

Religious Voices in Public Places

Edited by

NIGEL BIGGAR AND LINDA HOGAN

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Contents

<i>Contributors</i>	ix
Introduction <i>Linda Hogan</i>	1
PART I: RELIGION AND PUBLIC REASON: PHILOSOPHICAL VIEWS	
1. Why Can't We All Just Get Along with Each Other? <i>Nicholas Wolterstorff</i>	17
2. Citizenship, Religion, and Political Liberalism <i>Raymond Plant</i>	37
3. Between Postsecular Society and the Neutral State: Religion as a Resource for Public Reason <i>Maureen Junker-Kenny</i>	58
PART II: RELIGION AND PUBLIC REASON: THEOLOGICAL VIEWS	
4. Translation, Conversation, or Hospitality? Approaches to Theological Reasons in Public Deliberation <i>Luke Bretherton</i>	85
5. Messianic Ethics and Diaspora Communities: Upbuilding the Secular Theologically from Below <i>P. Travis Kroeker</i>	110
6. Christian Hope and Public Reason <i>Robert Gascoigne</i>	131
PART III: RELIGION AND PUBLIC REASON: PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES	
7. Not Translation, but Conversation: Theology in Public Debate about Euthanasia <i>Nigel Biggar</i>	151

8. Religious Education and Democratic Character <i>Paul Weithman</i>	194
9. Religion and Public Reason in the Global Politics of Human Rights <i>Linda Hogan</i>	216
PART IV: RELIGION AND PUBLIC REASON: NATIONAL CONTEXTS	
10. The Public Presence of Religion in England: Anglican Religious Leaders and Public Culture <i>Peter Sedgwick</i>	235
11. Religion, Rhetoric, and Running for Office: Public Reason on the US Campaign Trail <i>Brian Stiltner and Steven Michels</i>	260
12. Islam and the Secularized Nation: A Transatlantic Comparison <i>Jocelyne Cesari</i>	286
Conclusion <i>Nigel Biggar</i>	309
<i>Index</i>	331

Introduction

Linda Hogan

Religion has once again re-emerged as a significant force in the public square. Whereas in the twentieth century it was assumed that religion would become ever more marginal to political life, the events of the last decade suggest a more complex reality. The once dominant secularization thesis has had to be re-thought in light of the evidence that social and technological progress does not inevitably lead people to abandon ‘the naïve superstitions of faith’. Rather it appears that, around the globe, many people are turning again to religion, although for the most part they are not returning to the traditional religious institutions, but instead are attracted to its more informal manifestations. However, nor can one simply conclude that secular world-views are under threat while religious ones are again on the rise, since there are also countries like Malta and the Republic of Ireland, once renowned for their religiosity, where the social and political influence of religion is dramatically in decline. Rather there is in evidence a complex global political reality, in which the nature of religion and the character of religious affiliation are changing and in which one can no longer identify a simple trajectory towards either secularism or religiosity. Indeed our world is simultaneously secular and religious, with the political implications of this ambivalent reality evident across the globe. Secular Turkey now has an Islamist President, Abdullah Gül, while France’s President Nicolas Sarkozy, in a radical departure from the country’s long-established secular republicanism, has spoken of the need to allow for a more public role for religion.¹ In the United States, notwithstanding the constitutional separation of church and state, religious voices play a significant role in the determination of policy, especially relating to family, gender, and reproduction, while in many Asian, African, and South

¹ Late in 2007 and throughout 2008 President Nicolas Sarkozy made a number of speeches in which he elaborated his view of the role religion ought to play in political life. The most significant of these were at the Lateran Church of St John, Rome, on 20 December 2007 and in Riyadh on 14 January 2008 before the Saudi Arabian Consultative Council.

American countries the political influence of the more informal strands of evangelical Christianity and fundamentalist Islam is growing even as the influence of the more established denominations is in decline.

Alongside this resurgence of religion is the parallel phenomenon of the reassertion of violent religion. We see examples of this in India, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Israel–Palestine, and the Balkans, although in each case religion is but one among a myriad of factors fuelling political conflict. Indeed the presence of violent religion, in its local and global forms, has fuelled what *The Economist* has called a ‘secular fury’ against religion.² Associated with analysts like Christopher Hitchens,³ Sam Harris,⁴ and Richard Dawkins,⁵ this perspective lays at religion’s door the blame for much political turmoil worldwide and regards it as ultimately pernicious in nature. Nor is this negative assessment limited to violent religion; rather it is a charge laid against all religion, with sexism and the persecution of minorities, including sexual minorities, being named as examples of its destructive influence. According to this view the real clash of civilizations is between the superstition of religion and the enlightenment of modernity. Moreover, in this perspective the hope for humankind resides therefore in the abandonment of religious world-views in their entirety, and, in the interim, in the banishment of religion to the private realm.

Even the most tolerant of secular liberals tend to prefer a political order in which religion plays a predominantly private, rather than a public role. However, for most religious believers religion is inescapably political and cannot meaningfully be relegated to the private realm. In common with citizens who have no religious affiliation, religious believers expect to have the opportunity to express their views on matters of critical public interest within the usual deliberative processes of the polis. Nor is it clear that the unambiguous distinction between the public and the private can be sustained in the terms advocated by many secularists. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to delineate where the public and private realms begin and end. Moreover, many of the pivotal issues on which the debates about the political influence of religion revolve are precisely those that cannot be easily categorized thus. Few issues are more obviously simultaneously political and private than abortion, euthanasia, or gay marriage. Thus notwithstanding the risks to the polity posed by intolerant or violent religion, the solution cannot be

² This is a phrase used in *The Economist* in its special report on religion and public life, 3 November 2007, 4.

³ Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007).

⁴ Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004).

⁵ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006).

the privatization of religion. Such a remedy finds no resonance among the self-perception of the majority of religious believers, and conflicts with the dominant understanding of the nature of political participation.

1. THE FACT OF PLURALISM

This present age is characterized, not by the triumph of either religious or anti-religious world-views, but rather by the fact of religious pluralism. Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*⁶ maps the political and philosophical contours of the journey from a society in which belief in God was unchallenged to one in which it is one option among many, arguing that if one can talk of this age as being a secular one it can only be in terms of religious uniformity ceding to religious pluralism. For Taylor the most significant element in understanding the manner in which our world can be called secular lies in the changed nature of belief. There has been, he claims, a modification of what it means to believe. Thus the critical factor globally today is that 'belief in God is no longer axiomatic . . . [that] there are alternatives.'⁷ Believers and unbelievers alike live with the fact of religious pluralism and have to cope with both its theological significance as well as its political ramifications. According to Taylor we inhabit a global context which contains different milieux, 'within each of which the default option may be different from others, although the dwellers within each are very aware of the options favoured by the others, and cannot just dismiss them as an inexplicable exotic error.'⁸ 'Secularity in this sense is a matter of the whole context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual and religious experience and search takes place.'⁹

It is true that many public spaces have been emptied of any reference to God (in contrast to earlier times), and that there is a falling off in religious belief and practice (at least in some parts of the world). However, although these factors are pertinent to our discussion, it is the plural nature of the presence of religion, and the fact that all citizens—and especially religious believers—have to contend with that pluralism, that makes the debate about the role of religious voices in the public square so critical, and so contested. In every jurisdiction one can discern the political implications of this religious pluralism, especially in policy debates on issues such as education, health, and family law. In Europe, debates about the political implications of religious

⁶ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁷ *Ibid.* 3.

⁸ *Ibid.* 21.

⁹ *Ibid.* 3.

pluralism are affected by the multiplicity of institutional arrangements between individual states and the various majority and minority faiths represented therein. Moreover the construction of the EU as a political entity has also provided the occasion for a re-energized debate about the role of religion in the liberal polity,¹⁰ with the case for Turkey's admission to the EU being especially contentious. In the United States the issues debated mirror those that preoccupy Europe, whereas in Asia and in the Arab world, although a different dynamic is in play, nonetheless the common concerns of education, health (especially at the beginning and end of life), and human rights are among the issues through which the debate about the proper role of religion in public life is conducted. Thus despite certain regional particularities we can discern a certain commonality in respect of the issues through which the role of religious voices in the public square is considered.

The fact of religious pluralism raises a number of sensitive political questions for each state, among the most important being the extent to which the common good requires the regulation of particular religious practices (especially those that may be regarded as discriminatory or repressive of individuals within the communities in question), and the extent to which a society should adapt its existing norms and legislative provisions to accommodate religious practices that are untypical of those of the host communities. The controversy evoked by the Archbishop of Canterbury's suggestion that British society needs to have a debate about how it could accommodate some aspects of Sharia law is an example of just how contentious such issues have become.¹¹ States deal differently with these fundamental political questions, with a variety of approaches observable worldwide. In liberal democracies, two dominate: the assimilationist approach, most strongly associated with France, with its republican ideal of *laïcité*; and various versions of a multiculturalism, typical of the Netherlands, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States.¹² In spite of the differences of emphasis both approaches share some fundamental assumptions, including a separation of the spheres of

¹⁰ See for example 'Degré de modernité des états en Europe', *Revue d'éthique et de théologie morale, Le Supplément*, 226 (September 2003); 'Religions et nations', *Revue d'éthique et de théologie morale, Le Supplément*, 228 (March 2004); and Jürgen Habermas, 'Völpolitische Grundlagen des demokratischen Rechtsstaats?', in *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2005), 106–18.

¹¹ For the full text of the interview given by Archbishop Rowan Williams on 7 February 2008 see <<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/1573>>.

¹² See the various essays in Stefan Heuser and Hans Ulrich (eds.), *Pluralism in Europe? One Law, One Market, One Culture?*, Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Societas Ethica in Ljubljana, August 2004 (Münster: Lit, 2006); Marie Jo Thiel, *Europe, spiritualités et culture face au racisme* (Münster: Lit, 2004); and *Islam and Enlightenment: New Issues*, Concilium 2005/5 (London: SCM, 2005).

religion and politics (although this does not necessarily imply an unambiguously formal separation of church and state); a constitutional democratic government; the presence of multiple religious communities; and a thriving civil society in which policy issues are debated. In Islamic and Muslim majority states the proper role and functioning of religion is also of concern, although the framework in which even the most fundamental questions are posed, and the political options delineated, is very different. Currently dominating public discourse is the view that an Islamic state involves an Islamic religious establishment, on the ground that it is the responsibility of rulers to put in place an order that will secure peace with justice.¹³ The theological rationale for this conclusion is developed especially by a number of twentieth-century theorists, including the Egyptian intellectual Sayyid Qutb, whose position is discussed in Nicholas Wolterstorff's chapter in this volume. Nonetheless there are alternative voices, beginning with Ali 'abd al-Raziq,¹⁴ who argue for the development of new forms of Islamic governance that are consonant with many of the features of modern life, and especially with the fact of religious pluralism.¹⁵

2. THE LIBERAL PUBLIC SQUARE

The political context with which this volume is concerned is that of the liberal polity, within which the question of the role of religion in public debate takes on a particular hue. The essays herein recognize that within liberal democracies the formal arrangements between church and state may vary, as for example between the USA which imposes a formal separation, and England and Scotland where there are established churches. Notwithstanding these differences however, what characterizes the political contexts with which we are here concerned is the conviction that the state has an obligation to manage

¹³ Here I rely on an unpublished paper by John Kelsay entitled 'The Christian Sources of Liberal Democracy: An Islamic Perspective', which was presented at the conference 'The Christian Sources of Liberal Society', held at Trinity College Dublin in June 2006.

¹⁴ Ali 'abd al Raziq, *Al Islam wa usul al hukm* (Islam and the Fundamentals of Government), is available in a French translation by Abdou Filali Anseriy, *L'Islam et les fondements du pouvoir* (Paris: Éditions de la Découverte, 1994). Further details are available in John Kelsay, *Arguing the Just War in Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 239.

¹⁵ See for example Abdulaziz Sachedina *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) and Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982).

the reasonable pluralism (including religious pluralism) that inevitably occurs in democratic societies, and that it ought to do so in a manner that supports ‘the underlying ideas of citizens as free and equal persons and of society as a fair system of cooperation over time.’¹⁶ Within this context it is reasonable to expect that citizens, motivated by different theological and philosophical world-views, will forward a diversity of perspectives on the meaning and purpose of human existence; on the values by which individuals ought to live their lives; and on the nature of the human goods by which a society ought to order itself. Moreover the paradigmatic model has come to be the Rawlsian one, which proposes an understanding of liberalism in which any viable conception of justice must ‘allow for a diversity of general and comprehensive doctrines, and for the plurality of conflicting, and indeed incommensurable, conceptions of the meaning, value and purpose of human life [or what Rawls calls for short “conceptions of the good”] affirmed by citizens of democratic societies.’¹⁷ Given, as Rawls sees it, the political fact of the incommensurability of these diverse conceptualizations of the good, and that there is no political basis on which citizens can adjudicate among them, a well-ordered society must develop a political conception of justice (namely justice as fairness) which is independent of and free from any consideration of the good.

Rawls is confident that the liberal polity can forge ‘an overlapping consensus’ on fundamental political matters among people with diverse religious and philosophical commitments. The means by which this is achieved in the Rawlsian polity is by public reason, namely a process by which citizens replace their comprehensive doctrines of truth or right with an idea of the politically reasonable addressed to citizens as citizens.¹⁸ Moreover, underlying the concept of public reason is the criterion of reciprocity, namely a commitment by which ‘viewing one another as free and equal in a system of social cooperation over generations, [citizens] are prepared to offer one another fair terms of cooperation according to what they consider the most reasonable conception of political justice; and . . . agree to act on those terms, even at the cost of their own interests in particular situations, provided that other citizens also accept those terms.’¹⁹

¹⁶ John Rawls, ‘The Idea of Public Reason’, reprinted in *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 141.

¹⁷ John Rawls, ‘The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus’, *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 7/1 (1987), 4.

¹⁸ Rawls, ‘The Idea of Public Reason’, 132.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 136.

3. RELIGIOUS VOICES IN THE LIBERAL PUBLIC SQUARE

The concept of public reason is fundamental to Rawls's understanding of how the just and equitable liberal democracy ought to function. Public reason specifies 'at the deepest level the basic political values and specifies how the political relation is to be understood'.²⁰ More explicitly public reason is the form of reasoning that citizens ought to adopt when they deliberate on matters of constitutional essentials and on matters of basic justice. In short it is the mode through which political deliberation on the most significant of issues ought to be pursued. Within this framework a form of public reason is regarded as essential because the mutual incompatibility of comprehensive doctrines is presumed. Moreover it is assumed that the differences among these comprehensive (including religious) doctrines can only be managed by the systematic reservation of such doctrines, that is, by ensuring that they are aired only either in private or in the background culture of civil society. However, Rawls does enter a caveat here in that he accepts that citizens may introduce aspects of their comprehensive doctrines, religious and non-religious, into political discussion at any time, 'provided that, in due course, we give properly public reasons to support the principles and policies our comprehensive doctrine is said to support'.²¹ Rawls calls this 'the proviso'.

Whether and how far the concept of public reason resonates with theological (especially Christian) understandings of the liberal polity and Christianity's role therein is the central preoccupation of this collection. It is addressed from a number of theological and philosophical perspectives, through a range of issues in public policy, and in a variety of national polities. Each of the authors considers the extent to which responsible dialogue involves the systematic reservation of religious doctrines, or not. It probes too the underlying question of whether religious, or other metaphysically committed speech, is indeed unintelligible to non-believers, as many proponents of political liberalism would have us believe. The contributors attend to the issue of how consensus can be achieved, many challenging the Rawlsian assumption that the route to such agreement on constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice is via (Rawlsian) public reason. Indeed, running throughout the volume is an affinity for approaches that believe that the route to a durable political culture lies in serious and systematic engagement with different, and even opposing, comprehensive doctrines.

²⁰ Ibid. 138.

²¹ Ibid. 144.

(a) Religion and public reason: philosophical issues

All of our essayists share the view that the context in which liberal societies must function is one in which there is no prospect of religion disappearing, or of citizens agreeing on the fundamental principles of justice and of social order. From this shared diagnosis this collection proceeds to consider the relationship between religion and politics in the liberal polity, first of all, by foregrounding a set of philosophical questions. Of primary importance here is the question of ‘which principles of social organization must a non-confined exclusivist religion affirm if it is to embrace a liberal democratic polity for a society in which there are other such religions.’²² Nicholas Wolterstorff, Raymond Plant, and Maureen Junker-Kenny all consider this fundamental issue, each maintaining a confidence in the liberal polity, but each also, for different reasons, rejecting the view that Rawls’s overlapping consensus, advanced through public reason, is the way to identify such principles. Indeed, notwithstanding his evident support for the liberal polity, Wolterstorff rejects the Rawlsian, Rortian, Hickian, Kantian, and Derridean proposals, while Junker-Kenny and Plant conclude that the procedural approach of Rawls cannot secure the allegiance of those for whom religion is the fulcrum of their moral ideals. Plant’s subtle paper highlights the paradox within Rawlsian liberalism, which is reluctant to accept a comprehensive or perfectionist justification of the liberal political order, but which is nonetheless committed to particular (comprehensive) principles such as liberty and equality. In his essay entitled ‘Citizenship, Religion, and Political Liberalism’ he is not only critical of the pragmatic approach of Rawls, but also pessimistic about the prospect of a more comprehensive, perfectionist liberalism being able to provide the basis for an overlapping consensus.

Instead of the Rawlsian framework, Junker-Kenny prefers that of Habermas, especially as evident in his most recent work. She argues that Habermas endorses a form of deliberative politics in which citizens are not expected to reserve their systematic doctrines, but rather to explain and translate them.²³ She has reservations about the adequacy of translation as a mode of engagement, however. Nonetheless she finds much within his analysis to give comfort to those who recognize the legitimacy of the presence of religious voices in the public square. This concern with whether there are, within each religion, resources for affirming the basic principles of the liberal polity arises

²² Nicholas Wolterstorff’s analysis in ‘Why Can’t We All Just Get Along with Each Other?’, p. 26 below.

²³ Maureen Junker Kenny, ‘Between Postsecular Society and the Neutral State: Religion as a Resource for Public Reason’, p. 76 below.

for Plant too. His response lies in a natural law approach in which one would probe ‘whether there is some kind of common, shared moral and political space for reasoning about the nature of goods that have to be presupposed by any comprehensive doctrine.’²⁴ Wolterstorff too is exercised by this issue since he is firm in his conviction that the stability of liberal democracy depends, not on the ability and willingness of citizens to appeal to public reason, but rather on ‘the great majority having reasons based on their own perspectives for accepting the principles of political organization’ that are fundamental to a liberal polity.²⁵ Wolterstorff does not explicitly endorse the natural law proposal of Plant, or the universal morality idiom of Junker-Kenny. Yet in his conclusion one can see affinities with these other essayists when he speaks about the moral basis of democracy consisting in the protection of rights, which, in turn, is grounded in the worth of persons—that is, in something that all human beings share.

(b) Religion and public reason: theological issues

How Christians should engage political liberalism, particularly that of the Rawlsian kind, is the primary focus of Part II. In his ‘Translation, Conversation, or Hospitality?’ Luke Bretherton dismisses both the translation mode advocated by Rawls and Habermas, as well as the conversation mode proposed by MacIntyre. Although Bretherton is sympathetic to many aspects of the latter, which he regards as a model that attempts to take seriously the particularities of different traditions, he concludes that the MacIntyrian version of conversation is ultimately unsuccessful. This is because, he claims, MacIntyre gives no account of how the process of conversation is possible when there are significant power differentials between various traditions, either in terms of access to the public square or in terms of a historical affinity with particular forms of public engagement. Instead, he regards Stout’s prescription as the most hopeful, and he sees his own ‘hospitality’ model as a development of Stout’s proposal that ‘a common morality can only be achieved by gradually building discursive bridges and networks of trust in particular settings.’²⁶ The hospitality model ‘attempts to make explicit the commitments implicit in a community’s practices as an aid to self-reflective understanding,’²⁷ while seeing the embodied practices of distinct traditions

²⁴ Raymond Plant, ‘Citizenship, Religion, and Political Liberalism’, p. 56 below.

²⁵ Wolterstorff, ‘Why Can’t We All Just Get Along with Each Other?’, p. 35 below.

²⁶ Luke Bretherton, ‘Translation, Conversation, or Hospitality’, p. 96 below.

²⁷ Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 12.

as being, in themselves, direct contributions to deliberation about the common good.²⁸

While Travis Kroeker's messianic ethics also focuses on the embodied practices of communities as the way in which Christians can best engage in the public square, his assessment of the nature of that secular public square is far more negative. Indeed he argues that 'the notions of neutral technology and juridical state sovereignty that underlie current conceptions and embodiments of the secular are themselves dangerously totalitarian, exclusivist, and violent, even while hidden beneath the veneer of progressivist liberal assumptions.'²⁹ Reminiscent of the compelling analysis of both Stanley Hauerwas and Grace Jantzen, that the political formations of modernity are based on the production and denial of death,³⁰ Kroeker argues that the Christian diasporic ethic ought to be neither isolationist nor accommodationist, but rather ought to live out of a moral orientation towards a shared *shalom*. Inevitably this means not being coerced into the adoption of a contrived language of public reason. Instead it involves religious and other citizens in a form of political deliberation pursued through their own languages, while also 'learning the languages of others in order to communicate about the shared good'.³¹

Robert Gascoigne begins his reflection from a different place, arguing that Christians can bear witness to their religious identity and discern the ethical and political meaning of their faith without imposing the content of that faith on others. Meditating specifically on the virtue of Christian hope, Gascoigne argues that service to others in a shared historical existence *is* an expression of Christian identity and that an explicitly Christian hope can be expressed in three key ways: a discernment of human capacities that evoke moral virtue; a conviction of the openness of the future to human striving; and a certain detachment from the fruits of that striving.³² Gascoigne's analysis presents yet another model for Christians within the liberal polity. This is focused neither on the practices of local communities, nor on the prophetic witness of diasporic communities, but is rather based in the conviction that Christians can maintain their transcendent witness through the virtue of hope, and especially in its expression of solidarity and service of others.

²⁸ Bretherton, 'Translation, Conversation, or Hospitality', p. 109 below.

²⁹ Travis Kroeker, 'Messianic Ethics and Diaspora Communities: Upbuilding the Secular Theologically from Below', p. 116 below.

³⁰ See most recently Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles, *Christianity, Democracy and the Radical Ordinary* (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade Books, 2008); and Grace M. Jantzen, *Foundations of Violence* (London: Routledge, 2004), 10.

³¹ Kroeker, 'Messianic Ethics', p. 126 below.

³² Robert Gascoigne, 'Christian Hope and Public Reason', p. 132 below.

**(c) Religion and public reason: public policy issues
and national contexts**

Parts III and IV consider these philosophical and theological issues as they find expression in controversies about public policy and in different national political contexts. In Part III the policy issues of religious education, euthanasia, and human rights are discussed, while in the final part controversies in a variety of national polities are considered, namely: the formal role of Anglican religious leaders in the UK parliament; the role that religion played in the US presidential election campaigns of 2008; and the political role of Islam in democratic societies, European and North American.

The essays in Part III share a conviction that the presence of explicitly religious voices enhances rather than diminishes the nature and quality of political debate. Each is also aware, however, of the limits of such speech and of the fact that all citizens, including religiously motivated ones, share in responsibility for ensuring that the norms of civility and mutual respect are kept in view at all times. Paul Weithman's 'Religious Education and Democratic Character' argues that a religiously based education actually inculcates, albeit with a different rationale, the norms that ground deliberative democracy. In 'Not Translation, but Conversation: Theology in Public Debate about Euthanasia', Nigel Biggar probes the question of whether or not theological arguments about this controversial public issue are accessible to non-Christians. Biggar makes a theological argument against the introduction of euthanasia, and then goes on to reflect on the nature of that argument, asking if and in what ways such religiously based arguments can contribute both to political deliberation, and ultimately to consensus on policy, in its own terms. His conclusion is that 'public discourse should not require the translation of theology into secularist language', but rather 'should allow contextually sensitive, dialectical, improvisational, candid conversation about public goods between genuinely different points of view, which articulate themselves in their own terms while seeking to be persuasive to others.'³³ However he enters a caveat, in line with the spirit of Bretherton and Gascoigne—namely that 'if fruitful conversation does not need a common language or a uniform public reason (beyond the terms of public goods), it does need a common manner or a public reasonableness. . . . It needs a shared ethic of communication, a shared commitment to care more for the truth than the ego, and to care at once for the truth and for the dignity of those who seem not to recognize it. And it needs a shared belief that this human dignity actually exists.'³⁴

³³ Nigel Biggar, 'Not Translation, but Conversation: Theology in Public Debate about Euthanasia', p. 192 below.

³⁴ Ibid.

The final essay in this section takes the discussion from the national to the global political forum. In 'Religions and Public Reason in the Global Politics of Human Rights' Linda Hogan considers the existing language of global political debate—that is, that of human rights—and assesses its potential. She argues that 'although traditional human rights language operated as a version of public reason (expecting eventually that individuals would abandon their comprehensive doctrines), this understanding of human rights discourse has been modified significantly in the twentieth century. Moreover she claims that 'contemporary human rights discourse is more properly understood as a language of situated individuals who carry with them their comprehensive doctrines . . . [and that] as it moves from being a global version of public reason to being a deliberative discourse, it is fit for the task of generating a variegated and nuanced consensus on matters of basic justice and constitutional essentials in the global public square, and as such is worth supporting'.³⁵

Following consideration of the concrete policy issues of religious education, euthanasia, and human rights, the final part of this collection focuses on controversies where the question of the significance of religious affiliation has been central, as these have arisen in a variety of national polities. These three essays, while dealing with different national jurisdictions, focus on the ways in which different religious actors conceptualize the relationship between religious belonging and the exercise of some form of political influence. Peter Sedgwick considers the case of England, where Anglican bishops have a role in the legislature through their participation in the House of Lords. He concludes that the English experience demonstrates that holders of comprehensive doctrines can indeed participate fully in public and political life, while respecting the requirements of public reason, through respect for the criterion of reciprocity. Brian Stiltner and Steven Michels look at the United States. They analyse aspects of the presidential races of 2008, focusing on how various candidates express, comment on, and make use of their religious affiliation, and consider how this has been theorized and politicized. Their conclusion is that on balance 'candidates' religious ideals, rationales, and motivations should be out in public view, if [the candidate] thinks them relevant'.³⁶ Moreover they conclude that the four candidates they studied—namely Barack Obama, Hillary Rodham Clinton, John McCain, and Mitt Romney—'did not violate the basic requirements of Rawlsian public

³⁵ Linda Hogan, 'Religions and Public Reason in the Global Politics of Human Rights', p. 225 below.

³⁶ Brian Stiltner and Steven Michels, 'Religion, Rhetoric, and Running for Office: Public Reason on the US Campaign Trail', p. 284 below.

reason in their use of religious language',³⁷ and that ultimately 'the way should be kept open for candidates and citizens to use religious language if they feel it is important to do so, assuming they also accept their civil duty to make their views intelligible to others in the public forum'.³⁸ In the final essay Jocelyne Cesari looks at a different group of religious actors, namely Muslim organizations. Her analysis, in 'Islam and the Secularized Nation: A Transatlantic Comparison', highlights both the diversity of views among Islamic actors in Europe and the USA regarding how their religion should inform participation in politics, and the diversity of national political contexts that define what kind of participation is *prima facie* acceptable.

Much excellent work has already been published on the role of religion in liberal democracies. Originating in a conference held at the University of Leeds in June 2003, *Religious Voices in Public Places* seeks to make a distinctive contribution to this well-developed discussion in the following three ways. First, all our authors address the element that distinguishes Rawlsian liberalism from other perspectives, i.e. the requirement that political debate (on constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice) be conducted through public reason. This focus specifically on the norm of public reason facilitates a deeper, more nuanced assessment of the merits and limits of Rawls *vis-à-vis* religion, and is the starting point for a more creative response to this still pressing political debate. Second, this volume combines philosophical and theological discussion with consideration of the dimensions of public policy and political context. Whereas many discussions of this kind confine themselves exclusively to the theoretical level, half of the contributions in this collection consider the issue of religion and public reason in relation to particular public policies and particular polities. Finally, third, our collection extends the geographical scope of discussion in this field, which has tended to be centred on the USA. We have deliberately enlisted contributors from Canada, Australia, France, England, Wales, and Ireland—as well as the USA—in the hope of bringing to light how different national political contexts shape answers to the question of how religious voices should behave in public places.

There can be no privileging of religious voices in the public square. Nonetheless religious and other traditions do have an important public role to play. Moreover they can only properly engage in political life if they do so as substantive, situated narratives. Whereas Rawlsian liberalism confronts Christians (and other religious believers) with a choice between retiring to a cultural enclave or participating in political life by keeping from public view

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

their comprehensive doctrines, no such choice is envisaged by the authors in this collection. Although they come from different disciplines and different national contexts, and represent a variety of philosophical and theological viewpoints, the essayists in this collection share the conviction that religious believers can take their responsibilities as citizens seriously without jeopardizing either their heritage or their social practices. We hope that our discussion here will contribute to the development of a form of liberalism that is genuinely hospitable to religion—and so much the stronger for it.

Why Can't We All Just Get Along with Each Other?

Nicholas Wolterstorff

1. THE PARADOXICAL ROLE OF COERCION IN LIBERAL THEORY

In a recently published essay of mine I argue that coercion plays a paradoxical role in the theory of contemporary political liberalism.¹ What I had in mind by 'political liberalism' is that now-familiar version of political theory, articulating and defending the liberal democratic polity, which holds that it belongs to the role of citizen in such a polity to appeal to 'public' or 'secular' reason for conducting debates in public on political matters and for making political decisions. John Rawls, Robert Audi, and Charles Larmore are prominent examples of such theorists.

My argument went as follows. Those who embrace the theory of political liberalism regard specification of the conditions under which governmental coercion is justified as one of the principal tasks of any theory of liberal democracy. Audi remarks that

[a] liberal democracy by its very nature resists using coercion, and prefers persuasion, as a mean to achieve cooperation. What we are persuaded to do, by being offered reasons for it, we tend to do autonomously and to identify with; what we are compelled to do we tend to resent doing. . . . If fully rational citizens in possession of the relevant facts cannot be persuaded of the necessity of the coercion . . . then from the point of view of liberal democracy, the coercion lacks an adequate basis.²

¹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'The Paradoxical Role of Coercion in Political Liberalism', *Journal of Law, Philosophy, and Culture*, 1/1 (Spring 2007), 135–58.

² Robert Audi, 'Liberal Democracy and the Place of Religion in Politics', in Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff (eds.), *Religion in the Public Square* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 16.

Larmore says that ‘forcing people to comply is to treat them as means’, adding that ‘in itself this cannot be wrong (for otherwise political association would be impossible)’. He then goes on to say that ‘if we try to bring about conformity to a political principle simply by threat, we will be treating people solely as means, as objects of coercion. . . . To respect another person as an end is to insist that coercive or political principles be as justifiable to that person as they are to us.’³ And Rawls says that ‘the liberal political ideal [is] that since political power is the coercive power of free and equal citizens as a corporate body, this power should be exercised, when constitutional essentials and basic questions of justice are at stake, only in ways that all citizens can reasonably be expected to endorse in the light of their common human reason.’⁴ He calls this ‘the liberal principle of legitimacy.’⁵ Only when the principle is satisfied are citizens shown due and equal respect.

Each of these authors, in the passage quoted, alludes to his own view as to the conditions under which governmental coercion is justified—or more precisely, the conditions under which it is appropriate for a person, in his role as citizen of a liberal democracy, to favour some piece of coercive legislation. It goes without saying that the citizen must himself have, or (entitledly) believe that he has, sufficient reason for holding that it would be a good thing for everybody to act in accord with the legislation, so good that it outweighs the evil of coercing those not inclined to act thus. All three of our writers are also of the view, however, that a citizen must also regard the coercive legislation as not justified until he (entitledly) believes that *all his sane adult fellow citizens* do or would see themselves as having sufficient reason for holding that it would be a good thing for everybody to act in accord with the legislation, so good as to outweigh the evil of coercing those not inclined to act thus.

We are now ready to spy the paradoxical role of coercion in political liberalism. For the time being, let me drop the word ‘would’ from the formula that I just gave, so that it reads like this: a citizen must not regard a piece of coercive legislation as justified until he (entitledly) believes that all his sane adult fellow citizens *do* see themselves as having sufficient reason for holding

³ Charles Lamore, ‘Political Liberalism’, *Political Theory*, 18/3 (August 1990), 348–9.

⁴ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 139–40.

⁵ *Ibid.*: 137: ‘political liberalism says: our exercise of political power is fully proper only when it is exercised in accordance with a constitution the essentials of which all citizens as free and equal may reasonably be expected to endorse in the light of principles and ideals acceptable to their common human reason. This is the liberal principle of legitimacy. To this it adds that all questions arising in the legislature that concern or border on constitutional essentials, or basic questions of justice, should also be settled, so far as possible, by principles and ideals that can be similarly endorsed.’ An almost identical formulation of the concept of legitimacy is to be found *ibid.* 217.

that it would be such a good thing for everybody to act in accord with the legislation as to outweigh the evil of coercing those not inclined to act thus. This formula has two consequences. In the first place, the condition is much too strong; in our complex and pluralistic societies it would be crazy for anyone to believe, for any piece of legislation whatsoever, that all sane adult citizens do see themselves as having sufficient reason to believe such a thing. Our societies are rife with disagreement on such matters. But secondly, suppose, *mirabile dictu*, that everybody did see themselves as having sufficient reason for believing that everybody's acting in accord with the proposed legislation would be so good that it outweighs the evil of coercing those not inclined to act thus; then, as long as they do all believe that, the legislation will not be functioning coercively for any of them. As long as I believe that X is itself a good thing for me to do, then, whatever the penalties attached to my not doing X, I am not acting under coercion when I do X.

That first point impels all liberal theorists to move from the simple *do* to the disjunctive *do or would*—away from the actual to the actual plus the hypothetical. A citizen must not regard a piece of coercive legislation as justified until he (entitledly) believes that all his sane adult fellow citizens do in fact, or *would, under specified circumstances*, see themselves as having sufficient reason for holding that it would be a good thing for everybody to act in accord with the legislation, so good as to outweigh the evil of coercing those not so inclined. Different liberal theorists specify those circumstances in different ways. Audi, to mention just him, holds that what is relevant is what citizens *would* believe *if they were fully rational and fully informed*.⁶ But the differences make no difference. For there will be, for any piece of legislation, many sane adult citizens who, as a matter of fact, do not see themselves as having sufficient reason for believing the proposition in question; in particular, they do not believe it would be a good thing *for them* to act thus. Accordingly, if the legislation is enacted, they will be coerced; the fact that they *would not* be coerced *if they were* in that hypothetical situation takes away

⁶ The formula I quoted from Audi is susceptible to interpretations different from this one. It could be read as saying: what those citizens who are in fact fully rational and informed could be persuaded of (if I offered them my reasons). Then the only fellow citizens one need trouble oneself with are those very few who are now fully rational and informed. In the light of other passages, I have guessed that Audi does not mean this, but means, rather, what I have suggested above: what all one's actual fellow citizens would believe (could be persuaded of) if they were fully rational and informed. There is, of course, a yet more abstract way of interpreting the formula: what any human being would believe (could be persuaded of) if he were a fully rational and informed fellow citizen.

If we were going to treat this matter in detail, another issue we would have to consider is this: what is to be said about the person who agrees with me on the desirability of the legislation, but only because he is not fully informed, or not fully rational?

nothing from the fact that in their actual situation they *are* coerced. Thus all the bad features of coercion that our theorists pointed out in the first place will pertain. On Audi's account, they will feel resentful; on Larmore's account, they will be treated merely as means and not also as ends; on Rawls's account, they will not be accorded equal respect—this in spite of the fact that Rawls's concept of *legitimacy* is satisfied.

In short, on the implausible actualist interpretation of the conditions of justification of coercion, the citizen should support legislation only if he believes that no one would ever be coerced by it. On the preferred conditionalist interpretation, the citizen should support legislation only if he believes that in some hypothetical situation no one would be coerced by it; whether actual people will actually be coerced is not treated as a relevant consideration.

The reason our contemporary theorists of political liberalism do not regard themselves as engaged in purely utopian politics while turning a blind eye to the coercion that actually takes place is that they think there is some chance of persuading most of the citizens of our liberal polities to appeal to 'public reason', as Rawls and Larmore call it, to 'secular reason', as Audi calls it, in debating and deciding important political issues. The idea is that for all those who do appeal to that, if one person correctly thinks that he has a sufficient reason, drawn from public or secular reason, for the proposed coercive legislation, then the others will also have a sufficient reason for the proposed legislation. Admittedly they may not realize that they do. But once they are informed, then, on the issue at hand, they are together engaged in consensus politics. And insofar as they practise consensus politics, there will be no unjustified coercion among them—since, as we have seen, there will be no coercion at all. What we have here is the dream of a polity free of coercion because the politics practised by its members is consensus politics.

The relevance of all this to religion is well known from the writings of our theorists of political liberalism. Given that religion in our societies comes in the form of a plurality of particular religions, and given that there are those who embrace no religion at all, reasons for coercive legislation drawn from some particular religion will seldom if ever satisfy the condition for justified coercion. Almost always there will be, to use Audi's formula, some fully rational and informed citizen who does not accept the reason. And this, says Audi, is 'why religious grounds alone are not properly considered a sufficient basis of coercion even if they happen to be shared by virtually all citizens'.⁷

⁷ Audi, 'Liberal Democracy', 16.

Now as a matter of fact there are many religious people in our liberal democratic societies who are not in the habit of debating and deciding all significant political issues on the basis of reasons drawn from public or secular reason. Many are in the habit of debating and deciding those issues on the basis of reasons drawn from their own particular religion. For some, this is more than a mere habit; it is what they believe they *ought* to do. Accordingly, a condition of achieving the dream of a consensus politics conducted within a polity free of governmental coercion is that all such religious people 'shape up' by breaking their habit of debating and deciding significant political issues on the basis of reasons drawn from their own particular religion. Given the actual nature of religion in this world of ours, the aspiration toward a consensus politics conducted within a polity free of coercion necessarily requires that religious people shape up. Should they not do so, religion will remain an instrument of coercion. This coercion may take the form of religiously sponsored violence. Then again, it may not; it may instead take the form of winning the vote for some piece of legislation that functions coercively for those who lose the vote.

2. THE DEEPER PATTERN: DETERMINATE RELIGION IS CHARGED WITH HARBOURING COERCION AND VIOLENCE

I now suggest that this pattern of thought that I have been highlighting in the theory of political liberalism runs deep and wide in the mentality of the modern West in general; political liberalism is just one version of the pattern. Over and over it is said or assumed that the presence of religion in our society, so long as it comes in a plurality of particularist forms that are comprehensive in their reach, and so long as there are those who reject religion in all its forms, necessarily harbours within itself the threat of coercion and violence. Religion, though it may talk and dream of peace, is a menace to peace. To move toward the elimination of coercion and violence, thus to achieve peace, we must aspire to a politics of consensus on fundamental principles of justice and social order. Particular religions, in their present form, obstruct such a politics of consensus on fundamental principles. Accordingly, all the particular religions must shape up so as to be compatible with such a politics. The proposal of political liberalism is that it will be sufficient for the particular religions to so shape up that their adherents no longer treat reasons drawn from their own religion as decisive in their decisions concerning coercive

legislation, instead treating reasons drawn from a stock of shared principles—public or secular reason—as decisive. What religious people do beyond that is entirely up to them. In family, in church, in their own inwardness, they can be as particularistic as they wish; if they wish they can even attach, as optional add-ons to the reasons drawn from public or secular reason, reasons drawn from their own particular religion.

In Richard Rorty one sees the same structure of thought at work but with a different tactical proposal. In a recent unpublished essay of his consisting of remarks made at the ceremony for his reception of the Eckhart Prize and titled ‘Religion after Onto-Theology: Reflections on Vattimo’s *Belief*’, he asserts that ecclesiastical institutions, ‘despite all the good they do—despite all the comfort they provide to those in need or in despair—are dangerous to the health of democratic societies, so that it would be best for them eventually to wither away’. The dangers posed to democracy by institutionalized religion are ‘particularly evident’, he says, in the present-day United States, where ‘the Christian fundamentalists whose support has become indispensable to right-wing American politicians are undermining the secularist, Jeffersonian, tradition in American culture’. The nature of the danger is exactly the same as that pinpointed by the theorists of political liberalism. It’s not that there are swarms of fundamentalists threatening to overthrow the US government; the danger is that fundamentalists support legislation restricting behaviour that other groups in society regard as completely acceptable—abortion and homosexual activity, for example. Such legislation, should it pass, would function coercively.

Though the analysis is the same, the solution Rorty proposes goes beyond that proposed by political liberalism. Religion must shape up so that it becomes entirely personal and private. The religion of one’s inner life can be of whatever intensity and whichever particularity one wishes; no harm there. It is when religion leaves the sanctuary of the inner life and tries to shape institutions in accord with its convictions, particularly the state, but also schools and ecclesiastical institutions, that it functions coercively. The ‘happy, Jeffersonian compromise that the Enlightenment reached with the religious . . . consists in privatizing religion—keeping it out of’ the public square, says Rorty.⁸

The same pattern of thought, combined with yet a third tactical suggestion, is to be found in John Hick and his cohorts in the religious pluralism discussion. Both the theorists of political liberalism with their public reason tactic, and Rorty with his privatizing tactic, propose setting *bounds* to religion

⁸ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin, 1999), 169.

as we actually find it. Religion must shape up so that it no longer speaks from its own resources on significant political issues—or no longer speaks on institutional matters in general. Only thus is there hope of achieving a politics of consensus on fundamental principles, and thereby a polity free of coercion. Within the bounds, religion may be as pluralist as it wishes. What Hick proposes in his well-known book *Interpretation of Religion* is that particularist religions, rather than learning to live within bounds, should reinterpret their particularisms so that they are no longer exclusivist.⁹

Hick assumes that any 'post axial' religion that does not accord equal religious significance to all post-axial religions perforce harbours within itself the threat of coercion and violence, thereby being a menace to peace.¹⁰ To cite just one example: as long as Christianity harbours a supersessionist attitude toward Judaism, there can be no enduring peace between the two religions. The solution is for each post-axial religion to regard all post-axial religions as simply alternative ways of engaging The Real, with none of them giving us the literal truth of the matter, and to concede that all of them are equally successful in achieving salvation for their adherents.

There is a fourth, and yet more radical, version of the line of thought that I am delineating; it says that, for the sake of a politics of consensus, and thus for the sake of eliminating coercion and violence from the polity and achieving peace, particularist religion must be eliminated altogether. It must wither away. Rather than shaping up by living within the bounds of public reason or the bounds of the inner life, or even shaping up by reinterpreting its particularisms in non-exclusivist fashion, religion, on this fourth view, must shape up by transmuting itself into non-particularist religion.

To the considerable dismay of some of his followers, this is what Jacques Derrida has been proposing in recent years.¹¹ In his reflections on the 'return of religion' in the present-day world, Derrida proposed to undertake 'a program of analysis for the forms of evil perpetrated in the four corners of the world "in the name of religion"'.¹² His analysis led him to the conclusion

⁹ John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

¹⁰ Hick regards the religious significance of 'pre axial' religions as inferior to that of the axial religions.

¹¹ I have learnt a good deal of what I know about this particular part of Derrida's thought from some articles by James K. A. Smith, especially his 'Determined Violence: Derrida's Structural Religion', *Journal of Religion*, 78/2 (1998), 197–212. See also John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Hent de Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); and my own 'The Religious Turn in Philosophy and Art', in Ludwig Nagl (ed.), *Religion nach der Religionskritik* (Vienna: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2003).

¹² Smith, 'Determined Violence', 197.

that violence is the inevitable political consequence of what he calls ‘determinate’ religion. The violence may not be what those of us less given to hyperbole would call ‘violence’; it may simply be what we would call ‘coercion’—though let it be added that often it does take the form of true violence.

The solution is for determinate religion to be transmuted into ‘religion without religion’. Let me quote James K. A. Smith’s description: the aim is to achieve

a universal religion, albeit a religion without dogma or content—a religion of pure form, a formal religion. It is a religion of ‘formalization’ whereby the ‘logic’ of certain structures, which appear in the texts of determinate religions, are distilled or disclosed by a process that Derrida describes as ‘desertification’. By this process of ‘desertification,’ structures are emptied of their content; that is, the structures are made ‘arid’ by means of a ‘desert abstraction’. After this ‘complete formalisation’ that exhausts and impoverishes the determinate religious structure ‘nothing remains’.¹³

Take an example: a structural feature typical of religion—or at least of the religions that interest Derrida—is the messianic structure; the religion looks forward to the coming of justice and peace. ‘Religion without religion’ would then be religion in which all determinate content had been abstracted from such messianic anticipation, leaving only the pure structure behind. Such religion would be ‘structural messianism’, ‘messianism without content’, or simply ‘the messianic’. A condition of the elimination of political ‘violence is the emergence of religion in which messianism is purely structural; determinate messianisms always harbour the threat of ‘war’.

The great grey eminence behind this way of thinking is of course Immanuel Kant, though let it be said at once that the religion Kant proposed was by no means a religion of all structure and no content; though not a *particular* religion, it would nonetheless remain a *determinate* religion. Before we get to the details of that, however, let me note that Kant explicitly shared, with all the other thinkers we have canvassed, the conviction that particular religion, by its very nature, harbours the potential for coercion and violence. If ‘eternal peace’ is to arrive, particularist religion must wither away; Kant did not consider whether reining it in would be sufficient, nor did he consider the possibility of reinterpreting the particularism so that it is no longer exclusivist. Let me quote at some length what Kant says about the menace of particularist religion; it is as vivid as Kant’s writing ever gets:

The so called religious wars which have so often shaken the world and bespattered it with blood, have never been anything but wrangles over ecclesiastical faith; and the

¹³ Smith, ‘Determined Violence’, 199–200.

oppressed have complained not that they were hindered from adhering to their religion (for no external power can do this) but that they were not permitted publicly to observe their ecclesiastical faith.

Now when, as usually happens, a church proclaims itself to be the one church universal (even though it is based upon faith in a special revelation, which, being historical, can never be required of everyone), he who refuses to acknowledge its (peculiar) ecclesiastical faith is called by it an *unbeliever* and is hated wholeheartedly; he who diverges therefrom only in part (in non essentials) is called *heterodox* and is at least shunned as a source of infection. But he who avows [allegiance to] this church and yet diverges from it on essentials of its faith (namely, regarding the practices connected with it), is called, especially if he spreads abroad his false belief, a *heretic*, and, as a rebel, such a man is held more culpable than a foreign foe, is expelled from the church with an anathema . . . and is given over to all the gods of hell. The exclusive correctness of belief in matters of ecclesiastical faith claimed by the church's teachers or heads is called *orthodoxy*.¹⁴

The solution to these evils of religion is the withering away of 'positive' religions and their replacement with a purely rational religion, that is, a religion whose content is grounded in reason alone and not in the particularities of revelation, mania, or tradition. As humankind progresses toward full rationality, this is the religion it will increasingly embrace. Such religion, though determinate in content, will nonetheless not be a *particular* religion, since it will enjoy universal consensus; and by virtue of enjoying consensus, it, unlike all the particular religions that are its historical predecessors, will not harbour the potential of coercion and violence. The coming of such religion, shared by all on account of their common rationality, will finally bring about 'the world of an eternal peace'.¹⁵

3. NO HOPE OF DETERMINATE RELIGION DISAPPEARING OR 'SHAPING UP' BY BECOMING PRIVATIZED

Let me be blunt and crisp in my appraisal of this general line of thought, which, so I contend, runs deep and wide in the mentality of modernity. On the one hand, there is no prospect whatsoever of religion disappearing, or of all determinate religion disappearing, or of all particular religions

¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, trans. T. M. Greene and H. H. Hudson (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 99–100.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, the last words of division I of book 3.

disappearing, or of all particular religions becoming privatized, or of all adherents of particular religions refraining from using the resources of their own religion in making political decisions. And on the other hand, there is no prospect whatsoever of politics becoming a politics of consensus on fundamental principles of justice and social order, thus no prospect whatsoever of the elimination of coercion from the polity. The dream of consensus politics is just that: a dream. Consensus politics is utopian politics; a polity without coercion would be utopia.

Rather than continuing on the path of devising ever new versions of utopian politics, we must reflect on the conditions under which adherents of particularist religions, which confine themselves neither to the inner life nor to the employment of public reason for debating and deciding political issues, can live together in some modicum of peace and justice. I am assuming that coercion is not always unjust, and that coercion is not always a menace to peace.

I have said that consensus politics is utopian politics. Here is another, more historical, way of thinking of it: the advocates of a politics of consensus on fundamental principles, conducted within a polity free of coercion, have not given up on the hope of recovering the inner structure of the politics of Christendom. The fundamental principles proposed are different: the fundamental tenets of Christianity are to be replaced by the contents of public or secular reason; but the structure remains. I think we must give up on that hope.

4. THE QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED

I am a proponent of the liberal democratic polity—not of that theory about the polity which is political liberalism, but of the polity itself. I am a proponent of it not because, though I regard it as a bad thing, I judge that, in the present situation, what's likely to ensue were it overthrown would be yet worse. I am a proponent of it because I regard it as the best polity, in most cases, for religiously diverse societies.

I will not take time to explain what I take a liberal democratic polity to be. For my purposes here, I think it will be satisfactory for each of us to employ whatever may be the understanding of such a polity that we already have.

If what I have said just above, about the prospects for religion, is correct, then one of the first questions to be considered by any proponent of the liberal democratic polity is this: which principles of social organization must a non-confined exclusivist religion affirm if it is to embrace a liberal democratic

polity for a society in which there are other such religions? And second, what reasons might there be within the resources of those religions for affirming those principles? What I mean by a 'non-confined' religion is one that has views on political issues grounded within its own perspective, and that insists on debating and deciding at least some of those issues on the basis of those views. What I mean by an 'exclusivist' religion is one that regards the other religions present within society as inferior to itself—as containing less truth, as being less pleasing to God, or whatever. And what I mean by a religion 'embracing' a liberal democratic polity is that it does not merely put up with it, but affirms it as a *good* polity.

5. SAYYID QUTB'S READING OF THE RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF THE WEST

Let me proceed toward answering the above question by setting before us an example of a non-confined exclusivist religion that does not grant the principles of social organization necessary for embracing the liberal democratic polity. In the *New York Times Magazine* of 23 March 2003, there was a rather lengthy analysis by the journalist Paul Berman of the thought of the Islamic scholar Sayyid Qutb. Qutb was an Egyptian intellectual who, after spending more than ten years in prison, was executed by the Egyptian government in 1966. While in prison, he wrote a commentary on the Qur'an called *In the Shade of the Qur'an*. Let me summarize a bit of his thought, basing my summary entirely on Berman's article.

A central component of Qutb's writing is socio-political analysis of a type familiar to us in the West for a century and a half by now. The analysis begins with a recitation of the sorrows of modern life. I quote Berman:

Qutb wrote that, all over the world, humans had reached a moment of unbearable crisis. The human race had lost touch with human nature. Man's inspiration, intelligence and morality were degenerating. Sexual relations were deteriorating 'to a level lower than the beasts.' Man was miserable, anxious and skeptical, sinking into idiocy, insanity, and crime. People were turning, in their unhappiness, to drugs, alcohol and existentialism. Qutb admired economic productivity and scientific knowledge. But he did not think that wealth and science were rescuing the human race. He figured that, on the contrary, the richest countries were the unhappiest of all.¹⁶

¹⁶ Paul Berman, 'The Philosopher of Islamic Terror', *New York Times Magazine*, 23 March 2003, 27.

Those are the symptoms. Qutb's diagnosis is the same, in its structure, as that of all our great Romantic socio-political theorists: the once-upon-a-time unity of human existence has been fractured. Pervasive in modern life is what Qutb called a 'hideous schizophrenia'. The root cause of our unhappiness is the fragmentation resulting from that schizophrenia; the cure will be the recovery of wholeness.

Qutb's originality lies not in the structure of this analysis—analyses of this sort have been with us ever since the days of the early Romantics—but in his own particular way of filling in the structure. Christianity is the principal cause of fragmentation, with Judaism now playing a supporting role. Intrinsic to Christianity is a split between the spiritual world, on the one hand, and the physical, biological, and social world, on the other. The sorrows of modern life are the result of that split.

The narrative goes as follows. The teachings of Judaism were 'divinely revealed by God to Moses and the other prophets. Judaism instructed man on how to behave in every sphere of life—how to live a worldly existence that was also a life at one with God. This could be done by obeying a system of divinely mandated laws, the code of Moses.'¹⁷

Eventually Judaism withered into what Qutb called 'a system of rigid and lifeless ritual'. God then sent a new prophet, Jesus, who penetrated to the essence of the Mosaic code and proposed some reforms. Rather than the Jews in general acknowledging Jesus as a prophet and accepting the reforms he proposed, intense controversies erupted between old-line Jews and the followers of Jesus, resulting in what Qutb called 'this unpleasant separation of the two parties'.¹⁸ As a consequence of this antagonism, the early Christians distorted the true teachings of Jesus by emphasizing his divine message of spirituality and love while rejecting its context, namely, 'Judaism's legal system, the code of Moses, which regulated every jot and tittle of daily life'.¹⁹ They 'imported into Christianity the philosophy of the Greeks—the belief in a spiritual existence completely separate from physical life, a zone of pure spirit'.²⁰ The subsequent history of Christianity and of its influence has been the playing out, in ever new ways, of that original split between the spiritual, on the one hand, and our daily life, on the other:

Christianity lost touch with the physical [and social] world. The old code of Moses, with its laws for diet, dress, marriage, sex and everything else, had enfolded

¹⁷ Paul Berman, 'The Philosopher of Islamic Terror', *New York Times Magazine*, 23 March 2003, 28.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

the divine and the worldly into a single concept, which was the worship of God. But Christianity divided these things into two, the sacred and the secular. Christianity said, 'Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's.' Christianity puts the physical world in one corner and the spiritual world in another corner: Constantine's debauches over here, monastic renunciation over there.²¹

The same 'hideous schizophrenia' reveals itself in the relation of religion to science.

Europeans, under Christianity's influence, began to picture God on one side and science on the other. Religion over here; intellectual inquiry over there. On one side, the natural human yearning for God and for a divinely ordered life; on the other, the natural human desire for knowledge of the physical universe. The church against science; the scientists against the church. . . . [U]nder these terrible pressures, the European mind split finally asunder. The break became total. Christianity, over here; atheism, over there. It was the fateful divorce between the sacred and the secular.²²

The scientific and technological achievements of Europe enabled it to impose its 'hideous schizophrenia' 'on peoples and cultures in every corner of the globe'. That is the origin of our present-day worldwide misery—of 'the anxiety in contemporary society, the sense of drift, the purposelessness, the craving for false pleasures'.²³

One can now anticipate the cure that Qutb offers his readers. In true Islam there is a vision of the wholeness of life; in true Islam there is no schizophrenia between the sacred and the secular, church and state, the spiritual and the physical; in true Islam there is no split between God's laws, on the one hand, and our daily lives, on the other. It's all one. True Islam must thus be recovered. Crusaders and Zionists—that is, Christians and Jews—have mounted a gigantic campaign against true Islam, attempting to annihilate it. With their liberal democratic ideas in hand they have attempted 'to confine Islam to the emotional and ritual circles, and to bar it from participating in the activity of life, and to check its complete predominance over every human secular activity, a pre-eminence it earns by virtue of its nature and function'.²⁴ That campaign must be resisted by Islam with all the power at its disposal. Sharia must be reinstated as the legal code for all of society, so that God's law can once again hold sway for all of everybody's life. Only then will divinity and humanity be once again united. Only then will there be justice, peace, true freedom, and happiness.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. 56.

6. ABRAHAM KUYPER SIMILAR TO BUT ALSO DIFFERENT FROM QUTB

For a person of my own religious tradition, the Dutch neo-Calvinist version of the Reformed tradition of Christianity, to come up against Qutb's social analysis is to experience within oneself a disconcerting whipsaw of agreement and disagreement. I could quote passages from Abraham Kuyper, the principal founder of Dutch neo-Calvinism, in which the longing for a religiously unified existence is every bit as intense as it is in Qutb. The whole of our lives, not just some supposedly spiritual component thereof, is to be lived in grateful obedience to God and worshipful awe. The dualism between the sacred, on the one hand, and daily life, on the other, which Qutb regards as inherent within Christianity, is seen by Kuyper as a lamentable and avoidable deformation.

Kuyper rejected that entire line of thought that I delineated in the first part of this essay. The Rawlsian version, the Rortian, the Hickian, the Kantian, the Derridean, he would have rejected them all. Christians must resist all calls for limiting the scope of their obedience to the non-political or the non-public, all calls for reinterpreting their religion so as to eliminate exclusivism, all calls for the withering away of their religion in favour of a religion of pure structure or reason. Only in the eschaton can there be and will there be a politics of consensus on fundamental principles practised within a polity free of coercion. We long and hope for such a politics and for such a polity. But in this fallen world of ours, it is unavoidable that the politics we practise will be a politics without consensus, and unavoidable that the polities in which we live will be polities of coercion.

Yet Kuyper was a vigorous defender of the liberal democratic polity. Not, mind you, a defender of the *theory* of political liberalism; rather, a defender of the liberal democratic polity. Given our religiously pluralistic societies, Christian conviction requires, so Kuyper argued, a liberal democratic polity. It is within the liberal democratic polity that Christians are to live their lives of religious integrity.

What accounts for this deep difference between Qutb and Kuyper? How can it be that though Kuyper abhors dualism between religion and daily existence in the lives of Christians as intensely as Qutb abhors such dualism in the lives of Muslims, nonetheless Kuyper is a staunch defender of the liberal polity whereas Qutb is its implacable opponent? Evidently Kuyper affirms some fundamental principles of social organization that Qutb rejects. What might those be? The reader will of course realize that these questions about

Kuyper and Qutb are meant as ways of getting at the fundamental question that I posed earlier: which principles of social organization must a non-confined exclusivist religion be willing to affirm if it is to embrace a liberal democratic polity for a society in which there are other such religions?

7. PRINCIPLES THAT A NON-CONFINED EXCLUSIVIST RELIGION MUST AFFIRM TO ACCEPT LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

The first and most fundamental principle is that church and state be distinct social institutions. Or, more generally, that religious institutions in general—church, mosque, synagogue, whatever—be distinct from the political institution. The social structure must exhibit that fundamental duality, that fundamental institutional separation. A society that does not exhibit that fundamental twoness cannot possibly have a liberal democratic polity.

In Western societies shaped by Christianity there has always been that duality of institutions—even when everybody in society was baptized so that there was no distinction in membership. The distinction was not always, so it appears to me, a matter of principle. Consider Augustine, for example, in whose late thought the distinction between the institutions of church and empire loomed large. In the situation in which Augustine did his thinking and his writing, very many subjects of the empire were not members of the church; that perforce made the two institutions distinct. But what would he have said had the situation been one in which all the subjects of the empire were baptized? Is there anything in his thought that would lead him to insist on an institutional separation even in this situation? I fail to see that there is.

It was the pragmatics of the situation, more than any clear and consistent body of theological thought, that accounts for the fact that Western societies shaped by Christianity have always exhibited an institutional duality of church and government. Struggle as they did with each other, neither pope nor emperor, prince nor prelate, ever succeeded in completely subordinating the other.

What did this institutional separation come to? What were the tell-tale signs of the duality? Two, I would say. For one thing, neither party was ever the mere delegate or deputy of the other, nor were they jointly the mere delegates or deputies of some yet higher authority; that is to say, the authority and 'powers' of the one party were never merely delegated to or conferred on it by the other, nor were those of both parties delegated to or conferred on

them by some yet higher authority. And second, each party had its own distinct 'powers' and its own distinct scope of authority. The church had the 'power' to excommunicate; the political entity did not; it was within the scope of authority of the political entity to execute someone, it was not within the authority of the church to do so.²⁵

Things were different in the Christian East. There all authority flowed ultimately from the emperor. A rough and ready distinction could be made out between affairs of church and affairs of state; but they were one and all affairs of empire. Since the fall of Constantinople, societies shaped by Eastern Christianity have exhibited the same duality of institutions as those shaped by Western Christianity.

There is something right, then, in Qutb's analysis of Christianity. Always in the West, and now for almost six hundred years in the East, Christians, in all their variety, have lived with the institutional duality of church and state. Qutb is mistaken in his assumption that this institutional duality has been a matter of intrinsic conviction on the part of Christians. Sometimes it has been matter of expediency; for a thousand years the duality was not even present in the East. Likewise he is mistaken in his assumption that Christians have regarded God's laws as holding only for that area of life governed by the church and not for that governed by the state. Those who said that the state was to be concerned with 'secular' matters seldom meant that God's law had no application to government; Calvin was not at all eccentric in remarking that God's rule takes two forms, one for the church and one for the state. Nonetheless, Qutb is correct in his claim that there has long been an institutional separation of church and state in societies shaped by Christianity. And that separation, so I suggest, is indispensable to the existence of a liberal democratic polity.

A second structural feature of a religiously pluralistic society with a liberal democratic polity is that, to put it rather vaguely, the state is the polity of all citizens equally no matter what religion, if any, they may practise. No religion has a proprietorial claim on the state, with the others present only by sufferance. The state is the polity of all of us together and equally. No citizen is to receive either favoured or unfavoured treatment on account of his religion or lack thereof.

²⁵ Attempts to articulate a general formulation of the distinction in authority scope and 'powers' seem to me always to have been either patently incorrect or too vague to judge. An example of the sort of formulation I have in mind occurs at the beginning of the last chapter of the *Institutes*, where Calvin says this: 'Now, since we have established above that man is under a twofold government, and since we have elsewhere discussed at length the kind that resides in the soul or inner man and pertains to eternal life, this is the place to say something also about the other kind, which pertains only to the establishment of civil justice and outward morality.'

I have two things in mind here. In the first place, the state, in its distribution of benefits and burdens, rights and duties, is to take no account of the religion or non-religion of potential recipients. In this way it is to treat everybody equally with respect to his or her religion. And second, not only is the state to treat all citizens equally with respect to their religion or non-religion; everybody, regardless of his or her religion, is to have equal voice in the personnel and conduct of the state. One's religion or lack thereof is to make no difference to one's voice. Specifically, we are all to enjoy the same fair access to fair voting procedures for office-holders and legislation.

Not everything is up for vote in a liberal democratic society, however. The liberal polity has a constitution, or constitution-like body of legislation, that assigns certain rights to the members of society and makes it impossible or extremely difficult for those rights to be retracted by the outcome of any vote; the rights are 'embedded'. Prominent among these rights is the right to the free exercise of one's religion—and the right to exercise no religion. That same constitution or legislation will lay out a political structure and set of procedures that will also be difficult, if not at some points impossible, to amend by voting procedures. Voting for office-holders and legislation takes place within these bounds, these constraints. The most fundamental things are not on the table.

Almost always there will be losers in these votes, with the consequence, typically, that the losers find themselves coerced whereas the winners do not. The outcome of one vote will delight one religious party and dismay another; the outcome of another vote will reverse the distribution of delight and dismay. The outcome of yet another vote will delight some non-religious group and dismay one or more religious parties; a later vote will reverse the response.

As we saw earlier, the fact that citizens are dismayed and coerced by the outcome of the vote cannot imply that the legislation lacks justification; if it did, there would never be any justified legislation. It cannot imply that the polity thereby loses its legitimacy; if it did, there would never be any legitimate polities. Furthermore, the fact that I and my party lose the vote does not mean that we were wrong in our judgement as to what justice or the social good requires. We may have been right; it may be a bad piece of legislation. So the point is that one can justly be coerced by a piece of legislation whose content is out of accord with what justice or the social good requires, and which one believes to be thus out of accord.

My question was this: which principles of social organization must a non-confined exclusivist religion be willing to affirm if it is to embrace a liberal democratic polity for a society in which there are other such religions? My suggestion is that the following fundamental principles must be affirmed:

there must be an institutional separation between church and state, the state must not differentiate in its treatment of citizens on account of their religion or lack thereof, and there must be no differentiation among citizens in their right to voice in the conduct and personnel of the state on account of their religion or lack thereof.

It is these latter two principles that give to life under a liberal democratic polity the peculiar character that Qutb finds so offensive; so far as I can see, there is no reason why Qutb could not affirm the first principle, the institutional separation of mosque and state. To affirm those latter two principles is perforce to give up the classical Greek picture of the polity as the governance of both the highest and the most comprehensive form of human community. The polity is indeed the governance of our most comprehensive community; everybody is a citizen. But not of the highest. It steers away from the highest and deepest matters of the human heart. For those, one has to go to church, mosque, or synagogue. And even when the state does legislate, its legislation exhibits no religious or other unity; it is a *mélange*.

It is also to give up that more modest medieval picture, according to which the state has the duty to cultivate in its citizens fundamental moral and religious virtues. To affirm the liberal democratic state is to remove the state from the business of cultivating religion; it is to leave that to other institutions. Pluralism inevitably follows. Assuming that it is possible under such a polity for oneself and one's co-religionists to live lives of religious integrity, to affirm such a polity is to acquiesce in the fact that not everybody will be living that same life.

And last, to affirm the liberal democratic polity is to put the shape of our life together at the mercy of votes in which the infidel has equal voice with the believer.

8. THE PRINCIPLES DO NOT ELIMINATE ALL 'SHAPING UP' BY RELIGION

In my discussion in the first part of this essay I contended that the line of thought that I identified as prominent in modern society requires that religion shape up in one way or another. Let me not conceal the fact that for Qutb to accept the principles of political organization that I have just now sketched out would require 'shaping up' on his part. The shaping up required is of a very different sort from that required by Rawls, Rorty, Hick, and the like; many more religious people are willing to engage in this sort of shaping

up. But there is no denying the fact that a shaping up is required; the liberal democratic society is not compatible with every religious perspective whatsoever.

So what is needed at this point is an argument for such shaping up that has some chance of being persuasive. Rawls held that the stability of liberal democracy in a situation of religious pluralism depends on the great majority of the members of the plurality having reasons based on their own perspectives for appealing to public reason in the debating and deciding of significant political issues. I think its stability depends even more on the great majority having reasons based on their own perspectives for accepting the principles of political organization that I have highlighted.

Why would anybody who longs for a religiously integrated existence, and who believes that his religion has something to say about our life together, affirm such a peculiar, albeit familiar, form of political organization as liberal democracy? Offhand it looks so counter-intuitive. Why would anyone who longs for religious wholeness in his life willingly tolerate the divided loyalty that such a polity requires—loyalty both to church, mosque, or synagogue, and to the political community? What reasons are there, within the resources of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, that would lead to the conclusion that, given religious diversity, it is within liberal democratic polities that we can and should live our lives of religious wholeness? That is the fundamental question my discussion raises. Unless there is an adequate answer to that question, the Qutbs of the day will have won the argument.

An answer that approaches adequacy would require an essay of its own. But let me point in the direction where, I think, the answer lies. I suggest that the moral basis of liberal democracy is not what it is often said to be, namely, that the greatest good the state can secure is guaranteeing to each citizen freedom to act as he or she sees fit; this libertarian interpretation of liberal democracy is exactly what alarms the Qutbs of the world. The moral basis of liberal democracy consists in its protection of rights, including then specific freedom-rights—as opposed to some general right to act as one sees fit. For example, as the writers of American state constitutions around the time of the War of Independence almost uniformly declared, each human being has a right to worship God according to the dictates of his or her own conscience. It may be that some significant social good can be achieved by the state coercing its citizens to worship God as it sees fit. But to do so would require the violation of their rights; and hence is not to be done.

It is my own view that rights are grounded in the worth of persons. When the state uses the coercive power at its disposal to force its citizens to worship God as it sees fit, it violates them, fails to honour the worth they bear as human beings. Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike hold that that worth is the

worth of a creature made by God in God's own image. When one focuses on the worth of the person, and on the sorts of things that violate that worth, then liberal democracy begins to look to the religious person not strange but mandatory.

Let me close with the haunting words with which Paul Berman concludes his article on Sayyid Qutb:

Who will speak of the sacred and the secular, of the physical world and the spiritual world? Who will defend liberal ideas against the enemies of liberal principles in spite of liberal society's every failure? President George W. Bush, in his speech to Congress a few days after the September 11, 2001 attacks, announced that he was going to wage a war of ideas. He has done no such thing. He is not the man for that.

Philosophers and religious leaders will have to do this on their own. Are they doing so? Armies are in motion, but are the philosophers and religious leaders, the liberal thinkers, likewise in motion? There is something to worry about here, an aspect of the war that liberal society seems to have trouble understanding — one more worry, on top of all the others, and possibly the greatest worry of all.²⁶

²⁶ Berman, 'The Philosopher of Islamic Terror', 59.