Let me begin by stating a few biographical facts about our two authors. Løgstrup was born 1905; MacIntyre was born 24 years later 1929. Løgstrup died in 1981; MacIntyre is still very much alive and quite recently published *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* (Cambridge 2016 (CUP)). He first heard about Løgstrup when he was guest professor in Aarhus in 1992, 11 years after Løgstrup’s death. He there suggested that he and I should cooperate on a new American edition of Løgstrup’s main work: *The Ethical Demand*, originally published in Danish in 1956 and first translated into English in 1971 published by Fortress Press, but receiving little attention outside of Protestant theological circles in America. The new edition came out in 1997.

What attracted the Catholic philosopher MacIntyre to the work of the Danish Lutheran theologian Løgstrup? In two papers he has expressed both what he as a Thomist could and should learn from Løgstrup, but also why he thinks that Løgstrup ultimately fails to give a convincing account of moral life. I have discussed that critique in an earlier paper (ASA). In this frustratingly short presentation I shall limit myself to trying to place aspects of Løgstrup’s thought in the 1950s and 60s within the historically and sociologically informed philosophical understanding of the relation between morality and religion, philosophy and theology, that the young MacIntyre was developing at the same time, all in order to search for some common themes. As my point of departure I shall take the Riddell Memorial Lectures that MacIntyre gave in the University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne in 1964, and which were later published by OUP in 1967 as *Secularization and Moral Change*, but I shall take into account also his very first book *Marxism: An Interpretation*, published in 1953 when he was 23 years old. And here I shall rely on Peter McMylor’s book: *Alasdair MacIntyre: Critic of Modernity* from 1994.

In his 1964-lectures MacIntyre raises three questions: 1) Why has secularization not progressed any further than it has done? 2) Has the decline of religion been a, or the,
cause of moral decline? 3) What effect has secularization had on English Christianity?

To put it briefly, his answer to the first question (why has secularization not progressed any further?) is that the philosophers of secularized modernity have failed to provide a commonly agreed framework within which fundamental metaphysical and moral questions about life and death can be clearly formulated and answered by ordinary people. In rural England before the industrial revolution Christianity provided such an undoubted framework, but for rather different reasons, the two major forms of secular philosophies that he considers – individualist positivism and socialist Marxism – had both been unable to provide a broadly accepted, fully secular, version of such a framework. They had helped to undermine the intellectual credentials of traditional Christian religion but had presented nothing to replace it, so it just lived on, though in a socially impoverished forms relevant mainly at times of birth, marriage and death.

What our children are left with is on the one hand a vestigial Christian vocabulary of a muddled kind and on the other an absence of any alternative vocabulary in which to raise the kind of issues which it is necessary to raise if there is to be not mere assessment of means, but some kind of explicit agreement or disagreement about social and moral ends. (SMC p. 36)

The Løgstrup of The Ethical Demand could well agree with both sides of this negative diagnosis. He is fully aware of the realities of secularization. He does not discuss Marxism but he is quite harsh in his critique of the meagre ethics of individualist positivism or “the morality of intellectualism” as he called it in ch.10: “Science and Ethics”. On the other hand, he and his colleagues in Aarhus were also highly critical of the muddled kind of Christianity that people paid lip service to in Denmark. In a way his book is an attempt to help overcome this whole situation by offering a reinterpretation of central parts of the Christian vocabulary in a way that cannot be intellectually undermined by secular modernity, thereby pointing to a basic part of morality that everyone should be able to subscribe to with or without religious faith.

In answer to the second question (has the decline of religion been a, or the, cause of moral decline?), MacIntyre argues that the decline of religion is not so much to be seen as the cause of, but is rather itself caused by, a general decline in moral certainty
and commitment which is the result of the breakdown of the relatively stable social relations of rural England brought about by the Industrial Revolution and urbanization.

[I]t is not the case that men first stopped believing in God and in the authority of the Church, and then subsequently started behaving differently. It seems clear that men first of all lost any over-all social agreement as to the right ways to live together, and so ceased to be able to make sense of any claims to moral authority. Consequently they could not find intelligible the claims to such authority which were advanced on the part of the Church. (SMC p. 54)

Again I think that Løgstrup might well have agreed. He discusses moral change in somewhat different terms in chapter 4: “The Changing Character of Social Norms”. He was less of a Marxist than MacIntyre, and the impact of industrialism and urbanization came later and in less dramatic forms in Denmark compared to England. On the other hand, for him the question was not so much how the Church or some other institution could regain the kind of moral and political authority that MacIntyre found missing in England. In that respect he is clearly a Lutheran, emphasizing the importance of individual faith rather than social cohesion. A common point between them is, though, that their understanding of moral change is historically and sociologically informed without resulting in moral relativism.

In answer to the third question (what effect has secularization had on English Christianity?), MacIntyre supplements his criticism of the secular theories of moral philosophy prominent in the 1950’s with an equally strong criticism of the ways contemporary theologians have reacted to secularization.

On the one hand there are a series of theological liberalisms, by means of which theologians have tried to interpret the Christian religion in ways that would make it more at home in the contemporary world; yet because the implication of their doctrines too often seems to be that Christianity cannot remain itself and also be at home in the contemporary secular world, there are a corresponding series of retreats into orthodoxies. To name theologians of these two extremes: on the one hand Paul Tillich or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, or for the English Christianity their disciple, Dr. John Robinson; on the other hand the English disciples of Kierkegaard, or of Barth, or of the revivals of Catholic orthodoxy. (SMC pp. 67-68).
How does this criticism apply to the theology of Løgstrup? He would clearly distance himself from both camps. He had long been highly critical of the liberal theology of his teachers in Copenhagen and had joined a strong Kierkegaardian existentialist movement in Danish theology insisting on an even more radical version of the distinction between religion and gospel found in the Calvinist Karl Barth. The Christian gospel was not meant to fulfill the traditional roles of a religion, but was rather a constant call to each individual to live his or her life authentically. With *The Ethical Demand*, however, he clearly breaks with this movement. Løgstrup could follow the existentialist theologians in claiming that “for the Judeo-Christian faith it is beyond our ability and power to know and meet God in the world.” But unlike them, he added: “On the other hand it does not exceed human ability and power to know that the world is God’s” (KUS p. 526). The world has a given, created order which is not of our own making, and it is possible philosophically to explain the givenness of this order without relying on revelation or orthodoxy. It cannot be proven that the given order is created by a divine being, but it may be interpreted it that way without coming into conflict with anything else that we know about the world. Faith must thus presuppose an ontological metaphysics open to ordinary philosophical scrutiny. “[W]here Catholic theology has an ontology, existence theologians think that protestant theology should have a void … [but] faith contains an ontology” (ETV pp.45-46). And that means an ontology that is not special to Christianity but that secular philosophers might well share or not share. In a way it is this special understanding of an overlap between theology and philosophy that allows him the space he needs to distance himself from retreats into orthodoxies.

Regarding liberal theology, MacIntyre criticizes Paul Tillich for understanding God as the name of whatever it is about which we care most deeply, so that to discover more about the nature of God is just to discover more about the nature of the ultimate concerns of man. MacIntyre points out that this is actually quite close to the position of Ludwig Feuerbach, who in his time wasn’t exactly regarded as a great renovator of Christianity. Løgstrup, however, does not share this position. For him God is the creator, or “the power to be in all that is”. This is unfolded in his later book *Skabelse og tilintetgørelse* (Creation and Annihilation) from 1978.

MacIntyre also criticizes John Robinson and does so in a way that may seem directly to target a position like Løgstrup’s as well:
Consider, for example, the plea by Dr. Robinson that in place of the legalistic ethics of the past, Christianity should adopt an ethic that makes love the supreme value; Christianity is to disregard any morality in which the rules provide us with lists of prescribed and prohibited actions. Instead there is a single injunction to do whatever is compatible with acting with an intention and purpose of love. My argument will be that this attempt to reform Christian ethics is yet another recognition that traditional Christian ethics is no longer applicable in an entirely changed social and institutional situation, but that what is put in its place is not a new and relevant morality, but an entirely vacuous one. Dr. Robinson’s morality is a morality of intention, and moralities of intention divorced from the prescription of particular types of action are notoriously difficult to formulate in a way that gives them any content. If I am to say what it is to act from love rather than from any other motive in my intentions, I must be able to specify some content which love has in specific situations. (SMC p.71)

*The Ethical Demand* is one long attempt to understand in strictly human terms how it can be that an individual’s relation to God is determined wholly and solely at the point of his or her worldly relation to the neighbour, or how it can be that neighbourly love is demanded of us without presupposing revelation or orthodoxy. In a way Løgstrup thereby does avoid a legalistic ethics of the past by arguing for an ethics that makes love the supreme value. But this is not presented as a new morality for Christianity to adopt but rather as an appeal to a normative fact that is deeply involved in what it is to be human, and which could be seen as such a normative fact even before Jesus made others aware of it, and which would remain a normative fact, even if Jesus and Christianity were completely forgotten. Løgstrup is also quite careful to avoid the criticism for vacuity. His account is not a morality of intention. What is demanded is that you do what is best for the other for the sake of the other, and he is insistent that this ethical demand is always refracted by the quite specific circumstances surrounding the meeting between two persons out of which the demand arises. He also makes it quite clear that the demand for love is always complemented by moral and social norms that unlike the ethical demand are explicit, conditional, reciprocal and fulfillable.

Løgstrup thus seems to steer a middle course between the two forms of theological reaction to secular modernity that MacIntyre criticizes. MacIntyre would not accept this as adequate, but nevertheless that must again have been part of what made Løgstrup interesting for him.
Let me finish by briefly mentioning three points on which there seems again to be some kind of accordance between Løgstrup and the early MacIntyre. In the very first section of his first book the latter writes:

The division of human life into the sacred and the secular is one that comes naturally to Western thought. It is a division which at one and the same time bears the marks of its Christian origin and witnesses to the death of a properly religious culture. For when the sacred and the secular are divided then religion becomes one more department of human life, one activity among others. This has in fact happened to bourgeois religion … Only a religion which is a way of living in every sphere either deserves to or can hope to survive. For the task of religion is to help see the secular as the sacred, the world as under God. When the sacred and the secular are separated, then the ritual becomes an end not the hallowing of the world, but in itself. Likewise if our religion is fundamentally irrelevant to our politics, then we are recognizing the political as a realm outside the reign of God. To divide the sacred from the secular is to recognize God’s action only within the narrowest limits. A religion which recognizes such a division as does our own, is one on the point of dying. (MI pp.9-10 and AMCM p.3)

When Løgstrup says that it is possible to recognize that the world is God’s and that an individual’s worldly relation to his neighbor is the point where his relation to God is wholly determined, this corresponds with MacIntyre’s claim that the task of a true religion is to see the secular as sacred; the world as under God. The sacred is not a separate realm for Løgstrup either. They certainly differ somewhat in the way in which they see religion as relevant to politics, but unlike many of his colleagues Løgstrup cannot regard it as fundamentally irrelevant, though he is, of course, highly critical of political parties that call themselves Christian.

At the very end of Secularization and Moral Change MacIntyre says:

The inability of men to discard Christianity is part of the inability to provide any post-Christian means of understanding their situation in the world. But we would be quite wrong to accept this failure as having anything ultimate about it. … Both a secularization that is fruitful and not merely destructive and advances in the social sciences depend upon a determination to understand human life in a way
that does not sacrifice it either to mystification or to manipulations. (SMC pp. 75-76).

I think Løgstrup could well agree and that it is precisely such an understanding of human life that he is trying to develop. And they are certainly in deep agreement when MacIntyre in a paper from the same period states:

It is now too late to be medieval and it is too empty and too easy to be Kierkegaardian. (IUB pp.76-77 and AMCM p. 42).

I suppose that here the Lutheran Løgstrup was even less tempted to be medieval than the Thomist MacIntyre.


