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On the Disunity of Mankind

There is nothing particularly surprising about being presented with an unpublished fragment by Martin Wight. His posthumous *oeuvre* is far more substantial than the few scattered essays he wrote and published in his lifetime, and important works such as *International Theory: The Three Traditions* (1991), *Systems of States* (1977) and *Four Seminal Thinkers in International Theory* (2005) were cobbled together from lecture notes, occasional papers and just such fragments as the item in question, 'The Disunity of Mankind' – indeed, although *Power Politics* was originally published as a 60 page pamphlet by Chatham House in 1946, the 300 page book version with which we are now familiar was put together in much the same way.[1] Still, since so many of his jottings have appeared in print it is a little surprising that this one was missed, especially since it is revealing of Wight's thinking at a number of levels.

'The Disunity of Mankind' seems to have been written in the early 1950s, but it bears little sign of an engagement with the characteristic problems of that era – the comment on the differences between the Greek and Russian Churches and the Latin Church could be construed as having Cold War significance but the paper as a whole is resolutely non-'presentist'. Nor does it address directly the nature of systems of states, which was the focus of most of the posthumous volumes and not simply the volume with that title. Instead it explores the nature of, and obstacles to, cosmopolitan thought. Dismissing in a characteristically cavalier way the potential contribution of other civilisations to cosmopolitanism, Wight asserts that the notion that 'men form a community by virtue of their human character' alone originated in the West – rather implausibly he attributes this belief to Alexander of Macedon, more plausibly to the Stoics and then, the main focus of the fragment, to Christianity. Twenty-first century cosmopolitans, who are taken much more seriously than were their equivalents in 1953, might

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[1] Martin Wight *International Theory: The Three Traditions* ed. Gabriele Wight & Brian Porter (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994), *Systems of States* ed. Hedley Bull (London: Continuum International Publishing, 1977), *Four Seminal Thinkers in International Theory* ed. Gabriele Wight & Brian Porter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), *Power Politics* ed. Hedley Bull & Carsten Holbraad (London: Bloomsbury 3PL, 1995).

accept parts of this genealogy, but would move on quickly to the European Enlightenment and the thought of figures such as Kant and Bentham, Wight though remains with the early Christian Fathers as he explores what is for him the key question – why the doctrine of the unity of mankind has repeatedly suffered shipwreck. For two reasons, he suggests; the moral and social heterogeneity of mankind. It is the first of these heterogeneities which is the more interesting. Modern cosmopolitans are familiar with the tendency of humans to form exclusive political and social attachments and put a great deal of effort into explaining how and why preferential treatment for fellow citizens should be limited or abolished – this is the social heterogeneity to which Wight refers. Moral heterogeneity, on the other hand – the idea that the most important division is between good and bad people – is not a topic that modern cosmopolitans are much concerned with, yet is obviously central to Wight's thinking. What fascinates him is the way in which the universal message of the early Church is gradually transformed into a story about two kinds of human societies, in Augustine's terms 'the one consists of those who wish to live after the flesh, the other of those who wish to live after the spirit'. The latter, Augustine's City of God, represents in virtual form the unity of mankind, while the existence of the former leads to the actual disunity to which the title of Wight's paper refers.

The argument here is interesting at two levels, because of what it tells us about cosmopolitanism and because of what it tells us about Martin Wight. As to the former, modern cosmopolitans characteristically ignore the religious roots of cosmopolitanism as well as the actual living and breathing religious cosmopolitans in our midst – point out to modern cosmopolitans that when Thomas Mann wanted a representative cosmopolitan for his novel of ideas, *The Magic Mountain*, he choose a Jesuit, or suggest that radical Islam is a cosmopolitan doctrine and the response is likely to be the blankest of blank looks.[2] The cosmopolitanism of e.g. Richard Beardsworth, Charles Beitz or David

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[2] See for example the exchange between myself and Richard Beardsworth over his book *Cosmopolitanism and International Relations Theory* (Cambridge: Polity

Held takes the form of a rather banal exercise in global wishful thinking and the milk-and-water global social democracy they espouse is a long way from the cosmopolitanism of SS Paul or Augustine, let alone that of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.[3] Attention to Wight's argument would go some way to combatting the modern cosmopolitan resistance to acknowledging the importance of religious thought.

But 'The Disunity of Mankind' also contributes to our understanding of the international thought of Martin Wight. Understanding how to read Wight as a thinker has always been difficult – the Grotianism of 'Western Values in International Relations' seems to sit uneasily with some of the more realist formulations of *Power Politics*, and the discovery that Wight was a conscientious objector in World War II suggests a rejection of both realism and rationalism.[4] 'The Disunity of Mankind' however is clearly a work of Augustinian Realism which places him in the same camp as Reinhold Niebuhr, even if their versions of Christianity were rather different. The notion of Christendom ('*republica Christiana*') as an entity which, while representing a nascent version of the unity of mankind, is under threat and faced with the need to defend itself in an unforgiving world seems to me to be very much in line with the thought of the 'righteous realists' identified by Joel Rosenthal.[5] Wight's concluding thoughts in this paper, quoting at length Pope Urban II's call to Crusade at the Council of Clermont reinforces the point; it also has some resonances with the present day, reminding us that, for contemporaries, the Crusades were a reaction to

Press, 2011) in the *Journal of International Political Theory* Vol. 9, No. 2 April 2013 pp. 104 – 117.
[3] Beardsworth *op cit*; Charles Beitz *Political Theory and International Relations* Revised Ed. (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); David Held *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Reality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).
[4] 'Western Values in International Relations' in Wight and Herbert Butterfield eds. *Diplomatic Investigations* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966). Wight's status as a conscientious objector was unknown to most people before it was revealed in Hedley Bull 'Martin Wight and the Theory of International Relations' *British Journal of International Studies* Vol. 2, No. 2, July 1976, pp. 101 – 116. In a rather unsympathetic article in 1981, Michael Nicholson refers to 'The Enigma of Martin Wight' (*Review of International Studies* Vol. 7, No.1. pp. 15 – 22), expressing genuine puzzlement.
[5] Joel Rosenthal *Righteous Realists* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1991).

persecution not an unprovoked aggression, a useful reminder at a time when Christians are again under threat in the Middle East and 'crusader' is a potent insult.

In summary, 'The Disunity of Mankind' is not a major work, the enigma of Martin Wight' has not been solved, and Ian Hall will not have to re-write his excellent study of Wight's thought in response to it, but it is nonetheless an evocative piece which throws light on both Wight's thought and on contemporary cosmopolitanism.[6] *Millennium* are performing a service to scholarship by making it widely available.

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[6] Ian Hall *The International Thought of Martin Wight* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).