Jose Casanova critiques Talal Asad’s secularization thesis in *Powers of the Secular Modern*, a literary text in which many critics share their discourse on the opinions and argument displayed in Asad’s *Formations of the Secular*. Specifically in the second chapter, “Secularization Revisited: A Reply to Talal Asad,” Casanova discredits an important premise of Asad’s take on the secularization thesis. While a significant section of Casanova’s arguments are valid, these ideas also can be expanded upon. However, in order to fully discuss and analyze Casanova’s critique, we must first discuss Asad’s point of view. Talal Asad’s first point is that secularization results in a direct differentiation of social spaces, and therefore a separation of religion and politics. Asad is correct in this opinion because I feel that social areas such as schools, communities and workplaces, and religion should be separated because oftentimes the lines between religious and secular are blurred which can cause conflict. This is due to the fact that the motives behind actions may be based on one person’s religious views, which may differ from someone else’s. Therefore, Asad’s viewpoint is agreeable because it can be applied to the social arena.

Asad’s second support of his take on the secularization thesis goes on to say that religion should be privatized completely into its own sphere, separated from the social area. This ties back to Asad’s first premise, and therefore his thesis is supported. Religion should be privatized into its own sphere due to the fact that it is unfair to base everything off of religion when there are some that are not religious. When this happens, these non-believers are off-handedly sectioned off into their own area. Important social and governmental decisions should not be based off of religious views, but what is good for the community, based on the opinion of all members of the community. Thus, it can be concluded that Asad is correct in his view that religion should be privatized into its own separate sphere.
Asad states in his last premise that the social value of religious beliefs and their institutions has begun to decline, however I believe this statement is quite invalid for many significant reasons. Modern religion has become intertwined with who we are as a society, whether we truly believe it should be or not. For example, in today's public schools we say the, “Pledge of Allegiance,” to the American Flag before class, and in this pledge is the phrase, “under God.” This phrase is a perfect example of society’s connection to religion due to the fact that children are encouraged to say the pledge. This instills the idea of religion within our youth, even if its purpose is show patriotism for our country. Furthermore, religious institutions are also important within the community because churches work to better the community through volunteer work and mission trips. Overall, religion is still an integral part of society, as we know it.

Now that we have gone over Asad’s arguments we can turn to Casanova’s viewpoints. Casanova first focuses on the idea that de-privatization of religion does not alter Asad’s ideas on the secularization thesis and then moves to the conclusion that privatization of religion is not particularly important to modernity. Specifically Casanova points out that only the separation of religion and politics and the decline in religious beliefs is applicable, while privatization of religion in not important. This is where Casanova and I differ. I agree with the first and second premises of Asad’s ideas on secularization, but not the last because I believe that religion remains as prominent as ever in the United States. Casanova is wrong in his argument that religion should not be privatized because if religion were privatized, it would allow for an easier split between religion and the government. This split between the government and politics is beneficial due to the fact that it allows for common ground between different groups. Although I do not completely agree with what Casanovas ideas on Asad’s opinion, I do appreciate the
structure of his explanation of the reason for why premise 2 is not tenable. On page 16, Casanova shows support for his argument by referencing European religious customs. He says, “But Europeans tends to use the term in a double sense, switching unconsciously back and forth between this traditional meaning of secularization and a second meaning that points to progressive decline of religious beliefs and practices among individuals.” Personally, I do think that modern Europeans are not as religious as they were before in comparison to the United States, which ironic because the religiously prosecuted migrated to North America from Europe to begin with a clean slate. Casanova believes that Europeans switch back and forth between being religious and honoring tradition. However, although Europeans practice religious holidays and events, I believe it is for traditional purposes more than the fact that they actually religious. Therefore, Casanova is correct that religion is becoming less prominent, but only in Europe, as religion is taking the opposite course in the United States.

Privatization of religion has the potential to play a significant role in modernity. On page 14, Casanova attacks Asad’s second premise by commenting, “Religious traditions are now confronting the differentiated secular spheres, challenging them to face their own obscurantist, ideological, and inauthentic claims.” In this Casanova means to say that although religion may become privatized, there is no way to possibly stop it from bleeding into secular spheres and thus causing a challenge. I conclude that we are still modern when we question religion because it cannot be completely contained due to the fact that religion will always be haunted by secularization due to the fact that the very roots of the secular are religious.

Casanova makes a few valid points but his analysis of Asad is not completely adequate. In my opinion, premises 1 and 2 are valid, while premise 3 is only valid if analyzed from a European standpoint. Despite this small but significant change, it does not cause the entire thesis
to fall through. If this is applied, then all of Asad’s premises are valid in a sense, and Casanova’s viewpoint is slightly misguided.
Works Cited