

**Worldly Words and Sacred Ideas: The Shifting Meaning and
Usage of “Secular,” 400-1600**

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ABSTRACT

WORLDLY WORDS AND SACRED IDEAS: THE SHIFTING MEANING AND USAGE OF “SECULAR,” 400-1600

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This thesis offers a close examination of the word “secular” from the fifth century to the seventeenth century and examines its origins and the change in its usage over the course of the medieval and early modern periods, primarily in England. Existing scholarship on the idea of the secular has ignored the meaning of the word and how its usage adapted to social and political change. I argue that “secular” is not a static concept nor does it simply signify a society stripped of religion, but rather, the term occupies a complex neutral space that shifts within changing and evolving demarcations between sacred and temporal circumstances. Furthermore, I argue that the secular has had a long-standing place in Christian thought, though its role changed to meet the historical needs of Christian societies. In addition to undertaking a close reading of primary sources and foundational thinkers, I utilized text analysis software throughout my research in order to establish statistical data that tracks the changes in usage of the term from 1473-1603.

Dedication

For my family, old and new.

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Introduction

This project offers a close examination of the word “secular” from the fifth century to the seventeenth century and examines its origins and the change in its usage over the course of the medieval and early modern periods with a particular focus on the Reformation. Though this admittedly an exceedingly long amount of time, I found it necessary to start this exploration from the beginning of the Christian usage of “secular” at the end of the fifth century to better understand how thinkers such as Augustine, Wycliffe, and Luther used and understood “secular” through the late medieval and early modern period, and how Reformation ideas changed contemporary understanding of “secular.” I argue that the secular has a long history in Christian thought, which begins in the fifth century, and continues through the middle ages and early modern period, though its place changed fulfil different roles over time.

I began this research by investigating power shifts during the Reformation and the hundred years that followed, interested primarily in how the Reformation may have “secularised” Protestant Europe. There is a general consensus among scholars that secular power developed in response to the weakening of religious power and growing societal need over the course of the sixteenth century; however, what scholars cannot seem to agree on is the extent to which we can call these events “secularisation.” There is a large body of work in Sociology and Political Science that examines secularisation and modernisation – linking the two together – and focuses primarily on the decline in the inclusion of religion and the Church in state affairs; however, as I examined these connections, it became clear that scholars had largely taken the idea of “secular” for

granted and assumed it to be relatively static. In these discussions, “secularisation” seems to mean the process in which religion is removed from “lay” life and becomes a private practice if it remains at all. But this reductive understanding of “secularisation” and subsequently “secular” neither matched historical usage of the word nor critically examined the secular as an idea with its own history. Thus, the question “what is secular?” overtook my initial research question.

As a result, I have examined the origins and subsequent changes in the usage of “secular” from the fifth century to the seventeenth century and have found that the secular has had a long-standing place in Christian thought, though its role changed to meet the historical needs of Christian societies. Throughout, I argue that the content and place of “secular” changed to adapt to the broader changes of social divisions throughout the late antiquity and medieval period. Following the establishment of the origins and changes to “secular,” I closely examine the different understanding of the place of the secular during the Reformation period and later sixteenth century in England. I have not only employed a close reading of primary sources on political and theological divisions but also utilised text analysis software to track the frequency of “secular” and broader trends in vocabulary in a select number of primary sources. These digital research tools will complement traditional qualitative primary source analysis that will identify changes in word meaning and usage.

From the fifth through to the sixteenth-century, I will demonstrate that the usage of the word “secular” allowed for a neutral space for civic life, growing and contracting as political demands shifted. Moreover, I want to emphasise that the Reformation, rather than being the sole impetus for the “secularisation” process, was a

continuation of long-standing disagreements over the nature of temporal and religious power. The Reformation, rather than removing religion from governance, married them together as they had not been before creating a union between church and state that early Christians could not have imagined in the fifth century.

To begin the discussion on the secular, I have examined several essential theorists on “secularisation” theory and located how their arguments have influence historical studies on the reformation and state development in the early modern period. Chapter one examines the Latin and Greek origins of “secular,” and how it came to be understood and used as a neutral space in Christian thought through the work of Augustine. Chapter two will discuss how “secular” functioned during the middle ages primarily in England, which was much different from the heterogeneous society described by the elites of late antiquity. Though this section is brief compared to the large span of time, it is necessary to understand how “secular” adapted to the expansion of Christendom and dominance of orthodoxy. Chapter three will examine the Reformation period and how changes in church and state structures challenged medieval ideas of the secular, renewing the neutrality of the secular space, and challenging late medieval homogeneity. Though the focus the discussion will be on the reformation, it is necessary to begin nearly one thousand years before the beginning of the Reformation so that we may better understand the changes of the secular and its origins.

Historiography

As I have emphasised above, there is a lack of scholarship on the idea of “secular” itself; however, examination of the idea is possible through a less direct route.

Scholars have extensively examined the idea of “secularisation” – marching hand in hand with “modernisation” – in disciplines such as sociology and political theory. These studies examine social and institutional change and the degree of religious involvement in each to examine the secularisation of society, and in doing so offer some valuable insights into how the secular can manifest. Similarly, studies in history that focus on state and social change discuss many of the same things and can use them in tandem with studies in sociology and political science to illuminate some of the changing themes in the scholarship of the secular and can use them to understand some aspects of the secular. This interdisciplinary approach is not something these authors do with any frequency, but it is, however, the most comprehensive way forward. I hope to bring these disparate areas of study together to examine common themes and weaknesses in current discourse, and better illuminate how sociological and political theories on secularisation have influenced historical studies of the Reformation and state formation of the sixteenth century. To do this, I will examine critical works and theoretical approaches on secularisation theory and historical studies on the state developments of central and northern Europe during the early modern period.

Broadly speaking there are two sides to secularisation theory in history and sociology: the advocates of the “new paradigm” propose “dropping the term *secularization* from all theoretical discourse” as secularization has proven to be false; and the defenders of the “old paradigm,” who maintain that secularisation theories remain pertinent.¹ Some scholars, such as Bryan Wilson and Brad Gregory argued that the Reformation initiated

¹ Steve Bruce, *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 170–94; P.S. Gorski, ‘Historicizing the Secularization Debate: Church, State, and Society in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, Ca. 1300 to 1700.’, *American Sociological Review* 65, no. 1 (2000): 138.

the process of secularisation by reducing the religious influence and encouraging state intervention,² while others like David Martin and Robert Markus argue that secularisation theory has gone too far, and some scholars have considerably overstated the waning influence of religion in modernity. It is, however, important to note that there was a considerable shift in the study of secularisation. Where scholars who had previously been writing in support of the strength of the secularisation theory, such as Peter Berger, altered their stance and began to argue that religion was still dominant within modern societies, and previous arguments overstated the decline of religion.

Secularisation Theory and Prevailing Religiosity

Classical secularisation theory or the “old paradigm,” rooted in the work of scholars such as Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber, generally argued that as societies progressed and modernised, religion and religious influence would weaken and that the sacred would be relegated to the private sphere if it survived at all.³ This commonly held position followed a long tradition of similar thought that has its roots in the Enlightenment. Indeed, throughout much of the twentieth century, the rallying cry of political progress and forces of modernisation supported the theory that secularisation was a force for good and a necessary process for the improvement of society. Through the course of the twentieth century, however, scholars began to

² There are scholars who argue for a different chronology, dating the beginning of secularisation as early as the 14th century or conversely much later in the 17th century; however, for the purpose of this discussion, chronology is not essential. It may be mentioned as a point of distinction among scholars, but not as a point of contention. I myself would be inclined to agree with earlier periodization, but even for my examination here it is not strictly relevant.

³ Bruce, Steve. *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis*. Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 170-194; See Gorski, PS. "Historicizing the Secularization Debate: Church, State, and Society in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, Ca. 1300 to 1700." *American Sociological Review* 65, no. 1 (2000): 138-67 for a through discussion of the broad categories of the “old theories.”

challenge this hypothesis, and opinions diverged into four basic positions: disappearance, decline, privatisation, and transformation.⁴

Early scholarship on secularisation focused primarily on the disappearance and decline of religion in society. Comte argued that science would eventually replace religion and asserted that “dogmatic faith no longer exists,” and that “the doctrines of religion influence men’s minds only so far as morality is still associated with them.”⁵ Similarly, Weber was the strongest proponent of the “decline model.” Like Comte, Weber thought that science would undermine the “cognitive basis” of religion, and would erode religion’s power in society; however, Weber, unlike Comte, did not believe that religion would disappear entirely, and that “new prophets” could emerge from the political sphere.⁶

Later scholarship of the “old paradigm” in the mid-twentieth century focused on the privatisation and transformation of religion, often in combination with one another and the “decline model.” Thomas Luckman, first writing on secularisation in the 1960’s, was the strongest advocate of the privatisation model.⁷ He argued that new and personalised religions would fill the spiritual gap left by old religions and that new religions “consist of a mixture of individualistic ‘spirituality’ and nostalgic fundamentalism.”⁸ Authors who focused on the transformation of religion further branch out and focused on smaller aspects of transformation such as ideological or institutional changes.

⁴ Gorski, ‘Historicizing the Secularization Debate’, 140. I have borrowed these categories from Gorski, as I believe they are useful not only for sociology scholars, but history scholars as well.

⁵ Gorski, 140.

⁶ Gorski, 140.

⁷ Gorski, 140.

⁸ Gorski, 140.

David Martin focused his early discussions, in 1965 and 1978, on ideological shifts and challenged the importance of rationality to secularisation theory and is a proponent of the transformation theory of secularisation.⁹ Martin contended that secularisation is not universal in process or progression, and the use of the word “secularisation” covers too much difference and nuance to be of any value to sociological or historical discussions. Each society’s transformation from a religious to secular society is particular and dependant on its own circumstances. He explained that rationality and religiosity are not mutually exclusive.¹⁰ It is possible for a society to be both religious and rational, and secularisation rather than being a scientific concept is a “tool of counter religious ideologies” such as Marxism, rationalism, and existentialism.¹¹ Martin opened the word “secularisation” to examination by scholars throughout the seventies and eighties as the linguistic turn took over many sociological and historical discussions.¹²

Bryan Wilson builds upon early twentieth century scholars and agrees with their observation of declining religious influence and disappearance from public institutions.¹³ For Wilson, however, rather than the triumphant march of modernisation leaving rationality in its wake, modernisation transmutes the nature and status of religion within

⁹ David Martin, ‘Towards Eliminating the Concept of Secularization’, in *Penguin Survey of the Social Sciences: 1965*. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965); David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization*, Explorations in Interpretative Sociology (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

¹⁰ David Martin, ‘What I Really Said about Secularisation’, *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 46, no. 2 (2007): 139–41.

¹¹ Martin, ‘Towards Eliminating the Concept of Secularization’, 169.

¹² It is interesting to note that even in this focus on language, little was done about “secular” itself. In these earlier models of secularization theory, secular seems to mean a lack of religion and religiosity in society, but this is not closely examined or stated. Much more focus is placed on “religion.” This mirrors the usage of secular throughout the middle ages.

¹³ Gorski, ‘Historicizing the Secularization Debate’, 141.

society in a process that is neither inevitable nor uniform.¹⁴ He argues that the process of secularisation is the process by which religious institutions lose their power, prestige, and societal influence, and recede from public institutions, but crucially that this is largely unintended and not the result of planning by “secularists.”¹⁵ Secularisation then is not intended or inevitable, but rather a slow process in which factors of social and political power shift from religion to state and private institutions through welfare, law, education, and similarly modern fixtures of society. Furthermore, he rejects trends in sociological discussions of secularisation that theorise or extrapolate religious experience.¹⁶ Instead, he argues that secularisation is a social process and must be understood within societal contexts, not as a universal abstraction. He examines western societies, such as the United States and England, and focuses his attention on institutional changes, rather than focusing on ideological or theoretical shifts studied by other scholars. Historians generally take a similar view to Bryan Wilson. His focus on institutional evolution fits well into the discipline of history as they often examine similar sources evidence.

Early in his career Peter Berger focused on ideological changes within secularisation theory and examined how ideas embedded in modernity, such as rationality and pluralism, lead to secularisation.¹⁷ His early writings contain two especially significant contributions to secularisation theory: first, he reinforced Max Weber’s emphasis on the increased rationalisation of modernisation; and second, he argued that the pluralisation

¹⁴ Bryan R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society: Fifty Years on. New Ed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁵ Wilson, 4–10.

¹⁶ Wilson, 4.

¹⁷ Steve Bruce, ‘The Curious Case of the Unnecessary Recantation: Berger and Secularisation.’, in *Peter Berger and the Study of Religion*, ed. Peter Berger et al. (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 88.

of modern societies force religious neutrality in public affairs.¹⁸ Berger argued that rationalisation is built into Judeo-Christian thought and therefore sows the seeds of its own destruction and plays an integral role in the modernisation process.¹⁹ This emphasis on the role of rationality in dismantling religiosity strengthened secularisation theory as a whole and became a key component to secularisation theory within sociology. Scholars of social and cultural history echoed and reinforced Berger's argument that pluralisation encouraged neutrality in public spheres and by extension weakened religious communities; however, it is Berger's focus on the ideological aspects of secularisation theory that initiated a more extensive debate.²⁰

While scholars grappled with what "secularisation" meant – and by extension "religion" – there was an increasing sense that religiosity had not left the public sphere as much as scholars had thought, nor was it showing signs of declining or disappearing as scholars had previously argued. After over twenty years of scholarship on the secularisation theory, Peter Berger – one of the earliest and longest proponents of the theory – wrote in 1999 that "a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labelled 'secularization theory' is essentially mistaken."²¹ Berger and others began to rethink the totality of secularisation. In particular, Berger reassessed the strength of religion in modern societies citing the persistence of religion in western societies,²² the popularity of evangelical and conservative churches in the United States, and the vivacity

¹⁸ Bruce, 88.

¹⁹ Bruce, 87–88.

²⁰ A full discussion of these scholars follows in the next section.

²¹ Peter L. Berger, *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Grand Rapids, Mich.: Ethics and Public Policy Center; WBEerdmans PubCo, 1999), 2.

²² The increase in church attendance within the United States during the twentieth century is geographically particular and uneven. Many scholars focus the particular areas of increased church attendance to disprove secularisation generally, but authors such as Bryan Wilson have argued that religiosity cannot be proved by church attendance alone.

of religion in non-western parts of the world as reasons to doubt the strength of the secularisation theory.²³ Berger argued that rather than a decline in religion we have seen religion reject and adapt to many aspects of modernisation. He warned that “those who neglect religion in their analyses of contemporary affairs do so at great peril.”²⁴As scholars reassessed modern religiosity in the middle of the twentieth century, they called into question the usefulness of secularisation theory in sociological and historical discussions. The doubt in the strength of the secularisation theory gave rise to the “new paradigm” in which many scholars rejected secularisation, or at the very least questioned it and instead emphasised religions change.

One of the strongest advocates of the “new paradigm” is Gil Anidjar. In his book *Blood*, Anidjar provides a “haematology” of western Christian thought. He argues that Christianity, through its uses of blood as a figurative and literal symbol, unifies and segregates Christianity and its offshoots religiously, politically, legally, economically, medically, culturally and socially.²⁵ It is a comprehensive work that ties together the long history of Christianity and emphasises the continuity between ideas and concludes the secularisation is merely a change in language at best, and at worst a lie.²⁶ Anidjar’s critical analysis of the Christianity and its role in state and social development demonstrates clear linkages between past and present. Additionally, Anidjar uses an interdisciplinary

²³ Bruce, ‘The Curious Case of the Unnecessary Recantation: Berger and Secularisation.’, 89 and 115.

²⁴ Berger, *The Desecularization of the World*, 3–4 and 18. Berger does note two, comparatively small, exceptions to his desecularisation theory: first, is what he calls “Western Europe,” were “with increasing modernization there has been an increase in the key indicators of secularization, both on the level of expressed beliefs... and, dramatically, on the level of church-related behaviour”; second, is an “intentional subculture” of “carriers” of “progressive, Enlightenment beliefs and values.” The second, he argues, is a very small minority that nonetheless hold positions of important power, notably in the education and policy sectors, and thus cannot be ignored. For a greater explanation see, Berger, 9–11.

²⁵ Gil Anidjar, *Blood: A Critique of Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 68.

²⁶ Anidjar, 235–58.

approach to make his argument combining much of theoretical background of sociology with religious studies and historical analysis. He makes a strong case against secularism as a general theory; however, by using “blood” as this thread of continuity, he leaves out essential discussions on the development of public institutions and the changes that they experience. Bryan Wilson, who focuses on the slow change of institutions and the of continuity of ideas comes to a much different conclusion than Anidjar.

David Martin too altered his position gradually over the course of the secularisation debate. Though his break from secularisation was not as drastic as Berger’s, throughout his later work, he continues to reject the notion of a singular process of secularisation but recognises that there are general trends which different societies may take that may bear a resemblance and are more or less all “Christianizing” in nature. Simply, Martin is arguing that the process of secularisation is the process of becoming Christian. Throughout his later work, he focuses heavily on the use of language and argues that the language of Christianity slowly transformed into a language of civic virtue and is incongruous with ideas of secularism at the premise.²⁷ The language of Christianity, light darkness redemption, must exist in a world with God and do not make sense stripped from their religious context and directly contradict secularised language. The importance of language in the discussion of secularisation is echoed by scholars such as Robert Markus and should be further examined.

Robert Markus takes a similar approach to Martin and focuses on the continuity of language, and the spaces language creates for differentiated practices; however,

²⁷ David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2005), 183.

Markus, disagrees with Martin on the exclusionary aspects of civic language. Markus directly addresses the question “what is secular?” and gives an account of the origins of the secular and early Christianity. Markus focuses on the Augustinian division between sacred, secular and profane to argue that Christianity has always made space for the secular and that the secular was necessary for the growth and development of Christianity.²⁸ Throughout his work, he emphasises the secular is not a new idea, and that secularisation theories need to account for the long history of the secular and how its place in society has changed over time.²⁹ Markus holds that the secular has always been an integral part of Christianity and so the idea of secularism is not a new phenomenon, just the modern iteration of an old idea. Rather than focusing on the change of institutions over time, Markus heavily emphasises the unbroken continuity of ideas throughout western society. He shares this approach with many other scholars such as Steven Bruce who argues that secularism is a historical explanation of specific changes in the religious climate of societies rather than a clean or sudden break.³⁰

The emphasis on continuity and parsing out the nuances of change has recently dominated much of the discussion on secularism. Depending on what threads of continuity authors choose to follow the discussion leads to separate places. For example, Gil Anidjar uses continuity to challenge secularisation, while Bryan Wilson utilises continuity as the backbone of his support for secularisation and the change of institutional structures. It is curious then that most scholars have neglected to examine the contiguous use of secular. It is my hope in doing so that we can come to a better

²⁸ Further discussion of Markus can be found in chapter I of this work.

²⁹ R. A. Markus, *Christianity and the Secular* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 31–33.

³⁰ Bruce, *Religion and Modernization*, 8–28.

understanding of the theories and themes discussed by authors such as Anidjar and Wilson.

At the beginning of the study of secularisation in the early twentieth century, theory scholars emphasised the novelty of modernity and the breaking of traditional modes of belief. Scholars pushed for a narrative of progress in which modernity would make way for improvement by pushing religion and irrationality aside in favour of pluralism and rationality; however, examination by scholars throughout the latter half of the twentieth century called this thesis into question. A focus on the importance of language, continuity, and the resurgence of religious participation called into question earlier assumptions that religion and modernity could not coexist. Scholars have shaped secularism to allow for the continuation of religion even in modernity and highlighted the importance of language in the transition and change of ideas.

Secularism and History

Secularisation theorists have emphasised the importance of the Reformation to the secularisation process and subsequent state building. Broadly they emphasise the fracturing of the Roman Church and the emergence of “territorial or “state” churches,” with far more emphasis put on the former than the later.³¹ Initial studies of the Reformation depicted it as a popular, and positive movement that removed corruption and superstition from the important works of lay people and lay society— which secularisation was integral to - and paved the way for state building and progress. This depiction of the Reformation stems from the same enlightenment tradition as

³¹ Gorski, ‘Historicizing the Secularization Debate’, 151.

secularisation theories and follows the same ideological threads of modernity and rationality; however, as historians began to examine the Reformation more closely the popularity of protestant movements appeared more fractured and problematic than before. Like theorists of secularisation, historians began to focus on the subtle social ramifications of the Reformation, studying the importance of locality, confessions, and its reciprocal effects on culture. The question for historians is not whether secularisation happened, but rather *how* it happened, and what form it took.

The concept of confessionalization put forward by Heinz Schilling, in his book *Die Konfessionalisierung im Reich* (Confessionalization in the Empire) 1988, broadly speaking describes how church confessions and the state worked together and facilitated the centralisation of state power throughout the sixteenth century. The fracturing of the Church into smaller confessions reframed European society and made groups both more particular to their locality and made distinctions between those groups clearer. Europe was no longer just Christian, particular places where either Lutheran, Calvinist, Catholic or other particular denomination. This process, while separating much of Europe from the Catholic Church, strengthened bonds within those groups. Through the process of confessionalization, Schilling argues that rulers of the religious confessions and the local “state” rulers became dependant on one another and formed an essential partnership in which both were stronger together than separately. It was a partnership of mutual need: the confessional leaders were given “state” protection, and “state” rulers were granted religious clemency. So, while it may look to theorists of secularisation that the fracturing of the church was a step towards secularisation, Schilling’s arguments suggest that confessionalization further entwined the church and state together.

Wolfgang Reinhard argued that both Reformation and Counter-Reformation groups contributed to the centralisation process, regardless of theological differences, and the practical outcomes of each confessional group were very similar with regards to state development.³² Heinz Schilling, building upon Reinhard, went on to argue that the emergence of confessions was a crucial process in the modernisation of Europe because the organisational and doctrinal changes to each church confession set the ground for future changes in state development. Therefore the sixteenth century acted as “warm-up” to the major state changes seen throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³³ Confessionalization, according to Schilling, first and foremost modernised the confessions themselves, and then the states in due course. In places where the Reformation succeeded, the confessions went through an intense process of institutional reconstruction and liturgical reform.³⁴ Schilling argued that confessionalization influenced four key aspects of state development:

first, the theoretical and ideological foundation of the early modern state’s authority; second, the state’s human and material resources; third, the formation of a political and cultural identity to integrate the subjects into the state; and fourth, the growth of a system of European states, including their missionary and colonizing efforts.³⁵

³² Susan R. Boettcher, ‘Confessionalization: Reformation, Religion, Absolutism, and Modernity.’, *History Compass* 2, no. 1 (2004): 1; Heinz Schilling, *Civic Calvinism in Northwestern Germany and the Netherlands: Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries*, vol. 17, *Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies* (Kirkville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1991); Heinz Schilling, *Religion, Political Culture, and the Emergence of Early Modern Society: Essays in German and Dutch History*, vol. 50, *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought* (Leiden ; New York: E.J. Brill, 1992); Heinz Schilling, “‘Confessional Europe’”, in *Handbook of European History, 1400-1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation*, ed. Thomas A. Brady, Heiko Augustinus Oberman, and James D. Tracy (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994); Heinz Schilling, *Early Modern European Civilization and Its Political and Cultural Dynamism. Menahem Stern Jerusalem Lectures* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2008).

³³ Schilling, “‘Confessional Europe’”, 3–4.

³⁴ Schilling, 5–6.

³⁵ Schilling, 14.

It is important to note, however, that the separate confessions did not operate independently of one another, or in isolation from one another. P.S. Gorski notes: “on the contrary, the Lutherans reacted against the (old) Catholics, the Calvinists against the Lutherans, the new Catholics against the old Catholics and everybody reacted against the Baptists.”³⁶ So while the confession developed out of a similar need, how they interacted with secular institutions and one another was particular to each locality and confession. Schilling’s concept of confessionalization highlights the institutional changes of the Reformation and following secularisation that was stressed by Wilson; however, Schilling pays less attention to the social aspect of Wilson’s general theory than other scholars such as Kaspar von Greyerz.

Von Greyerz, though he does not disregard the concept of confessionalization, is critical of the broad generalisations it can project.³⁷ Von Greyerz argues that “religion must be seen and understood, always and without exception, as a cultural phenomenon.”³⁸ Consequently, confessionalization was not nearly as unified as the general theory would suggest, but a process in which the lay people and growing magisterial classes negotiated their concerns, beliefs and ideals. He does, however, agree that the Reformation shifted piety to the private sphere though he maintains that the process of secularisation and “Weberian rationalisation” was culturally informed.³⁹ This is to say that the process of secularisation differed depending on the location, and cultural status of the community or region in question. For Von Greyerz, secularisation

³⁶ Gorski, ‘Historicizing the Secularization Debate’, 152.

³⁷ Kaspar von Greyerz, *Religion and Culture in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 41–45; Kaspar von Greyerz, *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800* (London: German Historical Institute; Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1984).

³⁸ Greyerz, *Religion and Culture in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800*, 4.

³⁹ Greyerz, 68.

and the changes of the Reformation were negotiated through culture and society, not merely by institutions or ideological reform. Therefore, manifestations of the secular are not just political or religious, but also social, cultural, and intensely local, even personal.

Early interest in the renewed study of the Reformation following the confessionalization theories of Schilling and others, took particular interest in the different experiences of localities. Studies focusing on particular locations and the acculturation process provided a more nuanced account of the Reformation, particularly for the laity. R. Po-Chia Hsia, for example, stresses the importance of the locality, giving particular attention to Münster, and the difference among separate confessions.⁴⁰ Hsia's focus on Münster puts into practice what Von Greyerz had been arguing. Namely, the local experience can be as varied and complicated as large states, and that the confessionalization theory, while useful for understanding larger trends, does not always illuminate the nuance of the local experience.

John Bossy argues for a subtle shift, which is not so much institutional as they were social or societal. He argues that traditional pre-Reformation Christianity was a sacramental religion that focused on rites of passage and ritual to reinforce bonds of kinship and community through sacred practice which were shared and legitimised through the community. The Reformation, however, changed the focus on religious practice to doctrines and scriptures and as a result, focused on individual practice rather than social and communal experience. This subtle shift is what Bossy calls "the migration

⁴⁰ R. Po-chia Hsia, *Social Discipline in the Reformation: Central Europe, 1550-1750*, Christianity and Society in the Modern World (London: Routledge, 1989); R. Po-chia Hsia, ed., *The German People and the Reformation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

of the holy.”⁴¹ For Bossy, it is not the Reformation, by eliminating ritual practices, removed the sacred from religious life, but that the Reformation, through language and changes to religious practice moved the holy from the community to the individual.

In the concept of confessionalization, secularism is the slow incremental process in which through church reform, growing states were encouraged to develop strong central tendencies not in opposition to church power but in partnership with it. Indeed, the process of the confessionalization involved the state drawing on the deep religious faith and practice to cultivate its own identity as distinct from the Catholic Roman Church and used that faith to mobilise its populace. For most historians, the process of state development is neither positive nor negative, but an outcome of hundreds of years of institutional reform; not all authors are so neutral, however.

In his tendentious book, *The Unintended Reformation*, Brad Gregory argues that the Reformation and subsequent secularisation of society inflicted unintended but irreparable damage to society, and thus stands in opposition to modernisation theories. For Gregory “the modern western world is an extraordinarily complex and tangled product of rejections, retentions, and transformations of medieval Christianity, in which the Reformation era constitutes a critical watershed.”⁴² To achieve his argument, Gregory identifies six key issues that he argues led to the “Kingdom of Whatever” but place heavy emphasis on *sola scriptura*. Gregory argues that the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura* had far-reaching consequences that not only fractured Christendom but removed the way in which it could reconcile itself, and rebuild a unified worldview; therefore, *sola scriptura*

⁴¹ John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 153–71.

⁴² Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 9.

cleared the way for “hyper-pluralism” and morality of relativism.⁴³ The inevitable disagreements over the true meaning of the word of God could not be settled and served only to fracture protestant groups repeatedly and divide Christianity permanently. It was not only the political and social fallout that cause this irrevocable break but a spiritual impoverishment in which society could not recover. Importantly for Gregory, the effects of the Reformation and subsequent secularisation were unintended, and contemporaries could not have predicted the long-term consequences of their actions.

With such a provocative and extensive argument, Gregory does have critics. Nico Vorster, for example, takes exception to Gregory’s unified picture of medieval Christendom and argues that medieval institutions had their fair share of doctrinal controversy and power struggles that were much more numerous and diverse than Gregory was willing to allow. He further condemns Gregory’s focus on *sola scriptura* as overblown. He instead emphasises the changes in state development as the impetus of secularisation.⁴⁴ There is some contention even amongst the supporters of Gregory about the timeline of his argument. Many authors, citing Quentin Skinner, argue the fundamental changes that set these events in motion occurred earlier than the Reformation and could not have happened without the foundations of humanism.

⁴³ This general argument is echoed by many others and aligns with a long tradition of political theorist such as Alistair McIntyre, Quentin Skinner, Alan Bloom and even Leo Strauss, and Hans George Gadamer though they take a different route to reach the same destination.

⁴⁴ Nico Vorster, ‘Sola Scriptura and Western Hyperpluralism: A Critical Response to Brad Gregory’s Unintended Reformation.’, *Review of European Studies* 5, no. 1 (2013).

Regardless of chronology, however, Gregory's work has opened up the discussion of the consequences of modernity within a historical context.⁴⁵

The aim of discussing some of the broader ideas in the history of the Reformation is to illuminate some of the broad themes which appear in the mechanical history of secularisation. If the world is indeed secularised and religious influence is dwindling, then it is useful to understand how that happened. The history of the Reformation, however, gives us a much more complicated picture than the linear progression put forward by early secularisation theorists. Historians have focused on the confessional and local experiences of religious change and found that not only are those experience deeply localised, but also fostered rather than separated the church and state. For most historians, Gregory and his supporters excluded, the Reformation did not remove the church from state affairs but gave each state (or territory) its own church. This does not conform to the general theory of secularisation or arguments which hold that the Reformation is responsible for that process. What it does suggest, is that discussion regarding the secular increasingly become discussions regarding power and whom ought to wield it.

Discussion and Analysis

Rather than building a chronological historiography, what I presented here is a synthesis of different bodies of work that deal with the process of secularisation or the reformation. Though the two bodies I have examined do not often interact directly, they do intersect on several ideas that I have found useful in my study of the secular. First is

⁴⁵ Again, this has been discussed at length in other disciplines, political theory is particularly enamoured with the malaise of modernity but grounding it within a discussion of history opens up new avenues for discussion, and it is my hope bring these authors into conversation with one another.

the element of continuity. Though continuity may result in different conclusions, moving away from the early twentieth century theories has allowed scholars to identify essential connections between ideas and events that have had lasting effects. Second, both groups have paid particular attention to how words have been used and changed, and more specifically how the Reformation transmuted the meaning of Christian words into secular words. Linguistic tradition is vital to how we think about secularisation and understand the idea in the context of historical events. Words like “hope,” “equality” and even “secular” have deep roots in Christianity, which scholars should not ignore. Understanding these modern values requires an understanding the origin of the ideas and how they have adapted to changing circumstances. However, as I have stated, secularisation theorists have neglected to examine what “secular” is and how it has changed.

Within sociological discussions, there is a debate between a functionalist and structuralist definition of secularisation⁴⁶, but serious attempts to define secular have been sparse. At times secularisation is the conscious removal of religion from the state and society, and others it is the consequence of actions unrelated or at the very least unintended. Sociologists and secularisation theorists have failed to provide a sufficient definition and have thus not come to a satisfactory conclusion because they often start with differing premises. The swinging trend of thought regarding secularisation, I argue, is because of a fundamental misunderstanding of what the secular is, and its place in society. These authors use “secular” to mean the opposite of religion or society minus

⁴⁶ I have left this particular debate out of my discussion here for brevity. Neither side has emerged victorious or even unified, and so the nature of religiosity and faith goes on contested.

religion, but this is an impoverished understanding of the neutral space the secular provides. By better understanding the origins of “secular” we can better understand the space it created, and how it adapted to society’s needs. Only then can we understand the process of secularisation and religion’s ongoing role in society.

Furthermore, we sorely need a synthesis in scholarship. As I have noted, these distinct bodies of scholarship rarely interact or make mention of one another despite their shared subject matter. The sociological discussion could greatly benefit from more stringent historicization, while historians could benefit from the clarity of terms and diligence to the concept put forward by the sociological approaches. Furthermore, greater integration of authors of political thought would provide a long-standing foundation for the discussion of institutional development and ideological shifts.⁴⁷ The place of religion in society is far from over, as current events like to remind us daily. It is therefore imperative that we work to understand to what extent faith and religion integrate themselves into state structures, and influence state actions. I do not have such a bleak outlook on secularisation and modernity as some of the historians I have addressed; however, if I am to be cautiously optimistic, we need a better understanding religion in state functions. I hope that by examining the use of the word secular from its Christian origins to the Reformation, we can begin to understand what the secular space was and how it functioned and adapted to political and social needs as a neutral space of its own.

⁴⁷ There are several authors that quickly come to mind and have been mentioned in passing – Quentin Skinner and Alistair McIntyre – but I am thinking here most specifically of Charles Taylor, who was regrettably left out of this brief historiography simply for being too comprehensive.

Methodology

In addition to close reading of the primary material, I utilised digital text analysis to track the changes in the frequency of use, and context of the word “secular” in large corpora of text. In my data, I am limited to digital sources in formats that the software can process (Plain text, HTML, PDF, and XML).⁴⁸ I used primarily plain text files, but occasionally crossed check with PDF’s for sources that maintained much of the original formatting. Crosschecking formats ensured that changes in word spacing and page format did not interfere with frequency readings.

I have constructed each corpus manually by compiling and scrubbing digital copies of primary sources from various sources such as Archive.org and Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership (EEBO-TCP) database and then ordered them chronologically. I also utilised the Early Modern Print Tools, developed by Anupam Basu, to examine the frequency of use over the entire archive of EEBO-TCP.⁴⁹ In cases where I examine a particular author’s body of work, I followed the same practice of compiling and scrubbing digital copies of their work and organising them chronologically but further curated their work to only relevant sources, rather than their entire corpus. In cases where original works were written in Latin, I have opted to use English translations for clarity.⁵⁰ To examine the frequency of use I utilised the text analysis software Voyant tools to find the frequency of words in each document and the location of each word

⁴⁸ There is also a challenge with poorly digitised sources. In case where there was more than one version of a particular work, I chose the digital copy that was digitised cleanest, and free from marginal notations and watermarks that can interfere with text analysis software.

⁴⁹ Anupam Basu, ‘Early Print EEBO N-Gram Browser’, Early Print, 17 January 2014, <https://earlyprint.wustl.edu>; Anupam Basu, ‘Early Print EEBO-TCP and ESTC Text Counts’, accessed 6 March 2018, <https://earlyprint.wustl.edu/tooleeboestctexts.html>.

⁵⁰ Digital Latin version do exist and offer area of further research with digital tools for those with strong linguistic backgrounds.

within the text.⁵¹ Where applicable, I used alternative spellings such as “seculer,” “seculare,” and “saeculare.” The standard spelling of “secular” does not appear until the sixteenth century, but I checked all documents prior to 1600 for alternative spelling to be sure that I did not miss instances of alternate spelling.

Once I found the frequency of use and location of “secular” in the text, I examined its use in the text and relationship to other words to identify common word pairing and contextual usage. Examining the frequency of use and correlating it to changes will help to support close reading of the primary text to provide macro data on larger trends over extended periods of time and offers a new perspective on the large body of scholarship that already exists.

⁵¹ Stefan Sinclair and Geoffrey Rockwell, *Voyant Tools*, version Web, 2018, <http://voyant-tools.org>.

Chapter I | Creating the Secular and Early Christian Thought

The scholarship surrounding the secular has taken the meaning of “secular” for granted and neglected to define or understand the secular as its own neutral space, and instead focused on the socio-political changes which occurred around “modernisation.” This omission of a definition and history of the word “secular” has produced a number of assumptions about the secular space that have confused the issue and conflated acts of state building and power shifts within the church as acts of secularism. Therefore, to best understand what “secular” meant and how it changed over the course of the Middle Ages and Reformation, it is useful to understand the origins of the word and how the idea developed from early Christianity as an important neutral space.

One author who has explored the origins and meaning of “secular,” however, is Robert Markus, whose work on the early Christian origins of “secular” has been integral to this study. Markus argues that the secular realm is an “essential constituent” of Christian belief, but the content of the secular is historically situated in and dependent on the relationship between the Christian community and the society around it as well as the attitudes of the Christian community about that society.⁵² Thus, to Markus, what constitutes “secular” changes and is contingent upon the historical time and place in which is it applied.

In order to understand the origins of the secular, I will trace the origins of “secular” and how it came into Christian use from Latin and Greek. Particularly I will focus on how Augustine, a father of Christian doctrine, used and understood “secular” in

⁵² Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 13.

early Christian doctrine, and lastly how that understanding informed medieval understanding of Christendom. In Antiquity, the “secular” was a Christian-created neutral space that allowed early Christians and Greco-Romans to cohabitate and live harmoniously. It was a neutral space in which no one group had authority over another. In doing so, the “secular” protected daily affairs and culture from doctrinal disagreements and territorial disputes. At its core, the secular allowed Christians to live in a world that was confused by the idea of monotheism.

“Secular” derives from the Latin *saeculum*, which is the Latin translation of the Greek *αἰὼν* meaning a generation, *age*, or century.⁵³ In Christian Latin, however, it came to mean temporal, or time relating specifically to the earthly world, rather than the sacred and eternal world and describes those things that exist only in the temporal world.

“Secular” did not merely mark the passage of time in intervals but demarcated a particular kind of time and completely new interval. The promise of God’s Kingdom segmented time into “profane” and “sacred” time in which the coming of God’s city on earth was the ultimate end. For Christians, time now had defined purpose that superseded earthly regime changes and power struggles.

The new *saeculum* was not simply a generation or century, but the time between the death and second coming of Christ and God’s Kingdom. Moreover, the age of Christ began a new era in which God’s Kingdom would be revealed to Christians and grant

⁵³ αἰὼν (*aiōn*) is the Greek form and often used in early Christian text. Augustine makes this distinction in his writing and emphasises the difference. I will discuss Augustine’s particular usage later in this chapter. ‘Secular, Adj. and N.’, OED Online (Oxford University Press, Accessed Oct 2017); Jürgen Schäfer, *Early Modern English Lexicography* (Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1989), 399; Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 14.

them eternal salvation thereby giving the *saeculum* a defined purpose and end.⁵⁴ However, the changes of the worldly realm overlapped with the “coming age of Gods kingdom,” but their effects would be confined to this age (*saeculum*), and not effect Gods kingdom.⁵⁵ This separation of the *saeculum* and the distinction of temporal realms fundamentally altered how Christians understood the world around them, their role within it and the distinction between the sacred, secular and profane. Christianity divided time between the sacred – that would reveal God’s Kingdom – and the secular, which marked the day to day changes of regimes and daily life. This division in time also reflected division in practice.

Before Christianity, there was a notion of the sacred and profane in antiquity, but it was Christian thought and teachings that introduced the secular into the ancient world.⁵⁶ In Greco-Roman antiquity, the sacred was what belonged to the realm of the gods and their cults, while the profane was what was outside the cults and their sanctuaries or “the sphere of ordinary life.”⁵⁷ The profane was not necessarily vulgar or wicked, but simply what was not a part of the worship of the gods and common. In Christianity, the “sacred” roughly corresponded to “the sphere of Christian belief, practices, institutions and cult,” while the “profane” inhabited a negative meaning and understanding and comes to denote what has been rejected by Christianity or seen to be blasphemous or harmful to the sacred.⁵⁸ The secular within the context of Christianity is what is common to all members of a society, regardless of religious belief. It was these

⁵⁴ Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 14.

⁵⁵ Oliver O’Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 211.

⁵⁶ Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 4.

⁵⁷ Markus, *Christianity, and the Secular*, 5.

⁵⁸ Markus, *Christianity, and the Secular*, 5.

institutions and practices that ensured the daily running of government, commerce, and education. Importantly, Christianity did not regard the secular as inherently negative like the profane, nor is exclusive to Christians. Rather, early Christian thought deemed the secular necessary and accepted or adapted the secular to fit sacred needs.⁵⁹ For the Greco-Romans such a neutral space was not explicitly needed or stated because their sacred beliefs were accommodating to religious diversity so long as differing practices were not harmful to *res publica*, but for Christianity, the secular space was needed to reconcile polytheistic practice with monotheistic heterodoxy. The secular allowed Christians to make a space for themselves in a society that was confused by the idea of single god and practice that disregarded civic duty. The neutrality of the secular, however, does not mean that there is perfect harmony between sacred, secular, and profane.

Within the Christian understanding of secular, there is a tension between sacred life and secular life. On one end is the profane, the blasphemous, and on the other, is the sacred, the grace of God; in the middle lies the secular, whereby too much or too little can be a problem. The New Testament has a complex attitude towards what scholars have called “the state,” and its “ambivalence towards secular power structures, institutions, and relationships” is as a result of tension between the earthly and heavenly powers. On the one hand, secular powers are understood as part of God’s eternal plan and have a role to play, but on the other, “by a demonic reversal of their role, they separate men from God.”⁶⁰ Simply, the New Testament treats worldly institutions of

⁵⁹ Markus, *Christianity, and the Secular*, 6.

⁶⁰ Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 15.

power, such as the Roman Senate as simultaneously part of God's plan, and as a source of distraction that leads individuals away from godly life. Too much investment into civic life, for example, could lead an otherwise godly man astray towards sins and corruption. However, so long as one prioritised godly duty and sacred life, secular duties could be fulfilled.

Roman citizens did not experience this tension between the sacred and everyday life before the widespread adoption of Christian doctrine. Greco-Roman religious cults made little distinction between secular or sacred duty. They overlapped such that to be a good citizen was to be pious and sacred responsibilities likewise harmonised with civic functions and obligations.⁶¹ For Roman Christians, however, dedication to the Christian word of God subordinated civic life to the sacred and explicitly excluded worship of other cults. This divide between the wider Roman society and the early Christian Church meant that each side "perceived each other and mutually alien" leading to tensions that persisted for two and half centuries that would have to be overcome.⁶²

It was, however, Christianity's creation of the secular into their worldview, that allowed for them to live harmoniously with Roman society. Though the Romans might not have understood Christian apprehension regarding civic activities, Christian acceptance of their necessity and utility allowed them to live side by side and even partake in important civic role and functions, thereby contributing to society and allowing themselves to live within it. Christian participation in Roman society would become increasingly important as Rome faced increasing internal, external challenges.

⁶¹ Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 16-17.

⁶² Markus, *Christianity and the Secular* 17.

Saeculum to Secular: Augustine and Early Christian Usage

Saint Augustine of Hippo, 354-430 AD, a father of the early Christian church and foundational scholar in the European canon, writes extensively on the inclusion and growth of Christianity in Roman culture. In his work, he grapples with questions of the sacred, profane, and secular and the interaction between the earthly and heavenly realms. At the time of writing *The City of God*, 413-427 AD, the Visigoths had sacked Rome and Rome were in a state of political turmoil where both Christian and Greco-Roman groups vied to establish an order that would recover Rome and reclaim the mantle of the Empire. Augustine intended this work to address the accusations of Pagan Romans who blamed the attack on Rome on the replacement of Christianity with the old cult.⁶³ It was imperative that Augustine account for the cultural and political tradition of Rome, which “had been the vehicle of pagan religious values.”⁶⁴ Augustine, however, contends with the fact that those institutions and traditions were inextricably linked to pagan religion and therefore had to be rejected by Christians. Therefore, Augustine made a case for the necessity of secular disciplines – which is to say the existing syllabus of Roman education – to be used in Christian education integrated and in service to Christian scripture.⁶⁵ In essence, Augustine sought to protect those aspects of secular Rome life that would help restore Rome and use those institutions to the benefit of Christianity.

⁶³ R. A. (Robert Austin) Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, [Rev. ed.]. (Cambridge, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 47.

⁶⁴ Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 37.

⁶⁵ Markus, 38.

Secular is Opaque

In order to ensure a stable society on this temporal earth, Augustine had the task of carving out and delineating the shared space of institutions for the Christians and pagans, in which both sides had a stake.⁶⁶ This space was not “not a third City between the earthly and the heavenly, but they are mixed, ‘inextricably intertwined’ state in this temporal life” and became the secular.⁶⁷ Markus emphasises two key features of Augustine’s understanding of the secular, I shall discuss each in turn, though they are related. First, Augustine declared the secular to be opaque and unknowable. The secular can offer no clues of Christ's return, no revelation of salvation and the sacred. The day to day activities of the *civitas terrena* is not connected to the *civitas dei*, separating secular activities from the sacred. By declaring the secular, or entire saeculum, be opaque and unknowable, Augustine not only made space for Christians and non-Christians to coexist but also “protected the richness of human culture from the hubris of those who wanted to relate every aspect of the world around them directly to the sacred.”⁶⁸ The secular bolstered the ability of non-Christian and Christian Romans to work together to restore Rome after the Visigoth attacks and made space for the vast array of cults within the empire.⁶⁹

Second, because *civitas terrena* is separated from *civitas dei*, the secular does not matter in the Kingdom of God. The unknowable events of secular history are

⁶⁶ Markus, 39.

⁶⁷ Markus, 39; Saint Augustine, *The City of God, Volume I*, ed. Marcus Dods, 2014, <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/45304>.

⁶⁸ Markus, Christianity and the Secular,37.

⁶⁹ This is not to say that Augustine was for diversity in the modern sense, but that heathen gods could be tolerated so long as they did not threaten Christians or societal stability or inhibit the growth of Christian orthodoxy.

insignificant to the coming of God's Kingdom and bear no importance to one's salvation or truth. For example, Augustine in discussing the history of man and how long man has been on the earth denounces the Egyptian idea that humanity has been on earth for a hundred thousand years, as it is a direct contradiction with the assertion that Adam, the first man, was created six thousand years ago:

But we, being sustained by divine authority in the history of our religion, have no doubt that whatever is opposed to it is most false, whatever may be the case regarding other things in secular books, which, whether true or false, yield nothing of moment to our living rightly and happily.⁷⁰

Whatever secular books or thinkers may have to say, regardless of whether they are true or false, make no difference in living a good Christian life. Augustine emphasised the teachings of the Christian Church over Roman and non-Christian thinkers and stressed that "livingly rightly and happily" could only be achieved through the grace of God, and not through political or social means. As Steven Ozment aptly writes: "Augustine praised the Christian church over the Roman political community as the 'only republic' in which one could find 'true justice' and recognised Roman government as only an aid to the greater peace of heaven."⁷¹

It is not the case, however, that because the secular was unknowable and meaningless that its institutions were immoral or unimportant. Among worldly and human institutions, Christians should reject only those that were guilty of demonic practices; these institutions can be called profane. The rest, however, "maybe superfluous and extravagant, others convenient and necessary for human purpose and of value when

⁷⁰ Augustine, *The City of God*, Book 18 Chapter 40.

⁷¹ Steven E. Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 139.

utilised with a life ordered by the love of God.”⁷² Specifically for Augustine’s Rome, this meant ensuring the stability and recovery of Rome following the attack by the Visigoths. To Augustine ensuring the long-term stability of Rome also safeguarded the future Christianity and insulated the church from the dangers and upheaval brought by the Visigoths.

Augustine argued that stability in the *civitas terrena* could be achieved through harmony, diversity, and agreement between all men and strongly encouraged peace over conflict:

This heavenly city, then, while it sojourns on earth, calls citizens out of all nations, and gathers together a society of pilgrims of all languages, not scrupling about diversities in the manners, laws, and institutions whereby earthly peace is secured and maintained, but recognising that, however various these are, they all tend to one and the same end of earthly peace. It therefore is so far from rescinding and abolishing these diversities, that it even preserves and adopts them, so long only as no hindrance to the worship of the one supreme and true God is thus introduced. Even the heavenly city, therefore, while in its state of pilgrimage, avails itself of the peace of earth, and, so far as it can without injuring faith and godliness, desires and maintains a common agreement among men regarding the acquisition of the necessaries of life, and makes this earthly peace bear upon the peace of heaven; for this alone can be truly called and esteemed the peace of the reasonable creatures, consisting as it does in the perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God and of one another in God... In its pilgrim state the heavenly city possesses this peace by faith; and by this faith it lives righteously when it refers to the attainment of that peace every good action towards God and man; for the life of the city is a social life.⁷³

⁷² Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 38.

⁷³ Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, Book 19 Chapter 17.

The stability, harmony, and peace in the *civitas terrena* were dependent upon the harmony between all men and therefore required a space where people from diverse groups could converse and obtain the necessities of life. In this passage, Augustine made a practical argument to make space for the secular and making a shared space with other cultures, traditions, nations, languages, and even other faiths. Diversity may exist in the secular realm so long as it does not infringe on anyone's faith, and most importantly Christianity because it protects Christians from external discord and conflict that would make a good and happy life much more difficult to live. By highlighting the importance of peace and harmony within the temporal realm, Augustine is both restricting secular institutions to the realm of secular, meaning they have no power on the sacred, and freeing them of responsibility to the sacred. By asserting the independence of the secular, Augustine also thwarted any "hostile takeover" of the shared institutions and customs in the space between the sacred and profane.⁷⁴

Secular as an Adjective

Another important feature to note in Augustine's writing is the particular usage of word "secular." Augustine's usage of words is careful and thoughtful, and Augustine, himself, parses out the conflicting meanings of "secular," and directly discusses the confusion in translation and understanding:

since no kind of earthly possession can be everlasting for any nation whatever, let him know that the word translated everlasting by our writers is what the Greeks term αἰώνιον, which is derived from αἰὼν, the Greek for *saculum*, an age. But the Latins have not ventured to translate this by secular, lest they should change the meaning into

⁷⁴ Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 37.

something widely different. For many things are called secular which so happen in this world as to pass away even in a short time; but what is termed αἰώνιον either has no end or lasts to the very end of this world.⁷⁵

Here Augustine stressed the importance of the impermanence of the secular, distinguishing it from αἰώνιον or the everlasting, and also reinforces the connection between *civitas terrena* and the secular. Unlike αἰώνιον, the secular is tied to the present, as far as what is secular may exist only for a very short time and will have no bearing on the eternal realm of *civitas dei*. What is secular will come to an end. Secular institutions of education, commerce, governance, even the city of Rome itself are temporary. Only God's Kingdom and Grace are eternal. He also notes that things are *called* "secular," which is to say they are described using "secular." This is the way the Augustine uses "secular" most often.

Throughout *the City of God*, Augustine uses "secular" eight times while using words like "temporal" and "profane" seventy-one and eleven times respectively.⁷⁶ This infrequent usage suggests that when Augustine used "secular" he meant something very specific rather than general. For Augustine, the "secular" was things or institution that were shared in common with Christians and non-Christians alike, that were part of the *civitas terrena* but not synonymous with it. Augustine used "secular" most often to describe things that are not concerned with God or the church: "secular games," "secular books," and "secular history."⁷⁷ While these things are not directly associated with God or ecclesiastical affairs, Augustine does not speak of them as though they are entirely

⁷⁵ Augustine, *The City of God*, Volume I.

⁷⁶ Data collected using Sinclair and Rockwell, *Voyant Tools*; Augustine, *The City of God, Volume I*; Augustine, *The City of God, Volume II*.

⁷⁷ Augustine, *The City of God*, Book 3, Chapter 18, Book 18 Chapter 18, and Book 16 Chapter 8.

separate or divorced from the sacred realm they still play a part and fit into God's sacred plan for the world.

He also uses "secular" to describe non-Christian Roman writers such as Varro and Cicero. They are secular writers to Augustine not only because they do not speak of religious things, but secular as far as they could not have known God as Roman pagans because God had not yet been revealed to them through divine history. Augustine, however, speaks of these writers positively and uses them as a basis for knowledge and understanding. Like with the secular games and histories, it is not that these authors had nothing important to say, quite the contrary to Augustine, but that they did not have a full picture of the world God has intended but were still a part of that. These authors could be used, through the teachings of God, by Christians to understand the secular realm and worldly affairs. It was not Augustine's desire to remove every facet of life that was not explicitly Christian but to create a harmony of ideas that would ultimately lead to *civitas dei*.

In summary, Augustine set out three key features of the secular: first, the secular was what was shared and common between Christians and Non-Christians; second, the secular was opaque and unknowable; and third, the secular was necessary to harmonious living between Christian and non-Christian groups. The creation of the secular was integral to creating the intellectual and social space that allowed and eventuated Christians and Romans to coexist. To Augustine, it was a necessary part of a harmonious society in the *civitas terrena*, which could be adapted and used in service of God. The secular, being separated from *civitas dei* and what is in common with even non-Christians, could not provide clues to salvation or contain the sacred. Rather, the secular functioned

as a tool to aid in the harmonious and peaceful activities of the late-Roman society. Though the secular categorised the early Christian world according to what was and was not sacred, the secular was not intended to be a divided or contested space in Greco-Roman Antiquity. Rather it was a conceptual creation that allowed Christians to justify and ameliorate the tension of living with other religions and other sects. Over the course of the next 200 years, however, the heterogeneous society in which Augustine was writing for gave way to a comparatively homogenous Christendom, and subsequently alter the meaning and place of the secular in medieval Europe.

Chapter II | From the Fall of Rome to the Rise of the Renaissance

In the centuries following the decline of Rome, starting in 476 AD, Christianity steadily spread throughout Europe. The early middle ages were characterised by the transformation of the Roman World into Christendom, which would look much different than the world and Christianity that Augustine knew. In the worlds of Markus, by the seventh century “the Church had come to swallow up the world” and shape the world in ways that early Christians could hardly have imagined.⁷⁸ Moreover, the place and meaning of the secular changed to fit the new world that was no longer divided into believers and unbelievers, but by gradations of sacredness and closeness to the Church.

In order to best understand this change in the secular, we must cover – broadly and in less detail than is ideal – the major events of the consolidation of church power over the course of the middle ages looking specifically at how these changes limit or change the secular space. I cannot give a full account of each event or process, but instead, will parse out how the growth of the church and relative homogenisation of society affected ideas and attitudes towards the secular. I will begin with the expansion of Christianity in the fifth century and move through to the fourteenth century highlighting events that delineated powers between the Church and secular lords. This chapter ends with a close analysis of the English works of John Wycliffe (1320-1385) who wrote extensively and critically of the Church’s accumulation of power and special privilege and the tensions this created with the secular world. I argue that discussions surrounding the

⁷⁸ Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 86.

secular throughout the middle ages increasingly become discussions about the right of rule and power between the monarchs of Europe and the Church and lay the foundations for the political change that would come in the sixteenth century.

Disagreements regarding who ought to rule and in whose name one ought to rule, which come to a head in the Reformation, emanated from conflicts and institutions of the middle ages.

Expansion of Christianity

In the two centuries after Augustine's death, the Christian church would grow far beyond what it had been in his own time and replace the Roman Empire as the unifying force throughout the Mediterranean and Europe. The fifth through to the ninth centuries saw a concerted effort to spread Christianity throughout Europe far beyond what had previously been Roman imperial territories. Pope Gregory I, 590-604 AD, was the first of several popes to make a concerted effort to spread Christianity throughout Europe and would be later remembered as a great champion in the growth of Christianity. He famously sent missions into northern Europe and sent Augustine of the Canterbury to Britain, and successfully began converting the various group of Britons, a feat that would have seemed impossible just a few hundred years earlier. By the ninth century, Europe and its rulers had largely been converted to Christianity and eliminated polytheistic and non-Christian groups. It was not the case that the early medieval world was in complete harmony with one another, or that there were not competing factions and allegiances, but rather that divisions were finer and less obvious than they had been for Augustine. Where Augustine's world was divided into Christians, and "the unregenerate world outside of it," for Pope Gregory I, the world was divided "between

the less and the more perfect within the Church.”⁷⁹ This relative homogeneity changed how contemporaries conceptualised the secular because the secular was no longer shared among several groups with incompatible beliefs, but a single belief group with different ends. I do not want to give the impression that there was little variation of difference in medieval society, but that the nature of those differences had very different starting premises than the world that Augustine experienced. For medieval European peoples, the world was ruled by one god, and he alone had the power of salvation.

Consolidation of power

Along with the expansion of the Christian community, the Church as an institution grew in size and power over the course of the middle ages to become the preeminent authority in Europe. In the early middle ages particularly, it was not at all clear which powers were to rule over whom, the church and what could be called secular princes vied for power over one another, each claiming the legitimate authority over the other.⁸⁰ These disagreements occurred in part because neither the church nor lords of the early middle ages were necessarily strong enough to exercise power uniformly or consistently over time and space, and so they were left to fill in voids where and when they existed. Augustine, being the good Roman that he was, looked to the state and existing civic infrastructure to facilitate social cohesion; in medieval Europe, no such institution existed, and so rulers and church officials were to negotiate these problems

⁷⁹ Markus, 86. Around the ninth century the Church itself begins to show cracks and division between the sees, but they were all at the very least in agreement about their shared Christianity.

⁸⁰ Yet another point of separation from Late antiquity to the Medieval era: it would have been inconceivable for the priests and spiritual orders of antiquity to have real political power over the state rulers. Influence, perhaps, but raw power, no. In certain circumstance, Roman senators and political leader might hold religious offices, but this was by nature of their participation with the *res publica* and not because there was intrinsic power in religious office to effect civic action.

without a clear solution.⁸¹ A prominent example of these disagreements can be seen in the actions of Otto I, the King of Germany from 936-973 and Holy Roman Emperor from 962-973. Throughout his rule Otto used the church as a tool for his strength, appointing his allies Bishops within the church – including his Brother as the bishop of Cologne – and allowed these bishoprics to exercise royal prerogative, including levying taxes and maintaining armies. For Otto, it seemed clear that royal authority trumped church authority, but Church rulers were just as convinced of the opposite. The Gregorian Reforms (1050-1080) worked to consolidate and centralise Church power by asserting the supremacy of the Church over royal power and prohibiting “lay investiture” or the royal appointment of bishops and priests. The *Dictus Papae* (1075) codified the pope's power and infallibility within the church and asserted his supremacy over royal powers. *Dictus Papae* gave the pope, among other privileges, sole power to appoint church officials and depose emperors and was a direct response to the actions of kings like Otto I.

That contemporaries codified the privileges of the pope in such a way, suggests that it was not obvious to medieval peoples who should rule over whom and that these questions were up for discussion. Norman F. Cantor argues, and I am inclined to agree, that medieval intellectual history is intriguing in large part because, before the thirteenth century, medieval peoples were left to sort out the spiritual, physical, and societal conundrums of the day without the support of a system of law or public administration.⁸² Moreover, that “until well into the middle ages and only fitfully and in

⁸¹ Norman F. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc, 1991), 40.

⁸² Cantor, 40.

certain places, they were not routinised into behaviour patterns dictated by a technologically powerful law and government that predetermined the behavioural relationship of the two spheres of human experience, the spiritual and the material.”⁸³ The independent growth of the Church and secular lords separated effective power and diluted it from the strength of force Augustine had known, but rather ruled through constant negotiation between powers.⁸⁴ In some ways, Augustine had helped to establish the Church as the preeminent authority in the *civitas terrena*, subjugating other lay powers to its divine grace in theory, but in practice, he made a case for the acceptance of “secular” power in Christian life. Both the church and the lords of *civitas terrena* would have their role, even if those roles were unclear. How those roles were to be determined was a process of constant negotiation.

Throughout the middle ages, kings, emperors, lords struggled with church authorities to expand and solidify their power. Stephen Ozment argues that the Church’s high estimation of itself and comparatively low estimation of the ability and intentions of temporal powers was largely in self-defence.⁸⁵ Moreover, that when forced by secular lords and princes to defend itself, “no other medieval institution had richer intellectual resources for convincing an age open to religious argument of its authority.”⁸⁶ The power of belief held by the Church greatly affected the way in which negotiation of power played out over the course of the middle ages. Merovingian and Carolingian Kings, however, had little difficulty subduing and overpowering the church when

⁸³ Cantor, 40.

⁸⁴ The negotiated quality of early Christianity may have been an integral part of its success in spreading throughout Europe and its later consolidation of power.

⁸⁵ Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 138.

⁸⁶ Ozment, 138.

necessary. Ozment notes that Carolingians bishops appear at times to be “royal bureaucrats and agents of the state” and took church lands to provide fiefs for their loyal supporters.⁸⁷ By the tenth century, however, the Church and its clergy, through monastic reform, were determined to be the sole rulers of the spiritual realm.⁸⁸ As Ozment says, “the medieval church stubbornly resisted all forms of true secular autonomy, whether the independent study of philosophy apart from theology or the independent operation of secular political power apart from church oversight and freedom to interfere.”⁸⁹

The unrelenting march of Christendom papered over many differences between groups throughout Europe and created a comparatively homogenous world to Augustine’s Rome. Therefore, the need for a neutral space to conduct the daily affairs of *civitas terrena* became unnecessary, when all powers involved from the Church to lords were Christian; however, the secular did not disappear as a conceptual idea or fall out of use linguistically. Rather, the meaning of the secular changed as did its space of operation, to fit the needs and understanding of the new medieval world.

The word itself continued to be used by Medieval Christians in the Latin “*seculare*” and its various forms; however, the meaning diminished slightly. Augustine’s use of the word as an adjective continued, but “secular” was no longer what was shared or common, but simply *civitas terrena* or “this world.”⁹⁰ Moreover, the division was now only between *civitas terrena* and *civitas dei*, where *civitas terrena* had collapsed into a

⁸⁷ Ozment, 140.

⁸⁸ Ozment, 4.

⁸⁹ Ozment, 13.

⁹⁰ R. E. Latham, Revised Medieval Latin Word-List from British and Irish Sources. Prepared by R.E. Latham Under the Direction of a Committee Appointed by the British Academy (London: Published for the British Academy by the Oxford University Press, 1965), 429.

comparatively homogenous state, rather than the Christian and non-Christian division in Augustine's time. So, the distinction is more simply between those things that are of the church and those things that are not. The *civitas terrena* or now "secular" included the entire temporal world and the lay people, lord or otherwise, who occupied it and most importantly were subordinate to the church.

The fourth Lateran Council of 1215 codified the subservience of the secular to the church and reinforced the primacy of Church and its right to rule. Canons 67-70 of the 4th Lateran Council address Jewish and Muslim peoples living in Christendom insisting – among other things - that they must distinguish themselves through dress as not Christians so that they may not be confused for Christians and that Jews are disqualified from holding public office. These edicts suggest to me that though Non-Christians may have been a part of what is considered the secular, in so far as they were a part of the temporal world, the secular was not a neutral space during the middle ages, it was an increasingly Christian space in which non-Christians were forced to lived and negotiate. The portioned nature of the medieval usage of "secular" continued throughout the middle ages into the 13th century when secular entered into the English vernacular.

13th Century Writers and the Introduction into English

Before the standardization of spelling in the sixteenth century, it seems that in this period the dominant English spelling was the phonetic "seculer," or sometimes "seculere." I have chosen the modern spelling throughout this section for clarity. However, there were many alternate spellings, and Latin continued to be the predominant language of writing throughout this period.

“Secular” entered into English in the 13th century and functioned much as the medieval Latin “seculare” had from the seventh century. “Secular” came to describe non-cloistered clergy, often called secular canon, who lived out and about in the profane world and distinguished them from their more respected colleagues who lived in monastic seclusion or within the institutions of the church. Occasionally “secular” described affairs and people of governance who fell outside of the church, such as lords and courts.⁹¹ In this usage, “secular” was predominantly paired with a noun, such as a priest or clergymen or prince and served only to distinguish the secular from the non-secular. I have found no example of the secular independently of a noun. The secular existed only in relation to the church and its power. Importantly, in the 13th century, the usage of the word of “secular” deemed the non-secular or sacred as the default. Secular priests and clergy were the exceptions, not the rule, and when speaking of “secular princes”, the language used to describe them reinforced the Church’s position that secular powers ranked below that of the ecclesiastical counterparts.

Early usage of the “secular” in English, documented circa 1290, most often differentiated secular clergy from the regular clergy, and only sometimes referred to things outside of the church. The first record of the use of “secular” in English was documented in *The Early South-English Legendary, or Lives of Saints*, and appears four times.⁹² Saint Edmund after having performed a number of weather miracles was made a member of the secular clergy: “At salesburi he was i-maket: Canoun seculer; prouendes

⁹¹ OED, ‘Secular, Adj. and N.’; Schäfer, *Early Modern English Lexicography*, 399.

⁹² Carl Horstmann, *The Early South-English Legendary, or Lives of Saints* (London, Pub. for the Early English text society by N. Trübner & co., 1887), 133,169,270 and 442; ‘Secular, OED, Adj. and N.’ The quantitative data was collected through the use of Voyant tools. Sinclair and Rockwell, *Voyant Tools*.

of churches he hadde: and was treasurer.”⁹³ Similarly, Robert of Gloucester, a chronicler, also uses “secular” in the late 13th century to differentiate the clergy: “Cannons þer were seculers.”⁹⁴ And again, appears in the poem *Cursor Mundi* - “Enentes clergis seculers/ To þe preist at frain it feres.”⁹⁵ In these earliest instances, authors used “secular” to distinguish between the different broad types of clergy. Those who lived in monastic institutions were the default clergy, needing no descriptor, while the “secular clergy” were those members of the church who lived their lives in the *civitas terrena* and outside of monostatic church institutions. Thirteenth-century chroniclers make this distinction explicit in *The Early South-English Legendary*: “So þat he was Monek with-Inne: and seculer with-oute.”⁹⁶ Inside of a monastery and man was a Monk, a man of the sacred, but outside of the church, he was merely a secular man of the world.

Thirteenth-century contemporaries also used “secular” to describe worldly affairs, as separate from the church and similarly them from the sacred.⁹⁷ This use often carried a negative or pejorative undercurrent as things that were non-religious and therefore not sacred, reinforcing the supremacy of the spiritual realm over the secular. Again, in the *South English Legendary* we see “secular” describing the courts that would condemn Thomas Becket: “In seculer court to demen me: and þat nolde noust wel fare.”⁹⁸ Where there was a church version of a thing, be it clergy, court or prince, medieval writers presumed the sacred version to be the default, and I would argue the primary iteration.

⁹³ Horstmann, *The Early South-English Legendary*, 442.

⁹⁴ of Gloucester Robert and William Aldis Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester* (London: Printed for H.M. Stationery off., by Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1887), 418, <http://archive.org/details/metricalchronicl01robe>.

⁹⁵ Richard Morris et al., *Cursor Mundi: A Northumbrian Poem of the XIVth Century* (London; Toronto: Published for the Early English Text Society by K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1874), 1516.

⁹⁶ Horstmann, *The Early South-English Legendary*, 169.

⁹⁷ OED, ‘Secular, Adj. and N.’; Schäfer, *Early Modern English Lexicography*, 399.

⁹⁸ Horstmann, *The Early South-English Legendary*, 133.

Through the use of language, particularly the written language that the church had substantial control over, the church was able to demonstrate the subordination of the secular to the spiritual. However, by the late 14th century, secular branched out from being solely an adjective to a noun, secularity, and adverb, secularly, suggesting increased usage of the idea and transformation of understanding.

This early usage demonstrates two things: first, the prevailing understanding of the world was now a sacred one rather than a world divided between the secular and the sacred, as Augustine had described it. Moreover, lines of demarcations had shifted from non-Christians versus Christians to cloistered (and therefore sacred Christians) versus lay Christians. Medieval usage of “secular” followed from Latin usage but adapted to fit the changes of the middle ages. The “secular” now had to fit a world that was divided into degrees of sacredness. Closeness to God was a strict hierarchy, and physically partitioned the most sacred places and people from the laity through practices such as monastic seclusion and rood screens.

By the late middle ages, the neutral space of late antiquity was firmly Christian space, in which non-Christian “others” would have to work around at best, or at worst be rejected. The exclusion of non-Christians in the secular space can clearly be seen in canons 67-70 of the 4th Lateran Council that demanded that Jewish and Muslim peoples must distinguish themselves through dress as not Christians so that they may not be confused for Christians and disqualified Jews from holding public office. These edicts suggest to me that though Non-Christians may have been a part of what is considered the secular, in so far as they were a part of the temporal world, the secular was not a neutral space during the middle ages. The secular was an increasingly Christian space in

which non-Christians were forced to lived and negotiate.⁹⁹ Most importantly, late medieval contemporary's use of "secular" reinforced the Church's subordination of the secular to the church authority.

The political and struggles of the medieval period were animated but the tension and discussion of the supremacy of the sacred and power over the secular. Secular powers sought to delineate their jurisdictions in an increasingly cloistered world and were subordinated to the power of the Church to varying degrees of success and acquiesces. The Church's insistence on the supremacy of the sacred and their own power, however, continued to be challenged by secular powers and thinkers within the church who were sceptical of the infallibility of the Church.

Wycliffe

One thinker who challenged the Church's supremacy was John Wycliffe (1320-1385). Wycliffe was a prominent English scholastic philosopher and theologian of the late fourteenth century. He was deeply critical of the implicit privileges of the late medieval church and challenged the primacy of church rule. On more than on occasion, and increasingly after 1380, Wycliffe came into direct conflict with the Church over his criticism of monastic orders, challenges to transubstantiation and insistence on the power of secular rulers. Wycliffe opposed the supremacy the Church and the acts that had solidified its power over the course of the middle ages and instead staunchly supported lay power and authority. Though Wycliffe could be considered radical in his thought – and certainly was not on good terms with the church – his argument in favour

⁹⁹ Much more could be research an explored about non-Christians and the secular space throughout the middle ages and offers a rich area of opportunity.

of secular authority was not new. Wycliffe and his objections to church power should be understood as a continuation of the 500-year-old disagreement between secular and church powers that started between the Carolingians and early papal authorities.

Wycliffe wrote his early work in Latin, as this was the standard for the learned discourse of the time; however, later in his life, he chose to write more often in the vernacular.¹⁰⁰ His work is an excellent window into late medieval thought on the secular not only because he was preoccupied with issues of power distribution between church and secular bodies, but because we have access to many of his sermons. Wycliffe's sermons offer an opportunity to understand how these ideas might have been heard and understood by the laity and not just church officials and secular princes. Additionally, as a scholastic, he gives a good account of his opposition's position that we can use to reconstruct how those against Wycliffe may have thought about ideas of the secular. Through his arguments, we can parse a picture of his objection and subsequently on the collective understanding of the place of secular in the late middle ages.

By the late middle ages, contemporaries maintained that lordship and rule over the people derived from the divine. That is to say that God granted temporal persons and institutions the authority to rule and that only power granted by God was legitimate and just. Attempts to take power through force or sinful action were not legitimate and therefore unjust. There were, nonetheless, competing opinions on how those temporal persons and institutions were granted authority by God, and if grace had to be funnelled

¹⁰⁰ There is opportunity to do a lot of work with Wycliffe's Latin work and large corpus of English works. He was a prolific writer and much of his work has been translated through the Lollards society and made available digitally in many archives making his work ideal for digital analysis and close inspection.

through “official channels.”¹⁰¹ The prevailing, though weakening thought during Wycliffe’s time was the “ultramontane theory.” The “ultramontane theory” held that authority to rule was just only when it was officially sanctioned by the Roman Church, as the arbiter of God’s grace on earth. “Any other authority, such as that possessed by heath or sinful rulers, could not be acceptable to God and was therefore unlawful.”¹⁰² The “ultramontane theory” was the theoretical underpinning of the Church’s position that secular powers were subordinate to the church; without the church, the secular powers could never legitimately rule, and there had no legitimacy in and of themselves.

Wycliffe, however, took a much different view on how God granted authority. Sceptical of the privileges of the Church and the monastic orders, Wycliffe looked to the laity and the English government to become instruments of reform. Rather than the Church or the friars as he believed the wealth and security afford to churchmen hindered them from making changes that might affect the quality of life to which they had become accustomed.¹⁰³ Therefore, Wycliffe had to reverse the ultramontane position to theoretically justify the actions and power of the laity.¹⁰⁴ Those who argued against the ultramontane theory, Wycliffe and secular lords included, argued that God bestowed grace directly on the individual who ought to rule, and did not need the mediation of the church or “official channels.”

Wycliffe’s argument rests on two important points. First, that all power and authority, no matter if ecclesiastical or secular, was grace from God who alone was the

¹⁰¹ K. B. McFarlane, *John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Nonconformity*, Teach Yourself History Library (London: English Universities Press, 1952), 60.

¹⁰² McFarlane, 60.

¹⁰³ McFarlane, 61.

¹⁰⁴ McFarlane, 61.

true ruler and owner of all things. This meant that princes had to have the right of rule bestowed upon them directly from God, and not through the Church in Rome. Rather, as Steve Ozment said, “property and possessions belonged to men secondarily and accidentally, not primarily and necessarily.”¹⁰⁵ And second, as power and authority are not intrinsic rights of any man, “*rightful* lordship on earth must depend on an owner’s worthiness and merit, that is, his agreement with the divine standard of conduct.”¹⁰⁶ Those rulers who abuse God’s grace, commit acts of sin and rule unjustly forfeit their right to rule, and therefore their right to the property and possessions, “even though human law and tradition may permit them to keep them,” because their property and possession always belong first to God.¹⁰⁷ The latter part of Wycliffe’s argument not only justified the confiscation of property from “unworthy” member of the Church, but also the “righteous” laity’s confiscation of the property and possessions of unjust rulers.¹⁰⁸ According to Wycliffe, the Church was no more sacred than “the secular” or at the very least, no more likely to be granted the grace of God than secular persons or institutions. From this argument, it follows that the claimed primacy of the Church’s authority was flawed and could hinder the common experience of sacred rather than facilitate it.

Wycliffe’s contentious position reversed the trend of the Middle Ages in which the church had assumed primacy over secular lords, and therefore elevated the secular and laity from where the Church had placed them. Wycliffe’s view of how God invests power in temporal persons and institutions in many ways restored aspects of the secular for which Augustine had argued. Namely, because power is vested directly by God and

¹⁰⁵ Ozment, *The Age of Reform (1250-1550)*, 166.

¹⁰⁶ Ozment, 166.

¹⁰⁷ Ozment, 166.

¹⁰⁸ Ozment, 166.

not through the Church, it removed the Church's ability to judge the secular and restored the unknowability of the secular that was central to Augustine's conception of the secular. Wycliffe's reversal of the "ultramontane theory" changed the way the secular was positioned in relation to the sacred. It was not that he believed the secular ruled over the sacred, but that if the sacred was everywhere - which it was - then the secular did not need to be ruled over by an imperfect Church.

For Wycliffe, one could judge a secular ruler by *worthiness* and action that needed no external authority in the form of the Church, and indeed church rulers could be judged in the same manner. The actions of a ruler - secular or sacred - could be judged to be righteous, and if they were found wanting - by either the laity or the priesthood, in or out of the church - they could be removed and replaced with someone more befitting God's grace, regardless of papal authority.

A Petition to the King and Parliament

Wycliffe's insistence on the autonomy of secular powers and folly of the church and monastic orders is laid out in his 1382 petition to the Parliament, where he addresses four main issues. First, that men of religious order should be able to freely - and without impunity - leave religious orders; second, the King is within his right to rule over the church as he sees fit; third, tithes and offerings ought to be withheld from or bestowed to the clergy based upon their merit and desert; and fourth, the teaching of the Eucharist is open to interpretation, and is allegorical rather than literal.¹⁰⁹ Wycliffe indirectly addressed the

¹⁰⁹ John Wycliffe and Thomas Arnold, *Select English Works of John Wycliffe: Volume Three* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1869), 508-20, <http://archive.org/details/selectenglishwo05wyclgoog>.

place of the secular in the first three points of his petition and is at minimum anti-clerical if not pro-secular.

In his first article, Wycliffe argued that men of the religious orders ought to be able to leave them without impunity. He argued that to lead a good and sacred life does not require monastic orders or churches, but a good life could be achieved in the secular world so long as one adhered faithfully and truly to the teachings of Christ.¹¹⁰ The Church argued that seclusion from the secular world protected friars, monks and other religious men from the temptation and evils of the secular world. Wycliffe, sceptical of the Church's argument, however, asked if the monastic life was more godly than the secular, then why did the Church appoint religious men to offices that obliged them to partake in the secular world and its luxuries? He argued that no religion or institution made by "sinful men" could be more Godly or perfect than the "clene religioun and reule of presthod, by forme of þe gospel."¹¹¹

Wycliffe objected to the argument that the Church and orders had special knowledge of Christ or that they protected Christian doctrine. Rather he argued that the power and privilege afforded to the church rulers potentially distorted Christ's rule by allowing them to decide what could and could not be taught. Therefore, he argues "herof it sueþ openly þat men may lawefully forsake privat religioun, and kepe Critis religioun in his clenness, siþ it is most perfit."¹¹² Wycliffe did not place special importance on where or by whom one was taught the gospels, but rather that they were faithfully and correctly taught. The political machination of the Church made them no more fit or unfit to teach

¹¹⁰ Wycliffe and Arnold, 509–11.

¹¹¹ Wycliffe and Arnold, 512.

¹¹² Wycliffe and Arnold, 511.

the word of God than secular priests, and so Wycliffe sought to remove the physical and theological barriers that excluded the laity from spiritual practice.

Wycliffe's second article that the king was within his right to govern over the Church extended from his argument that the right to rule was divinely given by God directly to the ruler and did not require the mediation of the pope or church. He goes further to say that the belief that friars and churchmen may disobey the King is heresy and can lead to treason and unholy behaviour. Wycliffe argues that these sorts of men, friars or not, are the foulest of enemies to England:

For þe chief lordship in þis¹¹³ lond of alle temporalties, boþe of secular men and religious, perteyneþ to þe kyng of his general governynge, Ffor ellis he were not kyng of alle Englond, but of a litel part þerof. Þefore þe men þat bysyen hem to take away þys lordshipe fro þe kyng, as don freris and here fautours, in þis point ben shaper enemys and traitours þan Ffrensse men and alle oþere naciouns.¹¹⁴

In doing this, Wycliffe restores the neutrality of the secular space that the Church had been treating with increasing disdain. By rejecting the seclusion of the sacred, Wycliffe renewed the space for the secular to exist outside of the shadow the church. It seems that for Wycliffe, the sacred was everywhere. God was in everything. And so, it follows the goodness, grace, sin and temptation too would similarly have no boundaries in the temporal realm or adhere to church distinction of secular and sacred.

Wycliffe argued that ruler of the church and secular lords should be held to the same standards and that the church primacy was misguided. "Þis gospel telliþ how men shulden flee al ypoerisie, for among fyve pridis þis is moost perilous. And, for þis

¹¹³ Wycliffe and Arnold, 515.

¹¹⁴ Wycliffe and Arnold, 516.

ypocrisie is bope in religious and secular lordis, þerfore biddiþ Crist to hise,¹¹⁵ He stresses that Christ would punish both pride and hypocrisy, in both religious and secular rulers. By holding both to the same standards, Wycliffe removes the privilege of the church, insofar as they cannot only be judged by themselves, but externally, and extended the sacred space outside of the church. The extension of the sacred removes lines of demarcation used by medieval thinkers in organising their world. Where the church had physically partitioned from the laity via monastic orders and rood screens, Wycliffe argued that the Church could not contain the sacred. God's grace - and wrath - was available to everyone. Wycliffe instead emphasised the importance of the bible and lay participation in leading a Godly life over the rituals and decadences of the Roman Church. Moreover, the need for a particularly defined secular space was not as necessary for Wycliffe. For him, the secular was synonymous with the world, and a place for earthly life to play out, full of sin and temptation, but also opportunities for good and grace.

Lords and laymen who participated in the daily and necessary activities of life could be restored to just and Christian life. Participation in daily affairs, according to Wycliffe, did not exclude anyone from living according to the gospels. Indeed, Wycliffe argued that all men of all stations have different reasons for worshipping Christ:

Seculer lordis shulden worshipe Crist, and þat þis gold
shulde teche hem; preestis also shulden worshipe Crist, bi
þe lore of þis encence; and alle communes shulden

¹¹⁵ John Wycliffe and Thomas Arnold, *Select English Works of John Wyclif: Volume Two* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1869), 13, <http://archive.org/details/selectenglishwo02wyclgoog>.

worshipe Crist, for we ben alle dedle, and in tyme of oure
deþ and afterward we haue noon helpe but him.¹¹⁶

Though perhaps Wycliffe discusses the secular more than his contemporaries, it is important to note that relative to his spiritual preoccupations, his discussion on the secular are sparse. It was not the case that Wycliffe was advocating for the sole rule of the secular or the abolition of the church, but rather that he was critical of the Church's unchallenged authority and growing opulence. He saw the laity and secular powers as a check against the Church's power and hoped that through the secular the sacred could flourish.

Conclusion

It is easy to assume that because Europe had become Christendom, that the secular world has disappeared or been relegated to the fringes; however, the objections raised by Wycliffe suggest that this was still a contested space in the later middle ages. Wycliffe particular objection to Church power was an extension of long-standing disagreements that reach as far back as Gregory the Great and had been played out in the machination of medieval political dramas consistently throughout the period. Wycliffe's views on the secular would help to set the stage for the later assertion of secular power that would come in the sixteenth century, but ultimately the Church prevailed during the middle ages and even though the criticism and schism the church exerted its power over secular lords.

The world that Wycliffe knew was very different from the world that Augustine had written for and the place of the secular similarly adjusted. Throughout this chapter, I

¹¹⁶ Wycliffe and Arnold, *Select English Works of John Wyclif: Volume One*, 345–346.

have traced how the changes to Christianity over the course of the middle ages changed the relationship of the sacred to the secular and the place of the secular in society.

Moving forward into the discussion on Reformation thinking, I wish to highlight four key ideas. First, that Europe, though linguistically and culturally diverse, had been unified under Christianity and would remain so until the Reformations of the sixteenth century.

The relative spiritual homogeneity of Europe during the middle ages altered the place of the secular in society making it a Christian but not sacred space. The secular no longer had to be neutral to accommodate differing groups.¹¹⁷ Christianity would answer for all.

The unknowability and protection of the secular afforded by Augustine's division largely disappeared in the middle ages, as daily actions and secular law increasingly became a point of spiritual contention. The secular was still a shared space in the middle ages however it was a space that was shared with the laity by the church.

Second, the uniting force of Christendom subordinated the secular to the Church, not because it was obvious or uncontested, but because it was the institution most able to take advantage of the spiritual argument that medieval peoples were inclined to believe. The force of spirituality that animated medieval life overshadowed the efforts of secular lords to act autonomously. Secular lords, no matter how convinced of their autonomy, were no match for the wrath of God that the Church could invoke. Third, the Church's supremacy was contested, and the order of the great chain of being had been questioned since its inception. The intellectual and political roots of the scepticism Wycliffe gave voice to begin in the time of Gregory the Great and would continue for at

¹¹⁷ This is not to say that there were not minority groups in Europe, but that Europe had become Christian. There is an opportunity for research into localities that had mixed demographics. These locations may have experienced the changes to the secular differently, or perhaps protected that space more than their homogenous counterparts.

least another two hundred years after Wycliffe. And lastly, that the disagreements and discussion over the place of the secular were intrinsically linked to discussions of power and who ought to wield it. The element of power becomes an increasingly important aspect of discussions surrounding the secular moving into the early modern period but also plays a significant role in the ideas of the secular during the middle ages. The Church's desire to subordinate the secular lords, be it politically or spiritually, was to maintain their considerable power over Christendom. The power of the Church had afforded the higher-ranking members considerable material comfort and enshrining the supremacy of that power in the word of God solidified their power such that dissent was hearsay.

Chapter III | Reforming the Secular and Reformation Thinking

The disagreements over the totality of the Church's power that animated the middle ages came to a crescendo during the Reformation. The criticisms levied against the Church by Reformation thinkers were not new - they had many vocal predecessors- but Reformation thinkers captured the zeitgeist of early modern anxieties about power and faith and intersections between in a way that late medieval thinkers did not. For early modern contemporaries, it was not as clear that the Church had the right answers to questions of authority and sovereignty – or even how to live rightly-, as it had been for their medieval counterparts. Church schisms and growing discontent at the accumulation of wealth lowered the Church's claim to Divine authority. Moreover, increasing political tensions between the Church and secular rulers cast doubt that spiritual and political allegiance would or could align. To whom were early moderns supposed to be obedient? The Church? The State? God? Could one be obedient to all, or only some? Furthermore, how could the righteous navigate these tensions? These were the problems that the reformation confronted, and which its thinkers were confronted. In this context of uncertainty, that new discussions on the role of the secular occurred.¹¹⁸

In the previous chapter, I have demonstrated that the place and content of the secular are historically situated and not simply a government with religion removed. The space and content of the secular adapted to the changing political and spiritual climate. Thus, it stands to reason that during the Reformation, a time of great spiritual and political upheaval, that took place a demonstrable change in the understanding and

¹¹⁸ For a comprehensive discussion on the tensions and circumstance of the Reformation see, Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

content of the secular. The purpose of this exploration is to understand to what extent the Reformation affected the idea of the secular in Christian Europe.

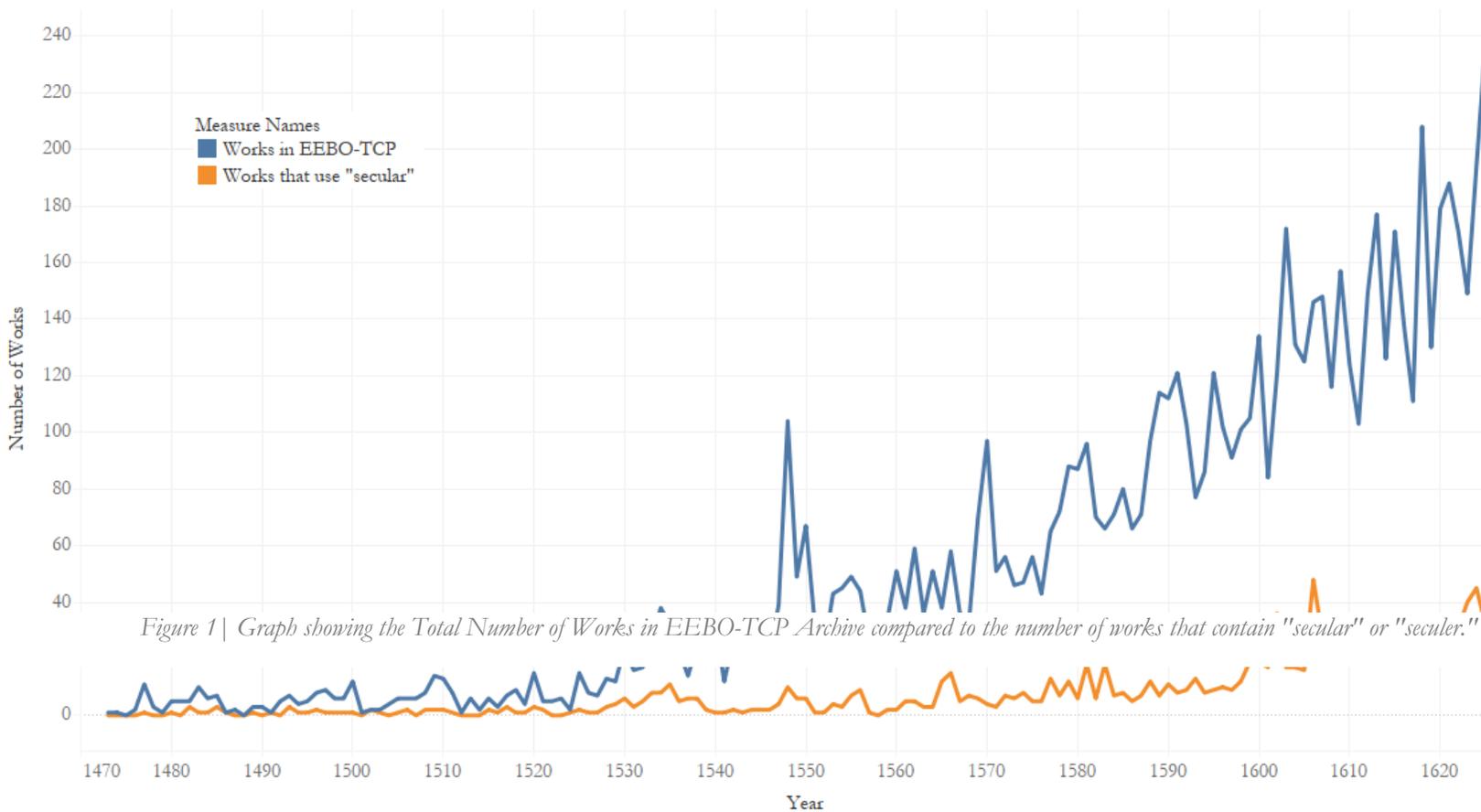
I argue that although early Reformation thinking did not directly address or seek to increase the secular space, early thinkers paved the way for the secular space to grow and become increasingly important to early modern life. The Reformation did not secularise Europe, insofar as it removed religion from public life, but instead wed secular power and sacred right like never before. For much of northern Europe, the Pope and Church in Rome was no longer the arbiter of God's grace, they had been usurped by secular authorities. The power to rule now flowed directly to the rulers. This did not mean that kings were now less likely to sin or that they now held sacred spiritual powers. Indeed they were still as prone to sin and unjust ruling as ever, but that they answer directly to God for their wrongdoings than to another man, up to and including the pope.

To make sense of this transition of power, this chapter will begin by examining macro data of the works published that mention "secular" and the frequency of use from 1473-1603 to provide context for the close reading of the primary sources which will follow.¹¹⁹ To provide a foundation and comparison of English sources, I provided an account of Luther's ideas on the secular and secular authority, and then move on the English works and authors such as Tyndale and More. The chapter ends, by examining trends in the use of "secular" over the course of the sixteenth-century and closing thoughts on the place of the secular by the end of the reign of Elizabeth I.

¹¹⁹ I begin with 1473 as it where the EEBO-TCP archive begins, and go through until the end of the reign of Elizabeth I.

Macro Digital Analysis

Digital text analysis offers new methods of research to understand better the early modern usage of “secular” and the distinction contemporaries made between the sacred



and secular. There are, however, some things to bear in mind when looking at the data.

First that the data only reflects what digital analysis tools can read and has been digitised.

For the EEBO-TCP archive, which has a total of 50 331 digitised works that text

analysis software can process.¹²⁰ Of those sources, the majority were published after 1640, which means that sources for the Reformation period are relatively limited compared to the seventeenth century; however, this limitation of available sources is reflected in the physical document as well. The number of sources available, digital or text, grows exponentially from the middle of the seventeenth century, so I maintain that digital sources available follow general availability trends. Though there are not as many texts available in digital format for earlier periods, particularly in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, comparing data over prolonged periods of time reveals patterns and correlation in word use and provides context for renewed analysis of the complex discussions surrounding the secular during the Reformation.¹²¹

¹²⁰ 'EEBO-TCP: Early English Books Online - Text Creation Partnership', accessed 26 March 2018, <http://www.textcreationpartnership.org/tcp-eebo/>.

¹²¹ For most graphs and tables I have combined the raw data for "secular" and "seculer" to create more streamlined data; however, "seculer" is the predominate spelling until the 1540's and "secular" does not completely take off until after 1625.

When I began the digital analysis of early modern texts, I expected to see a dramatic increase in the number of instances of “secular” over the course of the sixteenth century. If the Reformation did, in fact, begin to secularise Western European societies then it stands to reason that one would find an increase of writing that discusses the idea; however, I found that the usage of “secular” remains largely stable and consistent within the context of the increase of printed documents. One may argue that

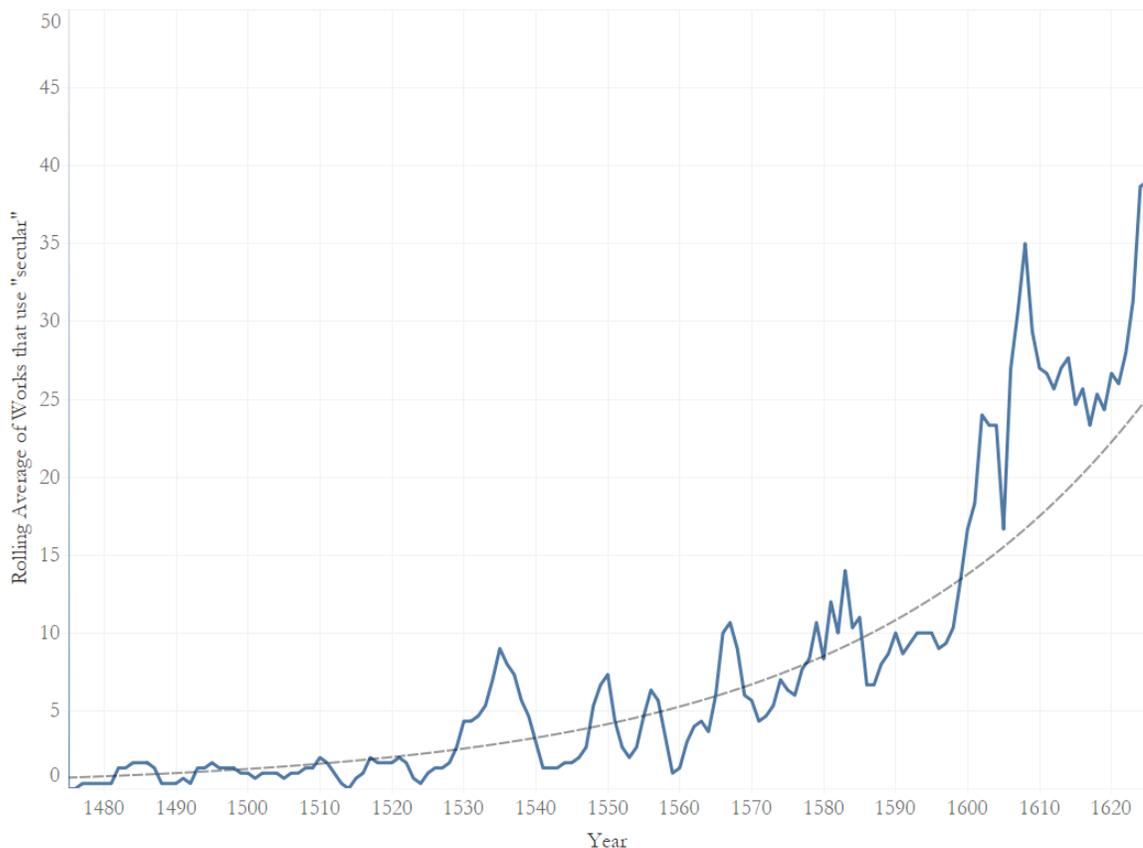


Figure 2 | Graph showing Rolling Average of the Raw Number of Works contain Secular by Year (1473-1625). The dotted line indicates an average trend.

this is an indication that the Reformation did not further secularisation, but I think that this is simply an indication of the way in which early moderns understood “secular” and how they saw the changes of the Reformation influence divisions of power within the world.

Looking at all works in the EEBO-TCP archive from 1473 to 1625, one can see that there is a dramatic increase in the number of works published, but that the number of works that contain “secular” remains comparatively low but steady (Figure 1). I do not think that this is an indication of a lack of interest regarding the secular. Rather, that advancements in printing technology and subsequent increase of literacy expanded not only the number but the type of works published. Before 1550, published works were religious or political works that would be far more likely to be concerned with distinctions of the sacred and secular. Once printing technologies became more widely available, however, the types of works printed began to include more varied content thereby lowering the relative number of works that contain “secular”. The raw number of works, however, that contain “secular” does steadily increase over the period and begin to significantly increase at the start of the seventeenth century (Figure 2).¹²²

| Year | Total Number of Texts | Works that contain "secular" | Percent of Works with "Secular" |
|--------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1473-1500 | 129 | 24 | 18.60% |
| 1501-1525 | 156 | 29 | 18.59% |
| 1526-1550 | 703 | 106 | 15.08% |
| 1551-1575 | 1154 | 124 | 10.75% |
| 1576-1600 | 2239 | 258 | 11.52% |
| 1601-1625 | 3755 | 692 | 18.43% |
| Total | 8136 | 1233 | 15.15% |

Table 1 | Number of Texts in the EEBO-TCP Archive compared to the Number of Texts that contain "secular."

¹²² I will be discussing the periodic changes and reasons for the changes later in the chapter. This discussion and graphs provide a macro view of the changes that occur and hopefully provide some context for the finer discussions to come.

Throughout the period on average, from 1473-1620, “secular” appears in 15% of published works (Table 1).¹²³ While the percentage remains consistent in 25-year intervals, there is a notable spike from 1519-1535 during the height of the Reformation. From 1519-1535 24% of works in EEBO-TCP archive mention secular, and many of those works actively engage with the idea of secular power in relation to the Church. These discussions appear to taper off during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603), however, the relative decrease was amplified by the significant increase of total publication at the time (Table 1 and Figure 1). The slow and steady increase of the number of works that discuss the secular, and the relative consistency when compared to a total number of works that discuss the secular, suggests that the secular remains a persistent topic of discussion throughout the Reformation period.

¹²³ Data collected using: Basu, ‘Early Print EEBO-TCP and ESTC Text Counts’; Basu, ‘Early Print EEBO N-Gram Browser’; Stefan Sinclair, ‘DREaM: Distant Reading Early Modernity’, accessed 12 March 2018, <http://dream.voyant-tools.org/dream/?corpus=dream>.

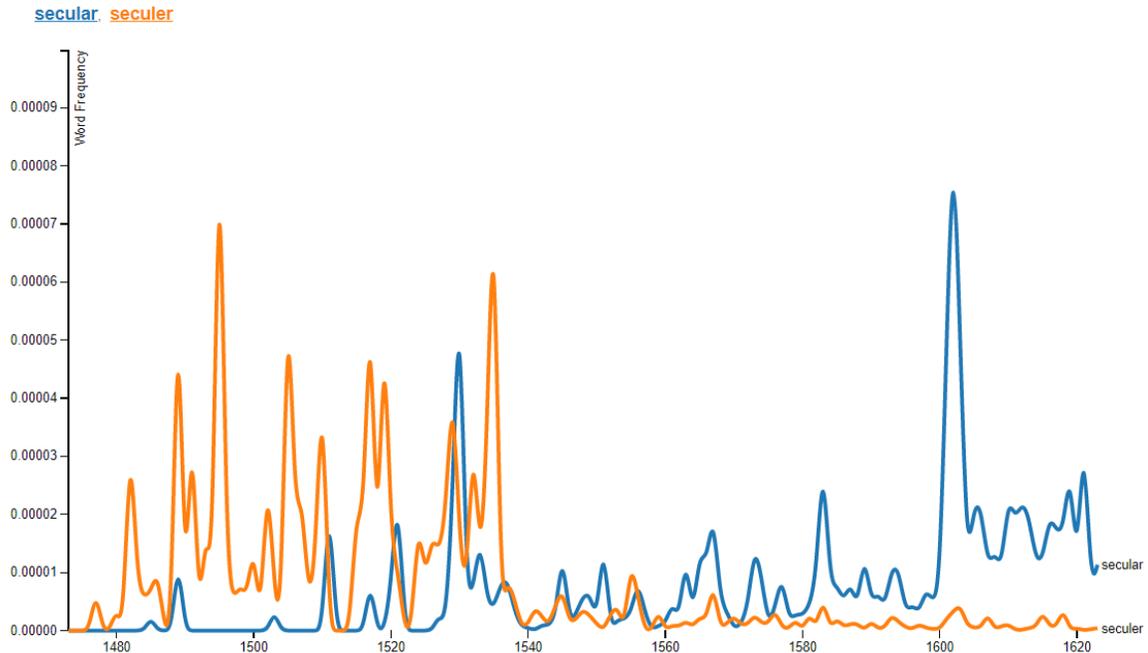


Figure 3 | N-Gram illustrating the relative frequency of the word "secular" and "seculer" within the EEBO-TCP database from 1460-1625. "Seculer" is the early English spelling of "secular" and falls out of use but the middle of the seventeenth century.

Digital analysis of archives, such as Early English Books Online, demonstrates that though the relative frequency of the word secular is low, between one and 8 per hundred thousand words, the rate of use does correlate with changes in the discussions on the nature of the secular and political climate (Figure 3). The highest frequency of use occurs simultaneously to early reformation discussions, and then quickly fall following the English Reformation and remain low until questions of popish plots burgeon in the reign of James I. One can also see that in the late fifteenth century and early sixteenth century the predominant spelling of the word found in texts was the old English spelling "seculer", but towards the middle of the sixteenth century, standardisation in spelling gives way to "secular" that more closely resembles its Latin predecessor *seculare*.

The relatively low frequency of “secular” is in part due to the early modern understanding of “secular.” When compared to the use of temporal, it is clear that early modern thinkers described their world on different terms that were still divided between the temporal and eternal division put down by Augustine (Figure 4).

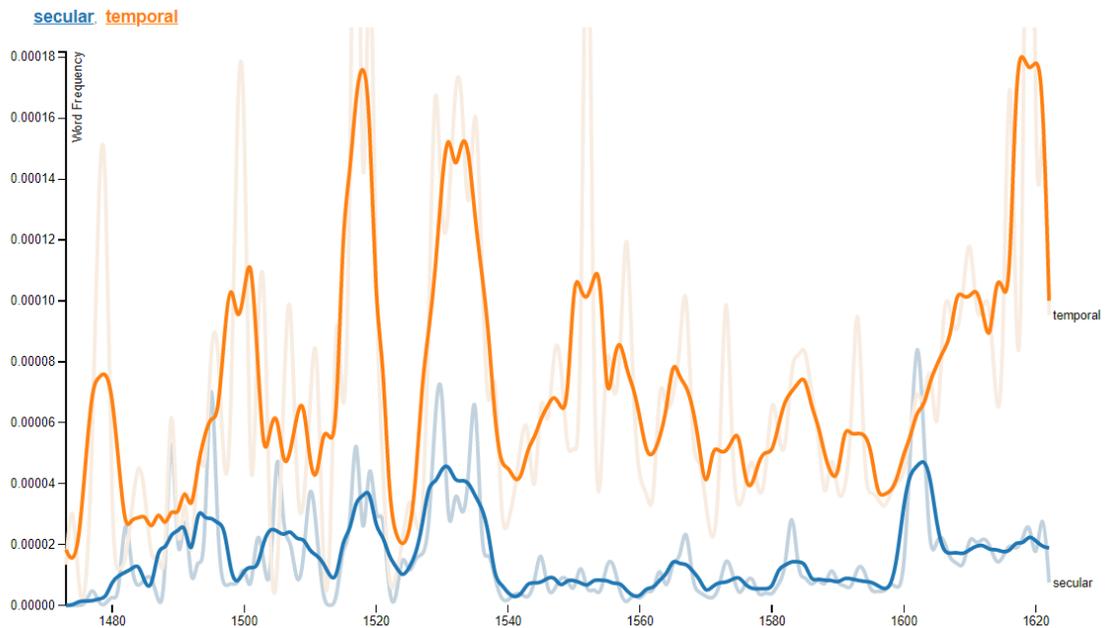


Figure 4 | N-Gram showing the relative frequency of "secular" and "temporal" from 1473-1625. Dark lines indicate 5 year rolling average, faded lines indicate raw values.

God was still very much in charge of Reformation Europe, even if contemporaries could not agree on who ought to be God’s ambassadors on earth. Early Modern thinkers were far more likely to have used “temporal” than “secular” when discussing matters of this world and reserved “secular” for a very specific use: outside of the church (Figure 4). Moreover, this distinction between temporal and secular also seems just to be an English one. In German for example, “*weltlicher*” is the singular term for all thing temporal or of this world and does not delineate “temporal” and

“secular.”¹²⁴ The ambiguous nature of “*weltlicher*” highlights some of the tensions that existed around the secular during the early modern period.

This data provides useful insight into how early modern writers used “secular” over the course of 140 years. Moving forward into the closer textual analysis, I would like to emphasise two things: first, though there is not a significant increase in the use of the word secular, the variation does coincide with larger political trends and the consistency is a reflection of the early modern attitudes regarding the secular. And second, during this time “secular” was a very limited term. It did not mean “without God” or “without religion” but simply “outside of the church.” To better understand the changes in the place of the secular I will examine Luther’s writings on secular authority and how his ideas permeated into the writings of English writers over the course of the sixteenth century.

Foundational Reformation Thought | Luther and Secular Authority

I am using Luther as a foundational thinker of the Reformation and then comparing other positions on the secular to his for two reasons. First, his account was widely circulated at the time, and he is often referred to in others works, and so can be said to be a large part of the dialogue of the time. And second, the dialogue surrounding Luther’s idea’s was often opposed to him or offered a differing view, which provides us with a good account of the early modern discussions and opinions. Over the course of his life and writings, Luther increasingly opposed the Church as an institution and criticised its claim to spiritual authority. He attacked the divide between secular and

¹²⁴ Harro Hoepfl, *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), xxxviii.

Church -just as Wycliffe had- and called into to question the sacredness of the Church. Indirectly he challenged the sacred and secular divide and changed the way in which discussions surrounding sacred and secular power took place.

Luther's ideas regarding the secular are fraught with tensions and complexities that are difficult to parse, which I think are indicative of the early modern view of the world.¹²⁵ For Luther, the secular is both sperate from spiritual and still governed by the spiritual. However, he stresses that the secular has a power of its own, which is not spiritual in and of itself, but was part of sacred rule. So, church officials who had commit secular wrongs could and *should* be judged according to secular law, just as all men – even secular princes – would be judged by God. Secular authority, however, was not in and of itself just, and Luther goes to great lengths to discuss the correct method of rule. Throughout his writing, he makes many asides and notes of the correct role and purpose of secular authorities. He did, however, write quite explicitly on the matter of secular authority on two occasions: the first in 1520 when he wrote “An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility,” and again in 1523 in “On Secular Authority.”¹²⁶

In “An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility” Luther made three arguments that directly challenged Church authority, and by extension strengthened secular power. First, he claimed that church has no intrinsic authority over secular powers; second, that the

¹²⁵ I would have like to be able to do a deep digital analysis of Luther's works; however, due to both size and necessary translation of Luther's corpus, readable text files only exist for portions of his work. Furthermore, translations of Luther pose a problem when it comes to an analysis of “secular.” As discussed above, early modern German does not make a distinction between secular, worldly and temporal and use the “*weltlicher*” for all. So English translation take contextual liberties when choosing which English word to use, making digital analysis muddled. A German language analysis of Luther's works, however, could elucidate many nuances in Luther's understanding of “secular.”

¹²⁶ Martin Luther, ‘An Open Letter to The Christian Nobility’, in *Works of Martin Luther, with Introductions and Notes*, vol. 2, 1520, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/34904/34904-0.txt>; Martin Luther, ‘On Secular Authority’, in *Lutber and Calvin on Secular Authority*, by Harro Hoepfl, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1523).

Church and pope were not the only ones who were able to give an account of scripture; and lastly that secular offices may call councils to discuss matters of faith and do not require the permission of the church.¹²⁷ These arguments are largely made with the assertion that the sacred is not confined to the institution of the Church, but rather available to all men, regardless of rank and title, so long as they have faith in scripture. His appeal to the nobility is not so much an assertion of the power of the secular nobility per se, as much as it is a dismantling of the legitimacy of church power. Luther was critical of secular power and was not convinced of their righteousness, so much as he had become convinced that secular authorities were Christianity's best chance at escaping the tyranny of the Church.

Luther's thoughts and cautions on secular authority specifically come in his later writing. Like his previous appeal to the nobility, the advice in "On Secular Authority" he said was for the benefit of the German nobility, though he was not convinced they would heed his words any more than they had previously. Speaking of secular princes, Luther mused: "may they remain princes, and never become Christians."¹²⁸ Nonetheless, in his renewed appeal to secular princes, Luther had three aims: first, to find "a firm grounding for secular law and the sword" such that there can be no doubting that good secular law is legitimate in the eyes of God and necessary for a good Christian life.¹²⁹ Second, to define the limits of secular authority. And third, to give guidance to princes on how to rightly wield their secular authority. In short, Luther was

¹²⁷ Luther, 'An Open Letter to The Christian Nobility'.

¹²⁸ Martin Luther, 'On Secular Authority', in *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority*, by Harro Hoepfl, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1523), 5.

¹²⁹ By sword Luther is referring to secular power via military, judicial, and punitive measures. The physical ways in which secular authority exerts its power.

looking to place secular power within the context of his doctrine of “faith alone.” Luther built his argument and recommendations upon scripture that allowed for and made space for Christians to obey secular laws, and passages that delineated authority and right of rule. Luther’s starting position was that man is unfailingly prone to sin and wickedness, and the sword of secular authority was God’s weapon to punish malefactors earth.

To prove the firm grounding for secular authority, Luther asserted that secular authority had existed since the beginning of the world and for the benefit of Christians.¹³⁰ He gives a number of examples from scripture in which God has instructed men to punish murders and wrongdoers and concluded: “how the secular Sword and law are to be employed according to God’s will is thus clear and certain enough: to punish the wicked and protect the just.”¹³¹ He maintained that:

If there were no law and government, then seeing that all the world is evil and that scarcely one human being in a thousand is a true Christian, people would devour each other and no one would be able to support his wife and children, feed himself and serve God.¹³²

Secular authority is, therefore, necessary to maintain order and harmony, just as it was for Augustine, and indeed Luther’s ideas on secular authority shared many similarities with Augustine’s.

Like Augustine, for Luther secular authority was timeless as far as it had always existed and was necessary for the functioning of society. Without secular authority, the wicked would be free to cause chaos and hurt the just. However, Luther did not conceive of the secular as a neutral space as Augustine had, instead secular authority was a tool for

¹³⁰ Luther, ‘On Secular Authority’, 6–7.

¹³¹ Luther, 5–7.

¹³² Luther, 9.

conflict management and punitive power. The outcome may be the same -an ordered peace society in which Christians are free to pursue a godly life- but for Luther, the practice is much less forgiving and far more prone to wickedness. Augustine saw sin in the secular space as well, but Augustine expected and accepted sin and wickedness as part of the worldly condition. Therefore, he takes for granted that people are going to sin but does not seek to root out sin with same fervour Luther employed.

Luther contended that a true and perfect Christian will always obey the law, but that “there are few who believe, and even fewer who behave like Christians and refrain from doing evil themselves, let alone not resisting evil done to them.”¹³³ Luther even claimed Christians are always fewest in number and that Unchristian are always the majority. He maintained that most people who claimed to be Christian were, in fact, hypocritical in their belief and did not truly have the “Holy Spirit in their hearts” and so were more likely to sin.¹³⁴ This is to say Luther recognised that not everyone behaved as they ought to, even if they proclaimed to be Christian and further that false Christians were not good law-abiding citizen. Sin was everywhere, and so he argued that secular laws are necessary to restrain “wicked deeds” and keep the peace while the spiritual government of Christ tended to Christian souls and worked to teach them the word of God:

Therefore care must be taken to keep these two governments distinct, and both must be allowed to continue their work, the one to make people just and the

¹³³ Luther, 9.

¹³⁴ Luther, 9.

other to create outward peace and prevent evil doing.
Neither is enough for the world without the other.¹³⁵

Luther, ready for criticism, answered why true Christians, even though they themselves do not need the secular because they will naturally do what is right and good, should follow the law. He maintained that true Christians live not for themselves while in this world but for their neighbours and so should do and support what will benefit their neighbours.¹³⁶

The secular sword, Luther continued, was necessary for the whole world to live peacefully especially for “unchristians,” so Christians should not hesitate to submit themselves to secular authority, pay taxes and uphold the law.¹³⁷ To do so, Luther maintained, did not harm the true Christian, as the church had argued. Moreover, the secular authority was made better by the participation of true Christians and indeed could not “get by without” the participation of Christians.¹³⁸ Therefore, instead of advocating for and imitating a monastic life, Luther encouraged full participation in the secular offices and activities; however, Luther stressed that participation in secular offices must always be done in service to others, and never in service of one’s own interest. To serve self-interest, Luther emphasised, was to serve avarice and sin.

The second point that Luther hoped to make clear, was the extent or bounds of secular authority. He defined the limits of secular authority and those things that secular authority ought to be responsible. First, and most importantly to Luther, he stressed that

¹³⁵ Luther, 9.

¹³⁶ Luther, 9.

¹³⁷ Luther, 14.

¹³⁸ Luther, 15.

the secular authority had no power or right to the souls of its people, only the body.¹³⁹ Here Luther argued against legislation that compelled the laity into a particular spiritual belief, or laws that assigned confessions to the people based on the belief of the territorial ruler. To compel the spiritual beliefs of the laity, Luther argued, drove “souls to eternal damnation with such blasphemous commands” because there was no basis for such a law in scripture.¹⁴⁰

Indeed, Luther argued that no one but God could rule over matters of the soul, not even the Church. Therefore, councils and decrees from the Church that compelled the soul were as harmful to the souls of Christians as the attempts of secular rulers. It made no difference if those decrees or law emanated from the Church or secular authorities, for “no one can or should lay down commandments for the soul, except those that can point it on the way to heaven. However, no human being can do that; only God.”¹⁴¹ Here Luther further reduced the importance and power of the Church and stripped away the spiritual authority that it had been building since the middle ages. He emphasised that secular authority could not simply usurp that spiritual power for itself, to dictate the faith of their people. Faith alone determined spirituality and belief, and not the intervention of any earthly power, Church or otherwise.

Moreover, Luther continued, that since faith alone determined belief in God; it was a futile effort for Church and secular authorities to compel belief with law or force. For there is no law that could compel faith truly. Instead, such a law would be a false outward faith that would turn souls further from God. Furthermore, Luther argued that

¹³⁹ Luther, 23.

¹⁴⁰ Luther, 24.

¹⁴¹ Luther, 23–24.

efforts to rule over souls had unjustly pervert both secular and church authorities. The Church, he argued, ought to have focused on nurturing the soul through the Word of God and inward reflection but instead was preoccupied with the outward expression of belief, and its own accumulation of worldly power and wealth. Similarly, secular lords, who ought to have been ruling countries and punishing the wicked seemingly cared more about taxes and the false spirituality of their people than the peace and prosperity of their lands.¹⁴² Luther reassured secular rulers that what each soul believed whether correctly or not, did not diminish the authority of secular governments, and so it was in the best interest of secular authorities to “attend to their own business” of punishing wrongdoers and protecting the just, rather than the outward expression of false belief.¹⁴³

Luther continued by giving the laity permission and reason to disobey in instances where secular and Church authorities had overstepped their jurisdictions. He argued that when a secular authority or the Church commanded belief or thought, that they have overstepped their authority and therefore were tyrants, commanding where they “have neither right nor power.”¹⁴⁴ To obey the laws of a tyrant, Luther argued, was sinful, as it contradicted God’s authority. To disobey a secular or church ruler it only to resist a man; obeying a tyrant is to flout God. Luther stressed that people should not be afraid to disobey a tyrant or the punishments they may receive for doing so. Instead, Luther explained that a good Christian should see their punishment and suffering as a

¹⁴² Luther, ‘On Secular Authority’, 27.

¹⁴³ Luther, 25; James Martin Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God: Secular Authority and the Church in the Thought of Luther and Melancthon, 1518-1559*, vol. 111, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1–7. Also see: Michael Laffin, *The Promise of Martin Luther’s Political Theology: Freeing Luther from the Modern Political Narrative*, T&T Clark Enquiries in Theological Ethics (London, UK: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016).

¹⁴⁴ Luther, 29.

blessing from God in which they are to become martyrs for following God's law, again stressing that secular authorities were simply men, and should not be elevated beyond their station under God.¹⁴⁵

As men, secular rulers were no better than any other and were equals under God. Indeed, Luther did not think very highly of secular authorities at all. He mused that "as a rule, princes are the greatest fools or the worst criminals on earth."¹⁴⁶ He warned against hoping for too much of secular rulers as spiritual guides and held that secular rulers were "God's jailers and hangmen."¹⁴⁷ Agents of God who used bodily force to coerce peaceful behaviour from the unchristian, not God's voice on earth or harbingers of spirituality. Moreover, Luther suggested if it was futile to look to secular rulers for spiritual guidance it was equally as fruitless to expect secular authorities to be able to combat heresy as the secular use of force could not compel a soul to accept God rightly. For, as Luther said, "heresy is a spiritual thing; it cannot be struck down with steel, burnt with fire or drowned in water."¹⁴⁸ Instead, Luther suggested that it is the bishop or spiritual leaders who would be best suited to compelling belief, but not through physical force, but through teaching the Word of God, and even then, their teaching could only convert the willing and open. Any use of coercion through excommunication or punishment would be ineffectual in convincing those who did not want to believe.

The third part of Luther's recommendations for secular authority focused on how rulers are to rightly wield secular authority, and not cause more harm to their people than good. In short, Luther argued that secular princes must be good Christians first and

¹⁴⁵ Luther, 29.

¹⁴⁶ Luther, 30.

¹⁴⁷ Luther, 30.

¹⁴⁸ Luther, 30.

princes second, for a good Christian will always be a just and prudent prince, but a prince who does not truly allow God into his heart, will act in his own interest and not for the good of his lands.¹⁴⁹ A good Christian prince will always act in service of their people and will not rule simply for personal gain and wealth. To rule as a servant, Luther argued, is to keep peace and harmony in mind at all times. Aspiring to peace and harmony, Luther emphasised, was the aim of good governance and would ensure that the laity did not pay the price for a ruler's greed. Luther also warned secular princes that while they should always listen to their councillors, a prudent prince will trust none of them. Rather, Luther emphasised, that secular princes should trust in God alone.¹⁵⁰ Lastly, Luther cautioned princes not to be overzealous with punishment. Protecting the innocent, Luther maintained, was as important as punishing the wicked and required the greatest prudence, so as to not wrongfully inflict suffering. Luther argued that a prince must not cause more chaos and disorder in trying to punish wrongdoers, but always remember his principal duty is to maintain peace in his lands.¹⁵¹ "Even in secular matters force cannot be used unless guilt has first been established by reference to the law."¹⁵²

Luther focused heavily on the importance of good and prudent rulers throughout his work -particular in "On Secular Authority"- but he does address secular laws, if only briefly in his letter to the Christian nobility. While he agreed Christians should obey secular laws so long as they are just, Luther was sceptical of law more generally and thought there was rather too much of it. In his earlier "Appeal to the Christian Nobility," Luther muses about the problem of laws:

¹⁴⁹ Luther, 34–36.

¹⁵⁰ Luther, 36–38.

¹⁵¹ Luther, 36–39.

¹⁵² Luther, 'On Secular Authority', 31.

The temporal law, --God help us! What a wilderness it has become! Though it is much better, wiser and more rational than the "spiritual law" which has nothing good about it except the name, still there is far too much of it.¹⁵³

He goes on to stress that local laws should take precedent over imperial laws, so that each land may keep its "character" as God intended them to have. His preference for local law over imperial law has the simultaneous benefit of giving secular authorities permission to ignore papal laws that might infringe on their people, but also from attempts of the Holy Roman Empire to enforce confessional lines on the territories.¹⁵⁴ Overall Luther favoured reason above laws and argued that each ruler should be bound to rational thought rather than strict adherence to the imperfect laws of men. The only laws a ruler needed, he stressed, were laws given by God, and a ruler should not seek to make more secular laws but enforce existing ones that conformed to the Word of God. Secular rulers should, Luther suggested, ignore, or dispose of laws that conflicted with scripture.

For Luther, the Word of God always superseded temporal authority, though he maintained that both secular and Church authority had a role to play in maintaining peace and harmony.¹⁵⁵ Luther made a case for the necessity of secular authority and liberated secular authority from the domination of the Church. Luther, increasingly at odds with the Catholic Church, argued that secular authority and church authority were equal to one another and that the Church's claim to supremacy was unsupported but scripture and illegitimate. In contrast, Luther made a strong scriptural case for the

¹⁵³ Luther, 'An Open Letter to The Christian Nobility', 247–48.

¹⁵⁴ Luther, 247–48.

¹⁵⁵ I use temporal here to mean both secular and church authority, as Luther does not take church authority to be sacred.

necessity and legitimacy of the secular authority to punish the wicked and protect the just. He fervently argued that secular authority should be used in service of the people and never for the ruler's gain. Though Luther's arguments are not much different in tone than earlier dissenter such as Wycliffe, it was his idea that jolted early modern rulers and thinkers to challenging the supremacy of the Church. Luther, however, did not have the last word on the place of the secular. Rather he opened up new avenues of thought and discussion on the ordering of the world that was still heavily governed by the sacred.

1473-1558 | Beginnings of the English Schism

Luther's view on the secular, though widely circulated throughout Europe, was not final, or undigested. In England throughout the sixteenth century, discussions on the place and power of secular authority drew not only on Luther for inspiration but also on earlier sources such as Wycliffe and Lollards. In in the English source available, there is a diverse range of sources and authors with equally diverse opinions on the matter of "secular" ranging from royal proclamations and religious treaties to pamphlets and appeals to the laity.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, using Luther's ruminations on the secular provide a useful fulcrum for this study of "secular" as a control to better understand the prolonged process of the English Reformation and the many contributors to its ideological change.

One of the striking features of many of the texts that use "secular" during this period, is how often they mention or are in direct response to one another. The works of William Tyndale and Thomas More particularly are explicit in their interaction with Reformation ideas and each other, as well as many other works that I will examine more

¹⁵⁶ Data and observations collected using: Anupam Basu, 'Early Print EEBO-TCP Key Words in Context', Early Print, accessed 7 April 2018, <https://earlyprint.wustl.edu/toolwebgrok.html>.

closely. These explicit interactions provide an opportunity to examine the particular differences in the content and meaning of “secular” and the extent that it had authority in the world.

Prior to Luther’s *Ninety-Five Theses*, we can already observe a change in the way in that early modern writers employed “secular” and how the meaning had evolved from its late medieval usage. Where in the late medieval period the usage had almost exclusively been as a clarifying adjective for “priest” or “canon,” by the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century writers were attaching “secular” to a wider range of words, such as: home, book, clothing, business, clerk and man.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, the pairing of “secular” and “priest” – which was the most common pairing in the late middle ages – becomes one of the rarest combinations by the early sixteenth century. This suggests that the content of the secular was expanding to include or describe things that had previously been limited. Where the distinction before had been inclusion or exclusion from the Ecclesiastical institutions, the secular now included material goods, ideas, and positions that were more than just something excluded from the church. Writers used “secular” independently of Church associations just as the secular aspects of society were also growing unrepentantly from the church.

Not surprisingly, English records from the Catholic Church continue to use secular only to distinguish between types of clergymen, and do not seem to incorporate the expanding usage of the word.¹⁵⁸ The Church was adamant on maintaining its power

¹⁵⁷ Data and observations collected using: ‘Early Print EEBO-TCP Key Words in Context.’

¹⁵⁸ Catholic Church, Richard Whitford, and Syon Abbey, ‘The Martiloge in Englysshe after the vse of the Chirche of Salisbury and as It Is Redde in Syon, with Addicyons.’, Archive, Early English Books Online: Text Creation Partnership, 1526, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=eebo2;idno=A07131>; Catholic Church, Pope Alexander VI, and Pope Julius II, ‘Hereafter Foloweth the Abreuiacon of the Graces/Idulgeces

over temporal matters and the division of the world into ecclesiastically controlled sacred spaces. While the Church's conservative use of "secular" does highlight the variety of usage that begins in the sixteenth century, other writers are similarly slow to adopt the new facets of "secular."

Tyndale

William Tyndale (1494-1536), though reformer in thought and action, did not propagate the burgeoning secular space. Tyndale, a prominent scholar in the early years of the English Reformation, openly discussed his desire for change in England and the role of the King in that change. Tyndale appealed directly to the rulers of England, as well as the laity, for religious change in his work *The Obedience of a Christen Man* (1528), which purportedly made its way into the hands of Henry VIII via Anne Boleyn.¹⁵⁹ Though, unlike Luther, Tyndale's approach to convincing rulers of their independence from Rome was entirely rooted in scripture – rather than faith – and did not give the secular any particular attention.

Tyndale devoted much of *The Obedience* to other matters, not just "how Christen rulers ought to governe." Tyndale spends a good portion of the small book arguing for the importance of a vernacular English Bible, and against the seven Sacraments that Henry VIII had defended from Luther to become the "defender of the faith." He was adamant throughout that "God's word should rule only; and not bishops' decrees, or the

& Stacios Which Our Moste Holy Fader Pope Alexander VI, Archive, Early English Books Online: Text Creation Partnership, 1505, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=eebo2;idno=B00205>.

¹⁵⁹ Susan M. Felch and Clare Costley King'oo, 'Reading Tyndale's Obedience in Whole and in Part', *Reformation* 21, no. 2 (2 July 2016): 86–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13574175.2016.1233630>. As Felch and King'oo discuss, it is unlikely the Henry actually read a copy of *The Obedience* much less one from Anne, but the tale nevertheless illustrates the perceived importance of Tyndale's work in the English Reformation.

pope's pleasure."¹⁶⁰ Indeed, his political recommendations were simple compared to Luther's prescriptive writing: "sovereigns are to submit themselves to God; subjects are to submit themselves to their sovereign; the papacy holds no separate authority, and certainly no authority over divinely appointed kings."¹⁶¹ He held some of the same finer principles as Luther, for instance, Kings are to act as servants to their people, punish the wicked and protect the people from aggressors. But Tyndale is far less concerned with the souls and with the spiritual wellbeing of his Kings than Luther was.

The primary difference between Luther and Tyndale is that Tyndale makes no claim to the secular as a separate space or authority: he appeals directly to Kings as the direct representatives of God. Throughout *Obedience* Tyndale only used "secular" twice and in quick succession. In both instances, Tyndale was discussing "secular priests" and remarking at the injustice of the Pope and Church to force religious men to sacrifice marriage and worldly goods to become a monk or friar, and yet they do not do the same.¹⁶² Throughout the rest of *Obedience* he does not make this distinction, and so I argue he only uses "secular" here for his readers, who would be familiar with the monastic secular divide and make his argument clear. Indeed, Tyndale argued that the clergy should be whole and unified in their dedication to scripture and nothing else and was critical of the division.

¹⁶⁰ William Tyndale, 'The Obedience Of A Christen Man And How Christen Rulers Ought To Governe, Where In Also (If Thou Marke Diligently) Thou Shalt Fynde Eyes To Perceave The Crafty Conveyance Of All Iugglers.', Archive, Early English Books Online: Text Creation Partnership, 1528, lvj, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=eebo;idno=A14136>.

¹⁶¹ Felch and King'oo, 'Reading Tyndale's Obedience in Whole and in Part', 93.

¹⁶² Tyndale, 'The Obedience Of A Christen Man And How Christen Rulers Ought To Governe, Where In Also (If Thou Marke Diligently) Thou Shalt Fynde Eyes To Perceave The Crafty Conveyance Of All Iugglers.', xxvij.

Tyndale did, however, fiercely advocated that the spiritual realm ought to be governed by priests, and the temporal realm by secular ministers.¹⁶³ “To preach God’s word is too much for half a man: and to minister a temporal kingdom is too much for half a man also. Either other requireth an whole man. One therefore cannot well do both.”¹⁶⁴ He was adamant that the King had authority over the pope and Church in secular matters, and as a result over their worldly possessions and lands.¹⁶⁵ Let them rule their realms themselves, with the help of lay-men that are sage, wise, learned, and expert.¹⁶⁶ He did this, however, not by elevating the secular itself, but by ignoring the medieval distinction that the Church had struggled to maintain. For Tyndale, the whole of the world was a part of God’s plan and illuminated to Christians through scripture and scripture alone. While the secular space was necessary for Luther, so that faith could be carried out and unjudged or forced, the focus on scripture made the secular space -as defined by Luther- unnecessary.

Tyndale’s exclusion of the secular from his discussion on the proper way of the rule is significant because it demonstrates that there were conceptions of protestant reformation in which the secular as a neutral space, was entirely unnecessary, and was not the only option available. For Tyndale, reformation could occur within God’s mandated sacred structure of master and servant relations through the monarch and did

¹⁶³ Brad C. Pardue, *Printing, Power, and Piety: Appeals to the Public During the Early Years of the English Reformation*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions; v. 162 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012), 165–67.

¹⁶⁴ Tyndale, ‘The Obedience Of A Christen Man And How Christen Rulers Ought To Governe, Where In Also (If Thou Marke Diligently) Thou Shalt Fynde Eyes To Perceave The Crafty Conveyance Of All Iugglers.’, lv.

¹⁶⁵ Pardue, *Printing, Power, and Piety*, 166.

¹⁶⁶ Tyndale, ‘The Obedience Of A Christen Man And How Christen Rulers Ought To Governe, Where In Also (If Thou Marke Diligently) Thou Shalt Fynde Eyes To Perceave The Crafty Conveyance Of All Iugglers.’, lv.

not require external apparatus. Tyndale’s avoidance or particular choice not to use “secular” is not indicative of other writing of the time

A Proper Dyaloge, Betwene a Gentillman and a Husbandman

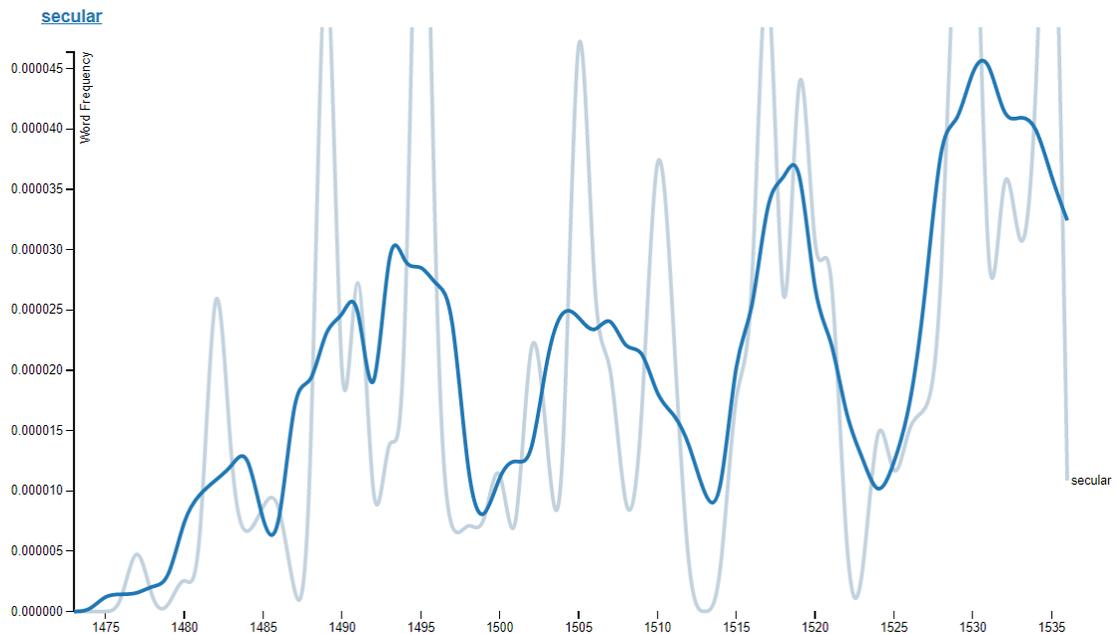


Figure 5 | Graph showing the increasing relative frequency of "secular" from 1473-1535 in the EEBO-TCP archive. The dark blue line has a rolling average of 5 years; faded line shows raw values.

In spite of Tyndale’s aversion, throughout the early sixteenth century, there was a gradual – if sporadic – growth in the use of “secular” that increased with the growing religious and political unrest during the period. The period from 1530-1540 also saw a dramatic uptick in the number of works published that used “secular” (Figure 5). Furthermore, throughout this period there was a wider variety of publications that catered to burgeoning literate laity. Many authors used this to their advantage and to convey their ideas to a wider audience.

One such publication is *A Proper Dyaloge, Betwene a Gentillman and a Husbandman* (1530). This is a firmly protestant work that stresses the role of the secular throughout as

a counter to the Church and does not share in Tyndale's aversion to the word "secular." The work includes a poem against the hypocrisies of the clergy, a reprint of a fourteenth-century anti-clerical text, and an argument for an English vernacular bible.¹⁶⁷ The poetic nature of the work suggests that it was a work that was intended for the laity, and not as an appeal to secular powers, but its authors nonetheless make a strong case for secular rulers and for the secular space.

The poem is a conversation between a gentleman and a husbandman who are both dissatisfied with their current status and feel that the Church, and greed of the clergy, is to blame. The gentleman argues that his station has been lowered by the Church, who tricked landowners into giving up their land, and now he and his peers are unable to help the poor as they are told. The husbandman argues that the clergy prey upon the poor and use them as a weapon against godly people and suggests that the wealth and land of the clergy should be confiscated as reparation. The men agree that indulgences ungodly, and ought to be abolished. The husbandman suggests they take the issue to parliament, arguing that they have the right and the power to punish the clergy, but the gentleman objects that parliament could not help though they ought to be able to. The gentleman makes a reference to Thomas More's defence of purgatory and position in the government and says:

Thou knowest that in the parlament
The chefe of ye clergye are resident
In a maruelous great multitude.
Whos fearce displeasure is so terrible

¹⁶⁷ William Barlow, 'A Proper Dyaloge, Betwene a Gentillman and a Husbandman Eche Complaynyng to Other Their Miserable Calamite, through the Ambicion of the Clergye. An A.B.C. to the Spiritualte.', 1530, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A04488.0001.001/1:1?rgn=div1;view=toc>. Interestingly, the appeal for an English vernacular bible is attributed to William Tyndale, and does not mention the secular, while the rest of text very firmly argues for the place of the secular in rule.

That I iudge it were not possible
Any cause against them to conclude.¹⁶⁸

The husbandman ends the poem by introducing a Lollard text, which he reads aloud, and dates to the reign of Richard II.¹⁶⁹ It is in this section of the work that the writer really emphasise the right of rule for the secular. This Lollard treaty, attributed to Richard Ullerston (d. 1423), makes it very clear that the secular has a right to over and above the church stating that “god that hath full lordshippe vpon all the world hathe geuen by perpetuall lawe or right to the state of secular lords.”¹⁷⁰

Thomas More

Thomas More (1478 -1535), Lord High Chancellor of England, councillor of Henry VIII and prominent writer during the early years of the English Reformation, was a strong Catholic voice. He repeatedly challenged Protestant thinkers such as Luther and Tyndale and later opposed the King’s decision to supplant the Church.

In his work *Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer* More methodically addresses each one of Tyndale’s arguments “in a detailed forensic deconstruction of Tyndale’s own words, quoted at length and scrutinised minutely for every negative nuance and insinuation... and then answered sentence by sentence, clause by clause.”¹⁷¹ More’s position on the hierarchy of power places royal and secular authorities explicitly under that of the ecclesiastical authorities and the Church. He uses the imagery of the body, with the

¹⁶⁸ Barlow.

¹⁶⁹ The reprinting of the Lollard text is incorporated into the poem insofar as it is introduced by the husbandman, but it appears to be a straight reprinting. It is interesting to see the text be integrated into the poem so organically.

¹⁷⁰ Barlow, ‘A Proper Dyaloge, Betwene a Gentillman and a Husbandman Eche Complaynyng to Other Their Miserable Calamite, through the Ambicion of the Clergye. An A.B.C. to the Spirituale.’

¹⁷¹ Eamon Duffy, *Reformation Divided: Catholics, Protestants and the Conversion of England* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017), 81.

secular as the hands and insinuates that their purpose is for use of violence against lawbreaker, sinner and particularly heretics. In fact, More endorsed the retributive power of the secular far more than Tyndale had. While Tyndale cited the limitations of secular justice within scripture particularly against the death penalty, More was much more certain of the positive power of retribution:

And so was he after myche fauour shewed hym, & myche labour charytably taken for the sauynge of hym / delyuered in conclusyon for his obstinacye to the seculare handes, and burned vppe in hys false fayth and heresydes, wherof he lerned the great parte of Tyndales holy bokes / and nowe the spiryte of errour and lyenge, hath taken his wreched soule wyth hym strayte from the shorte fyre to y^e fyre euerlastyng.¹⁷²

The bodily image of the secular as hands conveys the hierarchy of power that More advocated. The power of the secular was limited to the physical and actionable realm, while questions of faith and goodness were for the Church and mind. For Tyndale, this distinction is missing. The King is the head of the country, with only God above.

More, while conservative in his argument, was a pioneer in language. He was the first to use “secular power” in 1533, a phrase which becomes increasingly popular throughout the sixteenth century and by the time Elizabeth ascended of was one of the most common phrases pertaining to “secular.”¹⁷³ It is possible that More was not the first to use “secular power,” but he is the first record of it in EEBO-TCP and following his initial use it occurs with regularity thereafter. Even if he was not the first to use this phrase, I think it is clear that the idea of power as separate from the church, and even

¹⁷² Thomas More, ‘The Confutacyon of Tyndales Answere Made by Syr Thomas More Knyght Lorde Chauncellour of Englonde’, Archive, Early English Books Online: Text Creation Partnership, 1532, the preface to the chrysten reader, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=eebo;idno=A07693>.

¹⁷³ Basu, ‘Early Print Key Words in Context’.

God, was becoming increasingly prevalent. In this, More, and other contemporaries after him, granted that secular had tangible power outside of sacred rule.

Trends in Frequency | From the English Schism to the End of Elizabeth I

By the end of Henry's reign, the most common pairing with "secular" had become man, judge, and power. While it still operated as a way to differentiate, as it had been in the medieval period, the emphasis was on royal and governmental prerogative, not on the supremacy of the church. The secular was being filled with its own content without regard for church institutions. The secular was the place where people not only sinned but lived and Protestant ideas had made it so that it was no longer acceptable that the secular space be unilaterally lowered below the cloistered space guarded and protected by the church, whatever the disagreements were regarding the hierarchy of power.

The frequency of discussions shrouding "secular" peaked from 1528-1536, and then fall and remain low throughout the rest of sixteenth century (Figure 6).¹⁷⁴ This is in part due to the exponential increase of printed works during the latter half of the sixteenth century (see Figure 1) but I believe that following the Act of Supremacy in 1534, the discussion on the content and place of the secular had more or less ended. This is not to say that everyone was happy with Henry's decision, but that contemporaries realised the decision had been made nonetheless.

¹⁷⁴ Graph created using: Anupam Basu, 'Early Print EEBO N-Gram Browser', Early Print, 17 January 2014, <https://earlyprint.wustl.edu>.

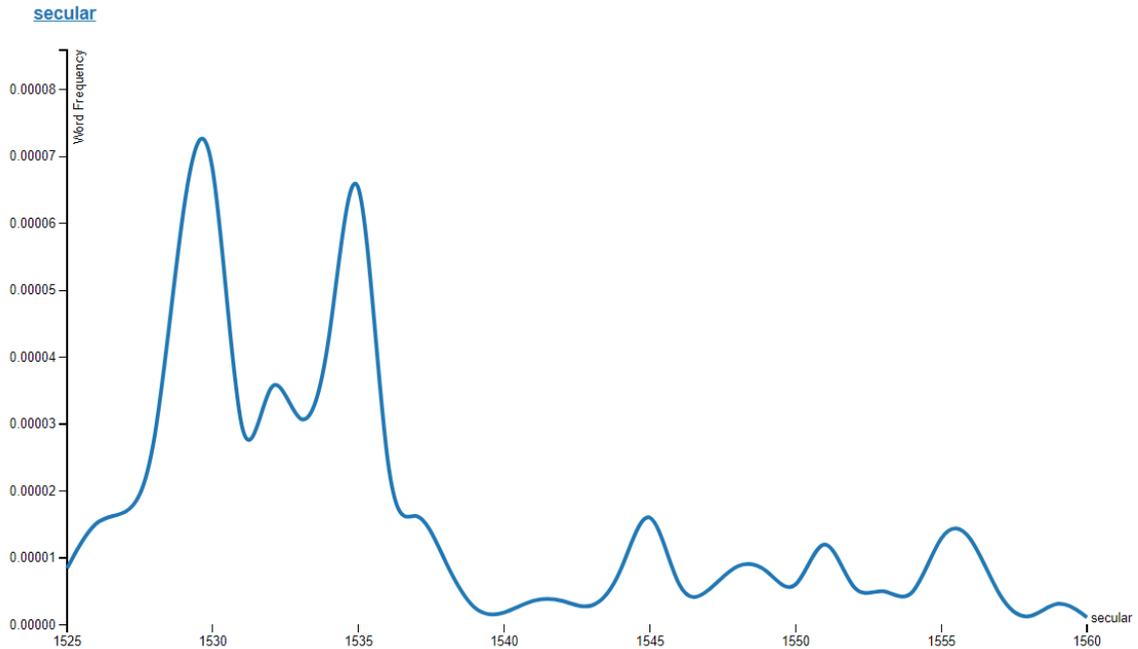


Figure 5 | Graph showing the relative frequency of “secular” in EEBO-TCP archive from 1525-1560.

Even throughout the tumultuous reigns of Edward VI and Mary, the role and power of the sovereign had largely been settled. There was little to be gained in arguing for a restoration of papal authority (except for briefly under Mary) and so secular power became synonymous with royal prerogative. The process underway beginning with Elizabeth I (1558-1603) was the long and slow transformation of England into a nation of Protestants, rather than simply a Protestant state. This process, of creating protestants, was much longer and required far more compromise than the separation from the Church itself.

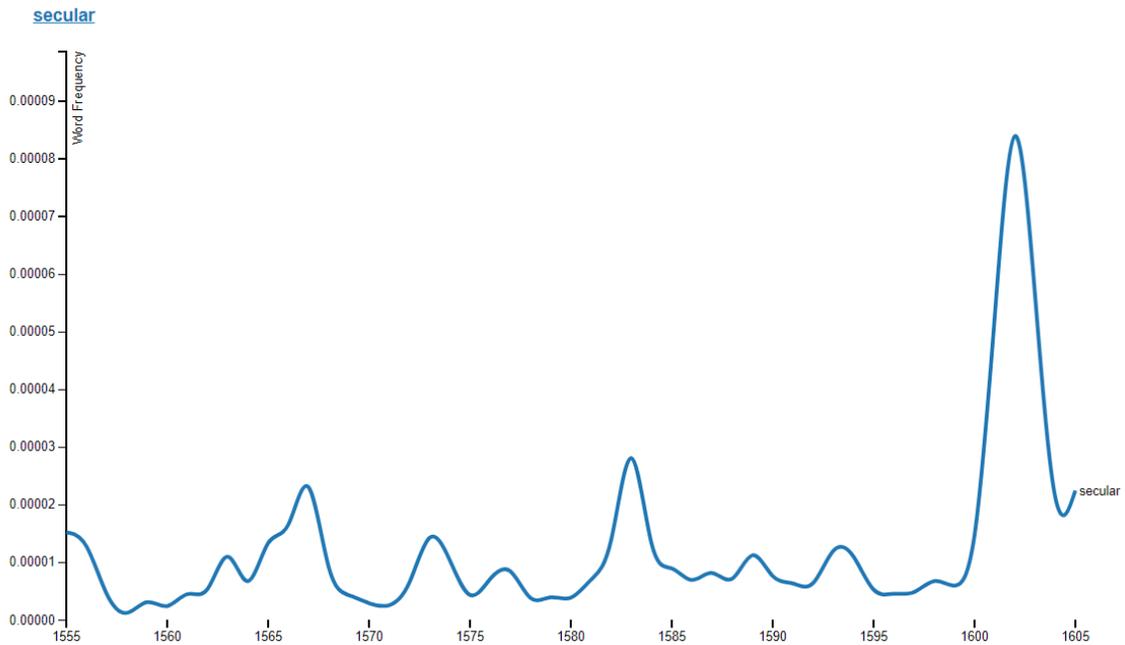


Figure 6 | Graph showing the relative frequency of “secular” in EEBO-TCP from 1555-1605.

Conclusion

The Reformation brought about an immense amount of social and political change and reframed the place and meaning of “secular.” Where before, the Church mediated God’s grace and the physical places of sacred worship, Reformation thinkers, such as Luther, and Tyndale, sought to remove the Church from interfering in the spirituality of Christians. The Reformation, and by extension the “secular,” however, was no one idea or plan. The process of the Reformation was long, variable, and constantly under negotiation. The political reformation that resulted in the break of England from Rome, though not in liturgical content, stemmed from these Reformation ideas that called for secular rulers to have the ultimate authority in their lands.

Conclusion

I began this study by asking to what extent the Reformation “secularised” society? As I have demonstrated, the Reformation did not “secularise” society insofar as it created the secular space or separated religion from rule or even in elevating the secular above the sacred. The secular has always had a role to play in Christianity, that adapted and moulded to fit the needs of changing political and social circumstances. To Augustine, and early Christians, the secular was a necessary part of a harmonious society in the *civitas terrena*, which could be adapted and used in service of God. The secular space allowed early Christians to live alongside diverse and polytheistic beliefs. As Christianity spread throughout Europe to create Christendom, the Church became a force of social cohesion and the ultimate arbiter of God’s grace. This shift meant that the secular was no longer a neutral space, but a Christian one that was divided by association with Church institutions. The secular space, which was excluded from the Church’s sacred protection, was now a stage for sin and temptation and not suitable for a godly life. Throughout the middle ages, the Church attempted to subordinate secular powers to its will with varying degrees of success but was not without its critics. The ideas of Wycliffe and Reformation Thinkers such as Luther and Tyndale challenged the Church mandated hierarchy that placed the secular and secular rulers under it and argued God’s grace could not be mediated. The Reformation saw the expansion of the secular as a legitimate power that should be obeyed and respected. The Reformation united secular power and God like it had not been before. To argue that the Reformation secularised society is anachronistic and ignores the continued importance of spiritual belief throughout the early modern period. Even after the Reformation, the world outside of

the -albeit weakened- Catholic Church in Rome was still a devout and Godly world, which was animated by spiritual conviction and belief.

Digital Navel Gazing

In my research, I utilized digital text tools to help identify patterns of use and compile large-scale macro data. When I began, I had envisioned using these tools to examine individual primary sources more closely, but the strength of these tools is most certainly in their ability to display data over an extended period of time, and to search for terms and phrases within a given text. There is an opportunity to utilise these tools for new research on particular authors (say Luther's entire corpus) to look at individual patterns and changes but is limited to what is available in text readable formats. While the data that I collected was not wholly unsurprising or indeed changes the way in which scholars have engaged with reformation texts, I feel that it helped to illustrate the changes and trends, while also quantifying that change. I do not think that digital analysis can replace a close textual reading, but it supplements and supports that method by helping to quickly contextualise a particular work against broad trends.

Further Research

I have had to move quite quickly through large parts of the story of the secular, and I think there is potential for more research in several areas. A comprehensive study of the secular of the early middle ages, if sources allow, would help to bridge the gap between early Christian concepts of "secular" and the late medieval period. There is also an opportunity to look at regions that were more diverse thought out the middle ages and may have been more resilient to the Christianisation of the secular space, such as the Iberian Peninsula. As a progression of this study, there is an opportunity to look in the

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. My preliminary research has shown that there is a strong correlation through the seventeenth century with the frequency of “secular” and the political turmoil of the Stuarts, and a closer look at the work of Calvin, and Knox would surely prove to be illuminating.

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