" sense, to use Hyman's terms.⁵⁹ Vattimo even talks about the weak subject being an "autonomous interpreter."⁶⁰ Returning to the example of the chador, even though there is a "liberation of metaphors" after the death of God, it would seem Vattimo thinks some "strong" semantic fields and practices based on them should be returned to the margins. In banning a form of life from the public space, Vattimo has thus created a weak humanism and has repeated the Enlightenment in "low-carb" form, a charge that has been levelled against him by Thomas Guarino about other aspects of his return to religion.⁶¹

THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE AS A TROJAN HORSE: RECONFIGURING SECULARISATION

Thankfully there are other resources within Vattimo's account of religion to reconstruct a theory of secularisation that will do what Vattimo wants it to do without the dubious anthropocentrism (and, perhaps, Eurocentrism). It has been shown already that he uses Girard's work to bring together different forms of violence (religious and metaphysical) in a "family resemblance." The end of metaphysics is a "transcription" of the message of the incarnation. Christ has value for Vattimo both in terms of who he was said to be (the *kenosis* of God) and his message of friendship. Girard's theory works on the basis that his sacrifice on the cross was not really a sacrifice, but an exposure of the victimary mechanism. Vattimo does not have much time for the cross, but telescopes Jesus's person and prophecy together as his message of friendship exposes the violence of God the Father (which, through his Joachimism, he identifies with the authoritarian God of the Old Testament⁶²). Whether one takes Girard's view of "unmasking" or Vattimo's, they both amount to the same thing: Christianity acted as a "Trojan Horse" for religion, to use Pierpaolo Antonello's phrase,⁶³ that it was not really a "religion," but posed as one to expose the violence of the natural sacred.

So far in this reconstruction there has been little or no divergence from Vattimo's own account of secularisation. At this point, though, Vattimo would wish to draw upon the principle of interiority to explain how the message of friendship/*caritas* became an exemplar for, and stimulus of, the end of metaphysics. However, in order for this to occur one has to accept Dilthey's principle of interiority which is only one particular, debatable account of the import and history of Christianity, which also limits one to human beings (and possibly only those engaged in weakening strong structures) insofar as weakening can only work itself out through normative inter-subjectivity. Is there another way in which the Christian message acted as an exemplar and/or stimulus for weakening metaphysical claims? Arguably, one can see how Christianity's missionary vocation enabled it to function as a "Trojan Horse" for philosophy as well as for religion. In other words, Christianity posed as religion and posed as philosophy, bringing them together and weakening both. This is an account of secularisation in Vattimo's thought that has been developed in part by Carmelo Dotolo⁶⁴ and by me elsewhere,⁶⁵ and is being

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extended further in this present study. Dotolo argues that the Christian message brought about a de-Hellenising in philosophy and a reduction of onto-theology in the content of philosophy. For philosophy, Dotolo interprets Vattimo as stating that philosophy was weakened based on its encounter with the Hebrew-Judaic temporally linear eschatological horizon, replacing the eternal view of time found in Greek philosophy. Ontotheological religious claims were then weakened later, in Dotolo's eyes, by being recovered in the late-modern environment in which transcendence no longer has any purchase.⁶⁶ Harris interprets the workings of secularisation slightly differently, such that the evangelical message of friendliness brought together both philosophy and religion, weakening both as Christianity was in essence neither, even if this has taken a long time to show. My own position will be developed here more explicitly in the missionary context of Christianity in which friendliness has entailed spreading the "good news" to all nations, thus explaining why Christianity took philosophy into itself in order to weaken it.

The risen Christ told his disciples before he ascended to heaven to make disciples of "all the nations" (Matthew 28:18-20), the "Great Commission" as it is known. Greek philosophy was part of the cultural milieu of the Near East of the first century, and once St Paul began his mission to the Gentiles he quickly encountered the philosophers of Athens. Most were unimpressed with his scandal of the cross; it was "foolishness" to the Gentiles. Nevertheless, a handful were receptive, notably Dionysius the Areopagite (Acts 17:34). By the second century, however, Christianity had found an impressively educated, albeit small, Gentile audience, including the philosophers Athenagoras, Theophilus, and most notably Justin Martyr. The theme in ecclesiastical history that Christianity became "Hellenised" is an old and contentious one, famously put forward by Adolf von Harnack.⁶⁷ More interesting is the claim by the contemporary British philosopher John Gray that Christianity did not abolish strong structures, but actually introduced the value of "truth" into religion through its appropriation of philosophy.⁶⁸ Fernando Savater places Gray's reading in opposition to Vattimo's,⁶⁹ but one could actually use it to extend Antonello's analysis of the function of Christianity as a "Trojan Horse." Christianity has posed variously as a religion and a philosophically justified faith, taking in the concepts of both philosophy and religion to weaken them in an indefinite process.

It is possible to indicate how Christianity has functioned as a "Trojan Horse" in the weakening of metaphysics. Karl Löwith has said that philosophies of history are ideological and are not interested in "what actually happens."⁷⁰ Nevertheless, if secularisation is to be a plausible philosophy of history, rather than the kind of teleological unilinear history about which Löwith was writing, it should at least be persuasive. To this end, examples can be found of Christianity weakening metaphysics in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. In the controversies concerning the Trinity and Incarnation in Late Antiquity there were frequent arguments over how metaphysical terms should be used. There was confusion, for instance, over whether the Greek "*hypostases*" should translate into Latin; was "*personae*" good enough? If so, it made the Trinity three separate beings, but according to Gregory of Nyssa they were not, for they shared a common "*ousia*" (essence), just as Peter, Andrew, John and James shared the common essence of humanity as four different *hypostases* of the *ousia*. Insistence on the use of these terms did no good for metaphysics, for it was making the normal conform to the exceptional, the immanent and human conform to the transcendent and divine, all due to the scandal of the particular: the incarnation of Christ. For although through the notion of *ousia* Peter, Andrew, John and James share a common human nature it would have been normal to regard them as separate human beings, Gregory of Nyssa would have had one think otherwise. Moreover, the use of *ousia* as "essence" rather than "substance" confused matters further, with the differences between *ousia* and *hypostasis* unclear even among the Church Fathers.⁷¹

The recovery of Aristotle in the West during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries only made things worse for metaphysics. St. Thomas Aquinas "twisted" Aristotle in various ways, forcing his eternal view of the universe into a Hebrew-Christian linear temporality, thus making his Prime Mover a first mover of creation, rather than acting as something akin to an eternal magnet as final cause for everything else in the universe. Therefore, Aquinas made problems for issues such as mutability, potentiality, actuality, and causation by using Aristotelian terms outside of their context. Even more problematically, Aquinas used Aristotelian terms such as "substance"

and “accidents” for his explanation of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist through transubstantiation, but, in the words of P. J. Fitzpatrick, “abuses them to the point of nonsense.”⁷² This is because Aquinas thought “free floating” accidents of the bread and wine remained once the host had been consecrated: “it is clear that the body of Christ is in this sacrament ‘by way of substance’, and not by way of [the accident of] quantity.”⁷³ Aristotle did not think it was possible for there to be free-floating accidents not qualifying a substance. Therefore the absolute importance of a contingent event, the Incarnation of Christ, meant a philosophical system had to bend to the point of breaking in order to explain articles of faith. That this philosophy had to be brought to bear at all comes down firstly to the Great Commission, the evangelical imperative of the risen Christ’s, and to the insistence on truth which came from the philosophy the evangelists brought into Christianity. This latter is explicit in the work of the second century Apologists and is traceable even to early second century canonical works such as the Gospel of John, which betrays strong Stoic influences particularly in the opening “Logos Hymn” (John 1).

If Christianity supplied a fatal dose of contingency to philosophy, how did philosophy weaken religion through its Christian guise? As has been mentioned, Savater reads Gray’s theory of secularisation as holding that Christianity introduced “Truth” with a capital “T” into religion: “Atheism is a late bloom of a Christian passion for truth.”⁷⁴ Here one can depart from Savater and Gray and take a far more familiarly Nietzschean-Vattimian line. The Hebrew-Judaic God was part of a linear view of salvation history based on a covenant, not on God being representative of the Absolute Truth. Nevertheless, monotheism lent itself to being read through the lens of philosophical first principles. Therefore, once the missionary element of Christianity necessitated that Gentile Apologists place a Hellenistic gloss over the Christian *kerygma*, the identification of God with the Truth was destined. However, a religion based on “Truth” and “truthfulness” will collapse when it is discovered to be a “lie.”⁷⁵ Of course, neither Nietzsche nor Vattimo have held that this discovery revealed God as a lie in a flat-footed literal sense. Rather, this “lie” has been interpreted variously, including such that God as the guarantor of the security of society is no longer required given the advances in science and technology that were permitted by monotheism (and here one can relate this history to the Heideggerian *Ge-Stell* and *Ereignis*), or that the value of truth and its concomitant, knowledge, led to the subjective turn inward and therefore down the road to the fabling of the world as narrated by Nietzsche (through Descartes, Kant, positivism, and its unmasking as a play of forces and situatedness). One could even interpret the “lie” as pertaining to the “Trojan Horse” effect in particular, such that it has been found out, through Girard’s work, that the value of Christ was not as a sacrificial victim, but as an unmasker of the natural sacred.

THE TROJAN HORSE AND THE ETHIC OF CHARITY

A significant motivation for Vattimo in recovering Christianity was to find an ethic to adjudicate the irreducible hermeneutic plurality of late-modernity. Vattimo thought he found it in “*caritas*.” His own account of *caritas* was flawed, but how will Christianity as a Trojan Horse yield an ethic of charity? Here an answer can again be found along Vattimian lines. If using philosophy as a handmaiden for theology occurred on the grounds of serving the servant, the kenotic Word, then essentially weakening took place in the name of friendship. Aristotle’s metaphysics was weakened in the name of fellowship (communion) and due to a history of salvation based on a contingent event, the incarnation. Now, if the incarnation functioned as an unmasking of the natural sacred due to a message of friendship (God lowering himself and announcing he was no longer master, but friend), then this message itself is the historical and historic announcement that is the guiding, normative thread for weakening interpretations that persists to the present day and is not capable of being secularised. Therefore Vattimo has a principle of friendship based on the hermeneutical occurrence of the Incarnation and Jesus Christ’s own interpretative action, of lightening the burden, of lessening enmity in his Antitheses (“love your enemy”), and his calling of everyone to friendship: “all the nations” and a renewal of all creation (Matthew 19:28).

Textual justification for this reading of Vattimo on friendship comes in the form of what he has written about “truth.” In a relatively recent book entitled *The Responsibility of the Philosopher*, Vattimo writes that “I can no

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longer keep the notion of truth and evangelical charity apart.⁷⁶ Charity in this context, for Vattimo, is “a life of heeding others and responding to others in dialogue⁷⁷; in short, “friendship.”⁷⁸ It is interesting that Vattimo should qualify “charity” with “evangelical.” This term has two main meanings in the context of Christianity. On the one hand, it is a synonym for “good news,” and thus simply the Gospel message, and this may well be the way in which Vattimo wishes to use the term. Nevertheless, “evangelical” can also mean spreading this good news, and this is where the nihilistic missionary vocation of Christianity comes in. Truth is made, for Vattimo, in consensus in which the primary value is the dialogue itself, only secondly the consensus that is made out of “interpreting our common situation along certain lines and from shared assumptions.”⁷⁹ Traditionally, evangelism in the missionary sense meant conversion through reduction. However, dialogue itself would presume weakening, for absolute positions preclude genuine dialogue. Indeed, to reach out to others in the first place means there is a desire to listen to others. In this *Verwindung* of the evangelical, the good news is that of weakening, abasement, and, above all, charity, friendship. In an ironic distortion of the Great Commission, the good news is that of spreading the good news, of seeking the other through dialogue.⁸⁰ For this reason, Vattimo refers to the missionary vocation of Christianity after the end of metaphysics as moving “from universality to hospitality,”⁸¹ deliberately invoking Derrida’s work on hospitality. The latter term means placing “oneself in the hands of one’s guest, that is, an entrustment of oneself to him.”⁸² In dialogue, “this signifies acknowledging that the other might be right,” and that in the spirit of charity the Christian “must limit [himself] almost entirely to listening.”⁸³ On these grounds, one can reach out even to those “strong” interpreters, for the primary action of this “twisted” missionary activity is listening, not trying to convince the other. Even for this reason alone this form of “friendship” is preferable to that given on Vattimo’s “principle of interiority” account.

Relating all this back to the reconstruction of Vattimo’s secularisation thesis without the “crash diet” Enlightenment undertones, it is possible to see charity and hospitality in the history of Christianity. The very weakening that occurred in the setting-up of Christianity as the Trojan Horse for both religion and philosophy can be regarded as the archetype for such a relationship to the other. The Christian gospel of weakness spread out and quickly found a Hellenistic Gentile culture to which it listened, adopting principles from its philosophy, Stoicism in particular. Later it listened to, and adopted, from other cultures, such as Roman governance after the conversion of Constantine, all the way up to listening to Marxism and the struggle of people in countries that developed liberation theologies. As such, one can see why Vattimo thinks that in *caritas* (the driving force of secularisation due, on this reading, to its ‘weak evangelism’ based on friendship and hospitality) he finds “the original ‘text’ of which weak ontology is the transcription.”⁸⁴ *Caritas* and weak ontology weaken strong structures by finding the other based on the announcement that God—representative of absolutist strong thought—has been weakened (*kenosis*). Indeed, as Vattimo realises, it is due to this secularisation that the death of God occurred and the philosophy of “weak ontology” is possible at all.

CONCLUSION

In seeking to ground hermeneutics historically in such a fashion that the process of weakening yields a normative criterion for interpretation, Vattimo “twists” the history of Christianity by interpreting the realisation of its essence as secularisation. Drawing together the authoritarian elements of religion and metaphysics under the label of “violence,” Vattimo is able to see one, then the other unmasked through a process of weakening inaugurated by the announcement of Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ’s announcement of friendship. Christ as the Incarnation of God is the hermeneutic event *par excellence*, but his real value was in the kenotic Word’s message of God’s friendship. Vattimo’s own attempts to account for the weakening power of his message through appropriating Dilthey’s notion of the subjective turn inaugurated by the Christian message lead down an alley that only ends with a “crash diet” Enlightenment anthropocentrism that is normatively a restricted and contradictory form of categorical imperative.

A more historically situated, less Enlightenment-based friendliness can be found by placing more emphasis on the missionary focus of the Christian announcement which led to the spread of Christianity to the Gentile world. Whereas Christianity was a Trojan Horse for religion in the sense that Girard describes, this became

the exemplar for the notion of Truth in philosophy; in both cases, Christianity successfully posed as something it was not in order to weaken it to the point of breaking. Jesus's calling to friendship and his death on the cross unmasked the "natural sacred," but the power of this memory as a trace, a tradition, made philosophies such as Stoicism, Platonism in its various forms, and Aristotelianism all break under the weight of having to accommodate the exceptional and contingently historical. This re-reading of Vattimo's theory of secularisation can still yield the results he wants, that is, to ground hermeneutics historically and yield an ethic of weakening, in other words, one of secularisation. The ethic in question remains one of *caritas*, but disparate elements of Vattimo's return to Christianity have been brought together to show that there are a lot of resources within his work with which to construct a philosophy of dialogue based on charity understood in terms of friendship and hospitality. These two notions involve seeking out the other and listening to them, which was commanded by the risen Christ's "Great Commission." This found its archetypal form very quickly in the mission to the Gentiles which yielded the Trojan Horse effect of the message of the weakening of God (*kenosis*) meeting philosophy.

Therefore, Vattimo was right to say that *kenosis*, *caritas*, and secularisation are important for hermeneutics, but in this analysis they are shorn of the Enlightenment presupposition of the "strong" subject left over in Vattimo's work. In agreement with Vattimo, it has been argued that *kenosis* is the message given in Christ of the weakening of God from master to friend. However, differently from Vattimo, it has been suggested that rather than seeking to ground *caritas* as a hermeneutical principle through Dilthey's principle of interiority, one should pay more attention to the missionary tendency within Christianity, of organising the hermeneutical principle around seeking the other in terms of seeking them out and listening to them no-matter who they are (*caritas*). When in the early fruit of a charitable exchange of ideas the covenant-based historical religious "Jesus Movement" met Gentiles, a fusion of fundamentally incompatible horizons took place. This fusion has played itself out in history in the form of secularisation, reinterpreted here as making the religious worldlier through its gradual unmasking at the hand of the ideal of truth incorporated from philosophy. Furthermore, the importance of the contingent was taken into philosophy through religion and has proved fatal to metaphysical philosophy. A process of weakening strong religious and metaphysics structures (secularisation) has thus taken place as a result of the weakening of God through *kenosis* and its hermeneutical principle of *caritas*.

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NOTES

1. Gianni Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation*. Trans. David Webb. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997, 106.
2. *Ibid.*, 7.
3. Gianni Vattimo, "Toward an Ontology of Decline" *Recoding Metaphysics*. Ed Giovanna Borradori. Trans. Barbara Spackman. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988a, 66.
4. Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation*, 7.
5. Gianni Vattimo, *Nihilism and Emancipation*. Trans. William McCuaig. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, 94.
6. Gianni Vattimo, *A Farewell to Truth*. Trans. William McCuaig. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, 73.
7. Gianni Vattimo, *Nietzsche: An Introduction*. Trans. Nicholas Martin. London: The Athlone Press, 2002a, 27.
8. Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*. Trans. David Webb and Luca D'Isanto. Polity Press: Cambridge, 1999, 38.
9. *Ibid.*, 41.
10. *Ibid.*, 64.
11. *Ibid.*, 39; although he does not quote the text.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*. Trans. Luca D'Isanto. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002b, 24.
14. Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation*, 51; Vattimo, *Belief*, 41.
15. John 15:15; Vattimo, *Belief*, 55.
16. Luca D'Isanto, "Introduction" *Belief*. Trans. David Webb and Luca D'Isanto. Polity Press: Cambridge, 1999, 15.
17. Kevin Hart, review of Gianni Vattimo and René Girard "Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue." *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (December 8th 2010). Available from <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/24546-christianity-truth--and-weakening-faith-a-dialogue>. Accessed 27/6/12.
18. Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 38.
19. Gianni Vattimo and Carmelo Dotolo, *Dio: la possibilità buona: Un colloquio sulla soglia tra filosofia e teologia. A cura di Giovanni Giorgio*. Soveria Mannelli, Calabria: Rubbettino, 2009, 5.
20. Some commentators on Vattimo's work, such as Frederiek Depoortere and Antony C. Sciglitano have argued that Vattimo is repeating this kind of 'Death of God' theology. See Frederiek Depoortere, *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy: Gianni Vattimo, René Girard, and Slavoj Žižek*. London and New York: T&T Clark, 2008, and Antony C. Sciglitano, "Contesting the World and the Divine: Balthasar's Trinitarian 'Response' to Gianni Vattimo's Secular Christianity." *Modern Theology* 23:4 (2007, 525-559). Against Depoortere and Sciglitano's views on this matter, see my article, Matthew Edward Harris, "Gianni Vattimo and Thomas J. J. Altizer on the Incarnation and the Death of God: a Comparison." *Minerva: An Internet Journal of Philosophy* 15 (2011, 1-19).
21. René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. London and New York: The Athlone Press, 1987.
22. Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation*, 50.
23. Vattimo, *Belief*, 50.
24. Gianni Vattimo, "Heidegger and Girard: *Kénosis* and the End of Metaphysics" *Christianity, Truth and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue*. Ed Pierpaolo Antonello. Trans. William McCuaig. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010a, 78.
25. *Ibid.*, 85.
26. René Girard, "Not Just Interpretations, There are Facts, Too" *Christianity, Truth and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue*. Ed Pierpaolo Antonello. Trans. William McCuaig. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
27. Gianni Vattimo, "Metaphysics, Violence, Secularisation" *Recording Metaphysics*. Ed Giovanna Borradora. Trans. Barbara Spackman. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988b, 60.
28. Vattimo, *Belief*, 66.
29. Gianni Vattimo, "Toward a Nonreligious Christianity" *After the Death of God*. Ed Jeffrey W. Robbins. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, 35.
30. Nancy K. Frankenberry, "Weakening Religious Belief: Vattimo, Rorty, and the Holism of the Mental" *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo*. Ed Santiago Zabala. London and Ithaca, New York: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007, 274.
31. Vattimo, "Metaphysics, Violence, Secularisation," 60.
32. Frankenberry, "Weakening Religious Belief," 274.
33. Vattimo, *Belief*, 64.
34. Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 108.
35. *Ibid.*, 106.
36. Wilhelm Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*. Trans. and intro R. J. Betanzos. Detroit and London: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1979, 229.
37. Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 108.
38. *Ibid.*, 108.

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39. Gianni Vattimo, "The Age of Interpretation" *The Future of Religion*. Ed Santiago Zabala. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, 47.
40. *Ibid.*, 47.
41. Vattimo, *The Future of Religion*, 47.
42. Martin Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God is Dead'" *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Trans. and Intro. William Lovitt. New York and London: Garland, 1977, 95, 104.
43. Vattimo, *A Farewell to Truth*, 73-74.
44. Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 109.
45. Vattimo, "Towards a Nonreligious Christianity," 42.
46. *Ibid.*, 43.
47. Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 103.
48. Peter Carravetta, "Beyond Interpretation?" *Between Nihilism and Politics: The Hermeneutics of Gianni Vattimo*. Eds Silvia Benso and Brian Schroeder. New York: SUNY, 2010, 79-97.
49. Depoortere, *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy*.
50. Peter Jonkers "In the World, but not of the World: The Prospects of Christianity in the Modern World." *Bijdragen* 61:4 (1999, 2526-28).
51. Vattimo, *Belief*, 45.
52. *Ibid.*, 66.
53. Vattimo, "Towards a Nonreligious Christianity," 42.
54. Vattimo, "Towards an Ontology of Decline," 73.
55. Erik M. Vogt, "Postmodernity as the Ontological Sense of Technology" *Between Nihilism and Politics: The Hermeneutics of Gianni Vattimo*. Eds Silvia Benso and Brian Schroeder. New York: SUNY, 2010, 229.
56. Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*. Trans. Jon R. Snyder. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988c, 47.
57. Gianni Vattimo, *Dialogue with Nietzsche*. Trans. William McCuaig. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, 131.
58. Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 101.
59. Gavin Hyman "Must a Post-Metaphysical Political Theology Repudiate Transcendence? The Case of Gianni Vattimo." *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 8:3 (2007, 130).
60. Vattimo, *Dialogue with Nietzsche*, 130.
61. Thomas Guarino, *Vattimo and Theology*. London and New York: T&T Clark, 2009, 71.
62. See Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation*, 48-49.
63. Pierpaolo Antonello, "Introduction" *Christianity, Truth and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue*. Ed Pierpaolo Antonello. Trans. William McCuaig. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, 8.
64. Carmelo Dotolo, *La teologia fondamentale davanti alle sfide del 'pensiero debole' di G. Vattimo*. Rome: LAS, 1999.
65. Matthew Edward Harris "Metaphysics, Violence and the 'Natural Sacred' in Gianni Vattimo's Philosophy." *Humanicus* 8 (2013, 1-21).
66. *Ibid.*, 406.
67. Adolf Von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 1. Trans. Neil Buchanan. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1902.
68. John Gray, *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals*. London: Granta Books, 2002.
69. Fernando Savater, "Christianity as Religion and the Irreligion of the Future" *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo*. Ed Santiago Zabala. London and Ithaca, New York: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007, 299.
70. Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1949, 3-4.
71. Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in the Divine Life*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993, 195 n. 19-21.
72. P. J. Fitzpatrick, *In Breaking of Bread*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 11.
73. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, q. 76, a.1.
74. Gray, *Straw Dogs*, 127.
75. Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation*, 7.
76. Gianni Vattimo, *The Responsibility of the Philosopher*. Trans. William McCuaig. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010b, 97.
77. *Ibid.*
78. *Ibid.*, 98.
79. *Ibid.* 69.
80. In recent works, such as his collaboration with Santiago Zabala, Vattimo has preferred the term "conversation" to "dialogue," for the latter have an association with the Socratic form of reasoning in which truth is presupposed before the exchange. Nevertheless, the context in which Vattimo and Zabala are writing is political philosophy. See Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism: From Heidegger to Marx*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, 25-26.
81. Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 100.

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82. Ibid., 101.

83. Ibid.

84. Vattimo, *Belief*, 70.