Liberal Democracy, Post-Secularism and the Public Role of the Churches: A Pluralist Approach

by

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Abstract

This study develops a ‘post-secular’ theory of the public role of Christianity in a liberal democracy. Public religion has come under renewed scrutiny in the light of two conflicting developments, the politicization of many religious groups and the emergence of a ‘strong’ or exclusivist conception of secularism which opposes not only the domination of the polity by such groups but also their right to contribute to decisions on law and public and policy. Post-secularists have appealed to theories of political pluralism to reject the containment of religion to the private sphere of liberal society and to affirm the legitimacy of its participation in the decision-making processes of the state.

This study follows Habermas in mediating between concerns about theocracy and rigid secularism. It recognizes limits on religion within the state apparatus while encouraging religious political contributions in a wider public sphere of debate on issues and events. Against Habermas and other post-secularists, however, it argues that liberal theories of pluralism are inadequate to a reinvigoration of inclusive public debate because their focus on individual rights of conscience and expression compounds the marginalization and decline of traditional groups, including the churches, in liberal society. This study appeals instead to ‘group-pluralism’ in
suggesting that the conditions of a post-secular society include protective rights for faith-based communities to pursue an integrated way of life.

This study combines a version of ‘contrast church’ theory with classical liberalism in proposing that the primary role of the churches is to maintain a visible and vibrant institutional presence in the private sphere of society. By concentrating on the formation of Christian virtues by means of discipleship in liturgical practices and in ‘classical’ as opposed to ‘contextual’ theology, the churches can help to ensure that their public witness, when warranted, can be radical. A secondary role of the churches, one neglected by most post-secularists, is to build coalitions with other traditional religious and normative communities in order to defend, in the face of an expanding public sphere, a diversity of life-styles, and hence of alternative perspectives to a dominant societal consensus on secular liberal social principles.
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Introduction

There has always been a close relationship between liberalism and secularism. The connection dates from the Wars of Religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which convinced the early architects of liberalism that a religious state must be intolerant and illiberal. For Hobbes [1963, 70], disputes about religious doctrine are “the cause of all our late mischief” (that is, the civil war in England). Theorists of liberalism have also always tended to understand secularism broadly as contrasted not just to theocracy but to the dominance of any faith-based conception of the good, or what John Rawls calls “comprehensive doctrines,” for the liberal commitment to individual autonomy entails a suspicion of worldviews which might justify intrusions into political, economic and social freedoms. A common defining condition of liberal democracy is, therefore, a secular or non-sectarian state in which no one comprehensive doctrine is officially favoured and the eligibility requirements of participation in public decision-making are neutral between competing substantive or moral conceptions of the good [Perry 2003, 9].

In the late twentieth century, a new sense of secularism emerged in political theory, one that rejects not just the dominance of a particular comprehensive doctrine in the polity but all faith-based contributions to law and public policy. The first sense of secularism entails a fundamental separation of the state from religion; the second goes on to require the separation of political
debate and deliberation from faith-based influences.\footnote{Among many statements of the new concept, see Ackerman’s ‘Neutrality Principle’: no reason to justify a power structure is legitimate “if it requires the power holder to assert... that his conception of the good is better than that asserted by any of his fellow citizens...” [Ackerman 1980, 10-11]. The emergence of this concept owes much to popular conceptions of totalitarianism following World War II and the Cold War, and its development has been fuelled by a worldwide politicization of religion, as we will see. For more on the distinction between the two concepts of secularism, see, Parekh 2000, 322; McClay 2003, and Habermas 2008b, 27.} For proponents of this new secularism, political debate should be confined to arguments based on public reason, defined by Rawls [1996, 224] as those “presently accepted general beliefs and forms of reasoning found in common sense, and the methods and conclusions of science when these are not controversial” With comprehensive doctrines safely contained in the private sphere of society, the new secularists believe, citizens would share enough common ground to adjudicate their differences without excessive discord by means of public reason [Mathewes 2007, 112].\footnote{Or as Bailey [2003, 67-8] puts the point, we can preserve universal consent by limiting argument to areas in which consensus is possible} There is thus an ambiguity in describing a liberal society as secular: we can mean either that it does not establish or recognize a particular faith-based doctrine or that it is purged in some way of faith-based principles and arguments. Various terms have been used to distinguish these two conceptions of secularism, including weak and strong, plain secular as opposed to secularist or “laicist”, and accommodationist as against exclusivist or separationist.

Post-secularism can refer to any movement of ideas which identifies or promotes a resurgence of religion in contemporary society.\footnote{For Habermas [in Mendiesta 2010, 3-4], post-secularism refers not so much to a rise in the level of religious observance as to a change in consciousness about religion, and specifically about its continuing relevance and influence in nominally secular societies.} For the most part, however, post-secularism has arisen and developed in reaction to strong secularism, and it has been concerned to reassert the status quo ante of weak secularism or non-sectarianism. Post-secularists argue that strong secularism...
mirrors theocracy in sanctioning public reason as the sole criterion of admissible public arguments, and thus officially privileging irreligion. They have sought to restore secularism, not as a quasi-religious and sectarian ideology, but as one among many legitimate perspectives in a pluralist society.⁴

The debate between post-secularists and strong secularists is primarily a normative one, concerning the ideal rather than the reality of liberal societies, which do not normally place legal restrictions on faith-based public arguments but recognize rights of free speech and assembly for religious as well as secular citizens.⁵ More specifically, the debate belongs to the field of political ethics, addressing the question of what types of moral arguments warrant restrictions in the public sphere. The debate is not entirely academic, however, for there are increasing instances of Western legislatures and courts adopting the strong or exclusivist concept of secularism, notably in prohibiting or limiting religious behaviour and symbols in public areas.⁶ In some cases, the Canadian courts have used the concept of secularism in its later sense to mean “necessarily exclusive of religion” [Chaplin 2000, 625].⁷ Post-secularism responds to fears

⁴ See, for example, Habermas 2008a, 266 and 2008b; Connolly 1999, 11; Walker 2000, 112-3, and Markham 1994, 3.
⁵ This is more clearly the case in Canada, where there is no Establishment Clause, than in the U.S., though many legal scholars would deny that strong secularism finds support in the Establishment Clause.
⁶ For example, Bill 94, An Act to Establish Guidelines Governing Accommodation Requests within the Administration and Certain Institutions, currently before the National Assembly of Quebec, would make it legal for state agencies in the province to refuse access to services to persons who do not show their faces during the delivery of those services. While the Bill does not specify any religious group, there is no question but that it addresses the ongoing issue of Muslim women who wear the burqa in schools, courts and other public institutions.
⁷ An example is provided by Chamberlain v Surrey School Board no 36 [1998], 60 BCLR (3d) 311 (S.C.), which concerned the rejection by the School Board of the use of storybooks depicting same-sex parenting in a positive light as educational resource materials for young children. The Court ruled that the Board had violated s. 76 of the BC School Act, which requires decision-making to be conducted on “strictly secular and non-sectarian principles,” in that its decision had been “significantly influenced by religious considerations.” As Chaplin [2000, 625] comments, this meaning of “secular” is not deducible from the Canadian Charter, but rather “reflects the… influence within the legal system of a particular strand of relatively recent liberal legal and political theory.” The BC Court of
about the potential of this concept of secularism, the possibility that it could become the governing principle of all institutions of liberal societies, including for instance schools, the media and non-governmental organizations.

Approaches to post-secularism

The growing influence of strong secularism or laicism in liberal societies has led to the defection of one of the leading proponents of secularist liberal democracy, Jürgen Habermas. Habermas’s proposal to counter this influence has two significant components, the first of which mediates between strong secularists and their critics by reformulating the liberal concept of the public sphere. Habermas [2008a, 128] retains strong secularist constraints on religious public arguments, but confines them to those who hold or seek office in a narrow or inner public sphere of the legislative and judicial institutions of the state. Faith-based arguments in a wider or outer public sphere of debate between concerned citizens on the events and issues of the day are subject to no such restrictions, but are rather encouraged. The second component of Habermas’s post-secularism calls on both religious and secular citizens to enhance debate in this outer public sphere by means of a “complementary learning process.”

Habermas addresses secular citizens in particular, asking them to reconsider their rationalist assumptions and to move beyond mere tolerance of religious citizens to critical engagement with their ideas. For their part, he suggests, religious believers can offer fresh justification and sustenance for the normative principles of

Appeal (2000, 80 BCLR [3d] 191 [C.A.]) and the Supreme Court of Canada (2002 4 SCR 710), favouring the earlier or “weak” conception of secularism, overturned the verdict of the BCSC.

8 See Habermas 2008a, 111, 119-121, 144, 253 and 2008b, 23-4, 28.
liberal democracy, most notably that of individual human rights [Habermas 2008a, 261; 2002, 153].

The first of these components helps to resolve what is widely viewed as a defect in the liberal model of the spheres of society. Criticism of the model dates at least from the industrial revolution, which seemed to reveal the negative liberty of the private sphere to be of value only to the wealthy and privileged, and it has gathered momentum as diverse social groups, cultural, linguistic, ethnic and racial, physical, sexual and so forth, protest that they have been silenced by their confinement to the private sphere of society. For Benhabib [1992, 84], “all struggles against oppression in the modern world begin by redefining what had previously been considered private…as matters of public concern….” Christian groups are not always numbered among the silenced minorities of Western societies. For one thing, many churches were established or national and thus located in the public sphere of society for much of modern history, and they retain something of their association with power and privilege. For another, the Christian emphasis on individual spirituality and salvation might seem to suggest that the churches are properly situated in the private sphere, and that they will not lay claim to a part in Benhabib’s struggle against privatization. However, the emergence and growth of strong secularist thought has been matched by the development of public or political theology, along with a demand for a public site or outlet for its ideas about politics and society.

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9 Here Habermas is close to Rawls [e.g.1996, 218].

10 See also Benhabib 1992, 79: “the struggle to make something public is a struggle for justice,” and Honohan 2000, 160-1.

11 The term “political theology” came into common currency only in the 1960s, largely under the influence of Moltmann and Metz, and it has retained an association with radical schools such as liberation theology. However, the view that Christianity has a strong political component, and that it should not be confined to the private sphere of society, is all but universal among theologians today. Major modern influences on this position include nineteenth-
Christianity contains a tension between the personal and the political; between a concern with the rituals of worship and the ethics of interpersonal relations on the one hand, and prophetic witness to alternative political structures and social ethics on the other. Sociologists of religion have long predicted and detected, along with a general decline in religious adherence in modern societies, a resolution of that tension in favour of the private aspects of religion. Until the second half of the twentieth century such predictions retained, as Casanova [1994, 17] puts it, “a truly paradigmatic status within the modern social sciences;” since then, the first part of the secularization thesis has been disputed, while the second has lost all currency. The politicization of religion worldwide since the Shiite revolution in Iran is obvious, as is the redundancy of the notion that the privatization of religion in the West could be a model or template for all modernizing societies. The politicization of religion is, however, a reality in Western societies too. In the last half-century, the tension in Christianity has been revived by theologians and church-leaders to the point that virtually all schools of theology now share a strong commitment to the social and political dimensions of the Christian faith. That development is most notable in twentieth-century Christian Socialism; the Social Gospel of the early twentieth century; the Barmen Declaration [1934], which concluded that “forms of life of the city are not outside the leadership of Christ,” and the Second Vatican Council [1965], for which the free exercise of religion entails empowerment to seek influence over public life in accordance with one’s convictions. Contemporary statements of the position can be found in just about any work on Christian social thought: see, for example, Forrester 1989, 7; Neuhaus 1984, 130; Davis 1994, 58; Mathewes 2007, 165, and Fergusson 2004, 160.

There is no necessary contradiction between these aspects of the Christian faith, but many passages of the New Testament (e.g. Romans 13: 1-6; 1 Peter 2:13) do appear to sanction individual salvation at the expense of political involvement, and there are clearly inconsistencies between concealment of the faith in private life and its public disclosure, or between the particularism of election and the universalism of the call. See, for example, Matt 6; 7.6; 28:19, and Mark 3:12; 8:30. For comments on these inconsistencies, see Niebuhr 1996, 144ff. and Malesic 2009, 17-8.

The secularization thesis is largely a deduction from social or functional differentiation, or the increasing autonomy of social institutions, a defining feature of modernization. But see Chaplin 2004: “secularization…was never a necessary feature or condition of institutional differentiation. [It] was the outcome, not of the structural process of differentiation itself, but of a contingent ideological process accompanying it.…”
the cases of the conservative evangelical groups in the U.S.A. known as the New Christian Right and liberation theology on the left, but it extends to the Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant churches. In the 1960s Moltmann proclaimed that religion confined to private concerns supports dehumanizing social structures; for him, “there is no apolitical theology.” Today political theology is so firmly entrenched that it would be hard to conceive of a major church congress or assembly which did not conclude by denouncing some dehumanizing aspect of the social structure.  

The first component of Habermas’s post-secularism helps to address another concern about the liberal model of the social spheres, one associated with the communitarian tradition. Communitarians question the primacy of the state and the individual in the liberal model, and especially the assumption that we relate to the state as unencumbered citizens rather than as members or products of communities. In this critique, many of the communities in which individuality is formed and maintained do not fit comfortably into the liberal model because they are strictly neither public nor private. Habermas’s wider or outer public sphere corresponds to a social sphere, intermediate between public and private and often known as ‘civil society,’ which

14 Moltmann 1967, Chapter Five; 1984, 99; 1971, 7-8. Among many examples of this position, see Fergusson 1998, 155 and Harrington 1983, 206: “[p]olitical theology rightly understands that privatization is the great enemy of religion in the modern world.” An entertaining statement of the position is that of Fish [1999, 11], for whom religion “in the quarantined realm of the private…takes its place alongside commitment to the Elks club or the New York Yankees or country music.”

15 See Benne 1995, 202 and Chaplin 2005, 597. The public role of the churches today includes not only, as Mathewes [2007, 216] puts it, offering “imaginative alternatives to the fallen social structures in which they find themselves…,” but also addressing morally contested public issues. For Habermas [2008b, 20], the churches “are increasingly assuming the role of ‘communities of interpretation’ in the public arena of secular societies. They can attain influence on public opinion by making relevant contributions to…value conflicts requiring political regulation.” Chapter One of this study will consider some of these public issues and conflicts.

16 As Melissa Williams [1994, 34] puts the point, “liberalism fails to comprehend the ways in which individual identity is shaped by membership in broader historical communities whose well-being is inseparable from our good as individuals.” For further statements of the point, see Rosenblum 1987; McDonald 1992; Kymlicka 1989, 164-5; Cochran 1989, 430-2; Tomasi 1995, and Walzer 1990.
can accommodate these communities as well as such public debate as takes place at a remove from legislative and judicial decision-making. 17 This intermediate sphere is of interest to post-secularists because it permits an accurate portrayal of the politicized role of the mainline churches. For the most part, these churches do not, as a role in the public sphere of society might suggest, aspire to return to establishment, or to impose Christian viewpoints by means of legislation or other forms of compulsion. 18 Instead, their politicization subsists typically in forming semi-public associations, some independent of the churches and some incorporated into them, and in forging coalitions with other religious or secular groups on specific issues [Fergusson 2004, 163]. This understanding of the public role of the churches is especially important in the light of fears raised by the New Christian Right. Indeed, the moderation of Habermas’s post-secularism owes much to his concern with the threat of the NCR to the principles and procedures of liberalism: his retention of strong secularist restrictions in the state apparatus recognizes that to open the door any wider to religion would allow extremist religious groups to enter through it.

The communitarian point has proved to be a useful rider to radical democratic criticisms of liberalism. Commentators have remarked on a tendency among early theorists of liberalism simply to assume the political skills and civic virtues necessary for political participation. 19 The

17 An early and influential manifesto of civil society theory was Berger and Neuhaus 1996 (1st ed. 1977). Their argument is widely accepted today by theorists of liberalism, as we will see in Chapter Five.

18 As Cavanaugh [2002, 53-4] puts the point, the concept of an intermediate sphere “seems to allow the Church to avoid mere privatization on the one hand, and the Constantinian specter of implication in state coercion on the other.” Or again [ibid.]: it becomes possible for the Church “to speak clearly in the public arena without carrying a big stick.” See also Dostert 1996, 71-3.

19 See McGraw [2010, 178-9]: liberalism was born partly of the conviction that disagreements about standards of human excellence are too inflammatory and dangerous to resolve or enforce publicly. “Virtue-talk” used to be for liberalism’s opponents – those who thought that political authority should seek to shape and improve the moral lives
role of civic communities and associations in forming these skills and virtues, and in particular the part played by religious groups and churches, has been widely documented.\textsuperscript{20} The contribution of the churches to civic virtue formation is, in fact, the most frequently cited evidence for the case that religion is not merely private but has a legitimate and beneficial public function [Coleman 1997, 285; Hollenbach 2003, 157]. The significance of this function of religious groups becomes evident when we turn to the second component of Habermas’s post-secularism, the regeneration of inclusive public debate, for Habermas gives few practical pointers as to how religious and secular citizens are to be moved to enter a complementary learning process, and to do so with mutual respect and civility.\textsuperscript{21} In the last two or three decades, however, it has become clear that civil society theory was launched with too much hope and enthusiasm, and that virtue-formation by civic associations has not succeeded in regenerating public debate.\textsuperscript{22} The problem is largely that membership in associations, especially genuinely civic ones, is in decline, while many flourishing associations are either apolitical or frankly illiberal. Church-membership statistics are very much part of the reassessment of civil society theory, and they are of particular concern to post-secularists because of the resources that the churches bring to public debate.

\textsuperscript{20} See, for example, Coleman 1997; Wuthnow 1996, and Putnam 2000.

\textsuperscript{21} As Mathewes [2007, 158] observes, post-secularists have been “frustratingly vague” about how to reinvigorate public debate.

\textsuperscript{22} See, for example, Boyd 2004; Chambers and Kapstein 2001; Rosenblum 1998b, 30, and Chapter Five below.
The obstacles facing the second component of Habermas’s post-secularism, the regeneration of public debate, prompt a reconsideration of his first component, the retention of strong secularist rules in the state apparatus, for it is arguable that these obstacles include not just the size of the religion-free public sphere but its very existence. Rawls [1996, 238] maintains that strong secularism in the public sphere does no violence to values personal to us; that our values and ways of life will be undisturbed by a consensus on public reason in the state apparatus. Others disagree, pointing out that the state sets the tone for debate in society because of its symbolic status, its dignity and prestige. For Graham Walker [2000, 114], “a political society’s constitution of religion forms consciousness.” State-enforced public reason at the highest level has, in the view of these theorists, a trickle-down effect on the lower levels in that its strictures on debate tend to be taken as binding in all arenas of political discussion. As David Hollenbach [2003, 160] puts the point, neutrality about the good in theory becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy in practice. This position finds support in an account of modern liberalism associated with various proponents of the politics of difference, identity and recognition who explain the silencing of certain minorities in liberal societies, not just by the public/private dichotomy, but also by a consensus which extends beyond procedural to substantive moral principles. In this account, what passes for ideological neutrality in the liberal public sphere masks a deep-seated preference for particular values and ways of life and a trivialization or marginalization of difference outside as well as within the state apparatus. Walker [2000, 114]

23 Rawls refers here to the wider public sphere of the normal liberal model rather than to Habermas’s inner public sphere, but the point holds a fortiori for the Habermasian model. See also Dostert 2006, 44.

24 See also Parekh 2000, 204.

25 See, for example, Weithman 2002, 141; Trigg 2007, 166; McConnell 2000, 104, and Dostert 2006, 6-7.

26 The idea that liberalism embodies specific and substantive notions of the good is widely recognized today. See, for example, Charles Taylor [1995, 249]: “liberalism is not a possible meeting-ground for all cultures; it is the
concludes that “liberalism…handles difference dishonestly…it displaces and co-opts differences in the name of tolerating them,” and for George Crowder [1999, 10] similarly, liberalism “accommodates diverse ways of life only at the cost of… reshaping them in its own image.”

We are now in a position to distinguish between two factions within post-secularism, not only by their position on whether strong secularist principles are valid at any level of political debate, but by their views on the ultimate end or purpose of a renewed public role for religion. For one faction, religion sustains and supports the social cohesion and consensus of liberal societies; for the other, religion best contributes to society by means of ideas and principles which challenge that cohesion and consensus. The latter, radical position rests on the premise that much of Christian doctrine is actually and necessarily at sharp variance with all social and political regimes, including liberal ones. The debate between these factions revolves in part around the question of whether Christian social principles can be translated satisfactorily or without remainder into the secular terms of public reason. As we will see, Habermas [e.g. 2008a, 132-3] appears to have retained his earlier confidence that they can be so translated, albeit now in the longer term. The radical faction argues that Christian social principles lack adequate secular political expression of one range of cultures, and quite incompatible with other ranges.” See also Galston, e.g. 1991 and 2002, and Williams 1994, 43. For these theorists, as for Taylor, the point in itself is not intended as a criticism of liberalism except insofar as liberalism purports to confine itself to procedural norms. See Fish 1999, 201: we should not “criticize liberals for using power in an effort to further the truths they believe in…but for pretending to be doing something else and for thinking there is something else to do.”

27 The distinction, which is drawn for instance by Forrester [1989, 39], will be developed in Chapter Two below. Prominent examples of the first camp include Neuhaus [1984], Bellah et al. [1985], Macedo [e.g. 1998], and (this study will contend) Habermas. Examples of the second camp include Stephen Carter [e.g. 1997, 1998], the Radical Anabaptists, notably Hauerwas and Yoder, and the Radical Orthodoxy school.
equivalents, and that rendering them in secular terms limits their capacity to be socially transformative.\textsuperscript{28}

One problem with the disagreement between these approaches is that it is hard to see what the public arguments of the radical faction would look like in practical terms, for even those for whom strong secularist rules are always invalid will want to express their arguments in language that can be widely understood. Christopher Insole [2004, 63, 70] suggests that their norms of humility and self-restraint should prompt Christians in particular to abide by the principles of neutrality in the public sphere.\textsuperscript{29} The case for an area of political society devoid of explicitly religious arguments turns largely on the circumstance that a diverse society cannot take it for granted that all participants in debate are making the same assumptions – or even that all religious participants share a single theological perspective [Stout 2004, 93-5, 97]. Habermas’s partial retention of strong secularism can be conceived as a pragmatic measure to facilitate public decision-making, and not as a statement about what all citizens of liberal democracies must believe and ultimately become [Stout 2004, 97-8].\textsuperscript{30} We have said that the debate on post-secularism is principally an academic one but that it has implications for the future of liberal democracies. Radical post-secularists cannot be content with identifying weaknesses in strong

\textsuperscript{28} See David Martin [2005, 174], for whom Christian social principles “resist any final conversion into a secular currency.” For further comments on this dispute, see Rosenblum 2000, 17; Mathewes 2007, 170-1, and Harrington 2007, 552.

\textsuperscript{29} Harlan R. Beckley argues likewise that the Christian ideal of \textit{agape} entails a view of individuals as free and equal, which in turn supports a conception of justice that denies appeals to religious convictions on the grounds that others could reasonably reject them [Cited by Trainor 1998, 1028].

\textsuperscript{30} As Paul Hirst [2000, 106] puts it, the neutral public sphere can be a “prudential” requirement rather than “the product of an activist and doctrinaire liberalism.” As we will see, many commentators who are critical of strong secularism recognize the prudence of this requirement, including McGraw 2010, Eberle 2002, and even Neuhaus 1984, e.g. 36.
secularist theories; they must also show how measures shaped by those theories can be engaged in the field, so to speak.

Further, it is unclear what principles radical post-secularists might want to promulgate in the field, if not liberal ones of equality, liberty and human rights. At the heart of Habermas’s conversion to post-secularism is a realization that secular liberal norms are not as strong and free-standing as he had supposed, and that they can benefit by such sustenance and support as can be found in the religious social principles from which (as he has always conceded) they mostly derived in the first place [Habermas 1983, 77ff.]. As Robert Kraynak [2001, 37] argues, “the moral assumptions underlying modern liberal democracy cry out for religious and metaphysical assistance….”

31 Why, for instance, do we think that individuals have such special worth that they should enjoy rights against the state? In what sense are we to consider them equal and free? Post-secularists are aware that the public legitimacy of their project depends largely on the record, imperfect yet undeniable, of modern theologians and church-leaders in leading or supporting movements for the extension of liberal principles to the treatment of excluded and underprivileged minorities. Conversely, for a clear majority in Western societies the legitimacy of post-secularism is threatened by the New Christian Right, the most familiar instance of a religious movement which has adopted non-liberal positions. 32 Of course, radical post-secularists do not rest their case on the social change brought about by the NCR: many prefer the example of leaders of the abolitionist and civil rights movements, who felt in no way

31 The point is common among Christian theorists: see, for example, Wolterstorff [1995, 211], for whom “liberalism depends for the sustenance of its ethos far more than it likes to acknowledge on religious communities.”

32 A 2012 survey reports that, for 54% of U.S. respondents, all churches should refrain from political involvement, a significant increase even from the 1990s, and one that the authors of the report attribute largely to the activities of evangelical groups. http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Issues/Politics_and_Elections/Religion%20Release.pdf, March 2012, accessed December 2012.
compelled to contain the religious content of their arguments. As Rawls [1996, 249-51] argues, however, the transformation sought and won by these leaders took the form of a more complete interpretation and application of liberal social principles, and so fell within the parameters of liberal social thought. It is fair comment on modern liberal theorists that they are not sufficiently open to new, as yet unimagined transformations of liberal principles, but Habermas has advanced beyond many of these in providing for and encouraging an area of inclusive debate from which such transformative ideas will presumably emerge.

Of the two components of Habermas’s post-secularism, a reformulated public sphere and reinvigorated public debate, the second is the more crucial, for transformative ideas typically originate and gather force in civil society. Yet post-secularists appear to be stuck on the first component, endlessly disputing the minutiae of rules governing religious public arguments in an ideal liberal democracy. Many of the contributors to this dispute seem to exaggerate the achievements of strong secularism, for religious citizens in Western democracies are, as we noted, generally not muzzled but free to express their viewpoints at all levels of public debate. At the same time, post-secularists often underestimate the accuracy and force of the dominant secularization paradigm, for the politicization of the churches speaks only to one clause of that paradigm, the expected privatization of religion, and predictions as to the decline of interest in religion in Western societies have not been convincingly challenged. As Steve Bruce’s work makes clear, the problem facing post-secularism is not so much secularist intransigence as public indifference to the religious public arguments that continue to circulate freely throughout society [Bruce 2002, e.g. 235]. If religious believers could find a way to generate a more enthusiastic response to their perspectives on public issues, Habermas’s diluted strong secularism would not constitute a major obstacle to those perspectives bearing fruit in social change. As Stephen
Carter [1999, 1064] points out, religion necessarily changes the person that the believer is, which in turn alters the way that the believer interacts with the world, and finally influences political outcomes. Social change inspired by religious faith will not be precluded by Habermas’s rules of engagement, but it may falter on low public demand for religious social ideas.

The approaches to post-secularism surveyed thus far identify aspects of liberalism which impede open debate by trivializing religious contributions to it. These aspects include the liberal conception of public and private and a surreptitious consensus on moral, in addition to procedural, principles. The approach to which we can now turn draws attention to a different impediment located in the theory and practice of liberalism, the liberal concept of pluralism. Liberal pluralism subsists essentially in extending recognition to such cultural preferences of individuals as are excluded from the existing package of rights or prevented in other ways from full public expression [Chaplin 2006, 151]. The argument of this study will draw instead on a type of pluralism known as “group,” “corporate” or “structural,” which will allow us to focus

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33 As Chaplin [2006, 168-9] points out, this approach does not differ fundamentally from that of the dominant critique of the liberal consensus, but rather identifies a key component of the liberal substantive consensus as being that the purposes and limits of the state should be derived from the rights and freedoms of individuals.

34 The basic assumption of group-pluralism, as stated by William Galston [2002, 60], is that the variety of human types is such that societies organized around a single dominant purpose “will allow only a small fraction of their inhabitants to live…in a manner consistent with their flourishing and satisfaction.” The central aim of group-pluralism, as stated by John Courtney Murray [1960, Introduction at x], is therefore “the coexistence within one political community of groups who hold divergent and incompatible views with regard to… ultimate questions that concern the nature and destiny of man….” Group-pluralism claims a long pedigree in the works of philosophers such as Aquinas and Althusius and certain aspects of medieval society. It developed in the late 19th century in response to industrialization and the resulting disintegration of traditional institutions, estates, guilds and kinship communities, and it found a clear statement in the early twentieth-century works of Harold Laski, G.D.H. Cole and J.N. Figgis. This nascent group-pluralist movement suffered setbacks from the increasing power of the state during and after the world wars – as Rodney Barker [1997, 108-9] notes, “the extension of state power over the life and labour of the English people made many collectivist arguments seem superfluous, and most anti-statist ones futile…” – as well as from the confusion of its ideas with the corporatist doctrines of the fascist movement, and from the seemingly inexorable rise of individual rights as the defining feature of liberal democracy. Some of the ideas of group-pluralism are currently popular in the form of the politics of identity and recognition, which maintain that (as Craig Calhoun [1997, 251] puts it), pursuing the “equitable inclusion [of minorities]…in the dominant public sphere cannot be either an adequate recognition of their partially separate discourses or a resolution to the underlying
less on the volume and public profile of religious public arguments than on their quality and effectiveness. This group-pluralist argument will depart most notably from other approaches to post-secularism in that it will emphasize the positive role of religious groups situated in the private sphere of society in developing original perspectives on public issues and events.35

A group-pluralist approach

Post-secularism has taken one step towards a critique of liberal pluralism by challenging the common assumption that social diversity presupposes secularism. Denys Munby [1963, 17], for instance, considers that secularism provides the optimal setting for citizens to select and pursue their preferred way of life: for him, “a secular society is in practice a pluralistic society, in so far as it is truly secular.” Post-secularists suggest that, on the contrary, liberal societies have grown more uniform under the direction of the secular state, most notably in marginalizing religious difference [Demant 1952, 102ff.]. However, post-secularists have been more helpful in identifying than in countering this marginalization of religious difference, in part because their strategy of increasing the volume and profile of religious public arguments cannot suffice to sustain diversity in a society dominated by one culture [Parekh 2000, 204]. Post-secularism can

35 Group-pluralists more commonly situate the communities they support and promote in the intermediate sphere of civil society than in the private sphere. The approach of this study is best described as a combination of group-pluralism and classical liberalism, though its reasons for situating the churches in the private sphere will not be identical to those of classical liberals.
take a second step towards a critique of liberal pluralism by challenging the assumption that social diversity presupposes individual autonomy.\textsuperscript{36}

Group-pluralism advances post-secularism by showing that modern liberalism perpetuates a bias, not simply against difference, but more specifically against such forms of difference as require communal realization. For group-pluralists, conflicting views on the good life cannot always be reduced to those of individuals, so a pluralist society presupposes a wide variety of social groups along with the conditions that they need to preserve and hand down their conceptions of the good life. Paul Marshall [1994, 150], for instance, argues that liberal pluralism threatens the long-term survival of groups which aspire to shape the ways of life as well as the beliefs and opinions of their members: such groups and their members have been left, as he puts it, “half-minded and thus half-hearted.”\textsuperscript{37} Post-secularists have made the point, formerly invoked by secularist social critics, that the right to express religious public viewpoints is anti-majoritarian. But if the dominant culture of society is individualistic as well as secular, anti-majoritarianism should encompass the protection of religious groups as well as individual rights of self-expression [Rosenblum 2000, 180]. A pluralist approach to post-secularism should therefore be corporate as well as individualist, promoting and defending structures in which we can pursue not only our individual callings but also our collective ends [Chaplin 2004].

\textsuperscript{36} See for example Chaplin 2006, 154: liberal pluralism “erroneously [supposes] that autonomy yields diversity and that diversity necessarily enhances autonomy,” and Galston 2002, 23: “[i]n the guise of protecting the capacity for diversity, the autonomy principle in fact exerts a king of homogenizing pressure on ways of life that do not embrace autonomy.”

\textsuperscript{37} The problem with liberal pluralism, for Marshall [1994, 156-7], is that it “undermines distinctive and traditional communities and replaces them with a uniform regime of individual choices.” See also Plant 2001, 4: “liberalism has a very attenuated idea of the common life.….” Galston 1995, 521ff, 526, and Carter 1998, 29 make similar points.
A group-pluralist approach to post-secularism further entails a reconsideration of the modern concepts of religion and religious freedom. The pre-modern concept of religion presupposed a context of rites embedded in the communal life of the church; the concept that has emerged since the Reformation refers to certain inner states, types of conscience and sensibility, and acceptance of particular doctrinal propositions rather than to corporal practices in an ecclesial setting. This understanding of religion has been influenced by the liberal norms of individual autonomy and choice, as well as by the post-modernist critique of established institutional narratives. Religious freedom has come to mean the right of individuals to select from the supply of available religious ideas and symbols, arranging and living them according to taste. These concepts of religion and religious freedom reflect and perpetuate a bifurcation between the inner spiritual world of the individual and the institutional life of religious groups which has a limiting effect on both components of post-secularism distinguished above. It undermines the prophetic role of religious public arguments, which are most effective when they are developed and articulated collectively, and it results in indifference towards sustained debate on moral issues – or even in antipathy towards it, as though moral debate somehow imposed on individual autonomy.

Group-pluralism rejects not individual autonomy but the humanist and secular construal of autonomy in subjectivist terms: it focuses on the freedom of mutual exchange between individuals, particularly that found in ecclesial settings, rather than on the subjective freedom of the atomistic self [Mathewes 2007, 113-4; Hollenbach 2003, 162]. This kind of freedom can benefit by structural changes to liberal society, as we will see, but it can be secured in large

38 See, for example, Cavanaugh 2002, 32-3 and Harvey 1999, 128.
39 Habermas refers to “new deinstitutionalized forms of a fickle religiosity that has withdrawn entirely into the subjective” [Mendieta 2010, 2]. See also Trigg 2007, 86-7, 139 and McGraw 2010, 180-1.
measure by the churches themselves. This study argues that the mainline churches have become prone to a new resolution of the tension in Christianity noted above, one that favours political engagement; that they have become over-identified with their civilizing mission, their role of improving humanity’s natural and social condition. This argument does not deny the social and political function of the churches, but rather suggests that they can best contribute to society by concentrating on their institutional life, their forms of worship and ritual, and their traditional commitment to the spiritual life or the quest for meaning beyond imminent goods. By restoring the tension between their roles of prophetic witness and spiritual leadership, this study argues, the churches can recover their unique presence in society and a more radical and effective public role. In Robin Lovin’s paradox, the churches can best fulfill their public function by turning their backs on the public [Lovin 1986, 17]. Or as David Fergusson [1998, 65] puts the point, “the purpose of a counter-cultural distinctiveness…is not isolationism, but a proper contribution to the wider social world.”

As we have noted, many post-secularists subscribe to the view that liberalism trivializes religion by assigning it to the private sphere of society. This study reverses the inference of these theorists from privatization to trivialization, arguing that religion has been trivialized rather by being reduced to the terms of the liberal polity and that it can best regain its authority and influence in society, as Kristen Deede Johnson [2007, 223] puts it, “outside…the direct purview of an all-embracing public…imperative.”

William Connolly [1999, 23] describes the motivation of strong secularism as being to dredge out of public life as much cultural density and

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40 Rosenblum 1998b, 74 argues similarly.
41 See also Rorty 1999, 170.
depth as possible so as not to muddy the pure water of public reason, and Linnel Cady [1993, 92] conceives the task of public theology as being “to nurture, deepen…sustain and transform public life.” Cady is surely right as to the ultimate purpose of public theology, but its proximate task should be to restore depth and diversity to private life. In pursuing this end, public theology can draw on a tradition of liberalism which places religion and religious groups in the private sphere in order to protect them from political society, rather than society from the political strife arising from religious disagreement. To relate the argument of this study to terms of political theory, we could say that, without the negative liberty of the private sphere, the positive liberty of public action is impossible, or at least impoverished [see Tinder 1989, 171].

We have also noted that for post-secularist critics of the liberal model of public and private, and for radical critics of Habermas’s alternative model, an unacknowledged consensus on moral principles in liberal societies renders public life impenetrable for excluded groups. This study suggests that exclusion from that consensus can have consequences beneficial to a pluralist society. We will see that the church historically prepared the way for liberal democracy by its insistence on its unique standing in society due to its divine origin and authorization. The distinction between imperium and ecclesia gave rise to one between state and society, and to the freedom of non-ecclesial groups as well as that of the church (or later, churches). The problem facing pluralism today, this study argues, is not the strength of the boundary between public and

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42 See Insole 2004, 106: “The separation in America of church and state, in its origins at least, was as much to preserve the full scope, integrity and influence of true religion as it was to protect the state from religious interference.…”

43 Rosenblum [1998b, 326] observes in regards to the politics of recognition that “[t]here is not a glimmer of the thought that alienation may have morally constructive consequences.” Calhoun [1997, 242] comments on Hannah Arendt that “[s]he see certain forms of worldly estrangement not only as inevitable but also as productive of positive goods and distinctive characteristics of human individuality and capacity for action.”
private, but rather its disintegration, as indicated by both the privatization of what is properly
cultural and the politicization of private life. If they can regain their rightful authority over
personal spirituality, the churches will help to fortify that boundary and so to preserve
viewpoints outside the liberal consensus which are the seedbeds for renewed public debate.

This proposed role of the churches contributes to public debate by reconnecting them to their
natural popular base. Secularization studies have identified a disjunction in Western societies,
captured by Grace Davie’s phrase “believing without belonging,” between persisting religious
belief and plummeting church-membership [Davie 1994]. For David Martin [1969, 16], the
decline of church membership is part of a broader phenomenon, a crisis of confidence in public
institutions and a search for meaning and fulfillment in private life rather than in political
activity. As Duncan Forrester [1989, 7] comments, “[t]heologians have in recent years
expended so much energy in denouncing the…captivity of religion in the private sphere that they
have often failed to notice the…increasing significance of what goes on there.”

In today’s secular societies, the churches alone cannot succeed in fortifying the public/private
boundary. They must therefore establish connections not only with religious believers but also

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44 For Davie [1994, 190], religious belief, defined broadly as “spiritual stirrings,” shows “little sign of diminishing.” Davie’s finding has been challenged by other secularization studies, notably those that define religious belief more narrowly than she does, but most studies agree that belief is declining at a lesser rate than church membership. See, for example, Bruce 2002, 71-2. A 2012 study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life finds that in the last five years the religiously unaffiliated have increased from about 15% to about 20% of the U.S. population. Two-thirds of these unaffiliated respondents consider themselves to be religious, but the study reports that “[w]ith few exceptions… the unaffiliated say they are not looking for a religion that would be right for them. Overwhelmingly, they think that religious organizations are too concerned with money and power, too focused on rules and too involved in politics.” (Original emphasis.) http://www.pewforum.org/unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx, October 9th 2012, accessed December 2012.

45 See also Davie 1994, 196-7. The idea that the association of the church with political power and elites in Western Europe has been a factor in the historical decline of religion is often invoked in explanations of the relative immunity of the U.S. churches to the crisis of church-membership.
with other communities which fall outside the liberal consensus. A pluralist approach to post-secularism would both draw on and depart from the role of the churches proposed most notably by contemporary Radical Anabaptist theorists and known here as contrast church theory. It would affirm the idea that Christians inhabit two fundamentally different orders, society and church, and that the churches should constitute a distinct, delineated colony or island in liberal society. It would differ with contrast church theorists over their sectarianism or isolationism, their failure to detect the significance of what goes on in the private sphere of society. In particular, we will see, they have not built on common ground with other social groups which would seem to qualify as contrast communities in a liberal society. Besides the churches, many groups do not depend for their legitimacy on the individual consent of their members; like the churches, they are “communities of memory,” normative rather than utilitarian in orientation, ordered by substantive conceptions of the good discovered through revelation or tradition and confirmed by custom and use [Bellah et al. 1985, 152-5; Lockwood O’Donovan 1994, 11-12, 14].

For Johnson [2007, 221], the challenge of post-secularism is less to provide legitimacy for religious public arguments than “to rethink the very concepts of public and private that have come to be taken-for-granted within… liberal society.” Habermas’s reformulation of the public sphere has met that challenge; this study maintains that rethinking the private sphere can likewise prove helpful to post-secularism. The private sphere is generally conceived as a largely voluntary space consisting of the interior lives and intimate relationships, especially domestic

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47 The point comes up in most commentaries on the Radical Anabaptists. The best known example is perhaps Gustafson 1985, esp. 84-5.
ones, of unorganized individuals. An alternative conception of the private sphere can take off
from the communitarian point that there is no such thing as the unadorned individual, and it can
expand that sphere to include the communities in which individuality originates or is formed.
Our distinction of the private sphere from the semi-private sphere of civil society will turn on
one between two kinds of social groups, ascriptive or normative communities and voluntary
associations. The distinction will not be unproblematic, but the difference between the sphere
of the state apparatus and the semi-public sphere of civil society is also not self-evident, for the
state penetrates civil society in many ways, such as the delivery of public services by non-
governmental bodies. The boundaries between the social spheres adopted in this study is
conceptual and tentative, a topic for further debate. The hope of this study is simply that they
can help us to envisage a post-secular society and the role of the churches in it.

48 See Weintraub [1997, 5]: there are two kinds of imagery of the private sphere, what is hidden or withdrawn as
opposed to open and revealed, and what is individual, as opposed to collective. Rosenblum [1987, 63] notes that the
identification of the private with the personal and individual has become “automatic.” Charles Davis [1980, 176]
portrays the private sphere as consisting of “those relatively unorganized segments of life, notably the family, still
existing in the interstices of bureaucratically administered society.” Incidentally, such models explain why
theologians so often consider religion to belong to the public sphere, for if “public” is equated with “communal” or
“institutional” and contrasted to “individual” a religious group, and particularly a church, would necessarily be
public rather than private. See Clarke E. Cochran [1989, 431] for a concept of the private sphere which attempts to
account for the communitarian critique: Cochran argues that the liberal concept need not “undermine the social
caracter of the person…for…[s]elves can be social and the private still prior to the public”

49 This distinction will question what Max L. Stackhouse [2008, 55] calls “those secular understandings of human
existence wherein legitimate social life consists only of voluntary agreements constructed by autonomous
individuals on the basis of rationally calculated marginal utility.” See also Jeff Weintraub [1997, 15n]: we should
distinguish “carefully and systematically” between civil society and the truly private realm of the family and other
intimate relationships.” And again at 18: “modern civil society represents not the ‘private’ realm but the new
‘public’ realm; the ‘private’ realm is the realm of personal life, above all of domesticity.” This study will develop
Weintraub’s distinction by expanding the conception of the private sphere to include, not only families and intimate
relationships, but also ascriptive or normative communities.

50 As John A. Coleman [1997, 280] puts it: “[p]olitical and civil society shade into one another….Nevertheless, they
do not simply fuse…..” And again at 277: they “interpenetrate each other and remain, at least analytically,
independent.” For examples of this interpenetration, see Chambers 2002, 95 and Honohan 2000, 162.
The post-secular role of the churches proposed by this study has two related components, one internal to the private sphere and one external to it. Within the private sphere, the churches can form coalitions with other normative or ascriptive groups while maintaining their own unique traditions, in order to counter what Habermas [1983, e.g. 332ff.] calls “colonization by system,” or incursions by the state and market into private life.51 If the project of strong secularism has been to consign not just religion but all comprehensive doctrines to the private sphere, the strategy of post-secularism should be to make common cause with communities subscribing to such doctrines. Beyond the private sphere, the churches can work to secure the social and political conditions of their own integrity and autonomy, along with those of other communities. For Augustine [1950, 696, 698 (19 §17 and §19)], the church may intervene in the procedures of the state when its forms of worship have been violated. A group-pluralist approach to the role of the churches would widen this stipulation to include the protection of the equivalent of forms of worship in other communities, their activities and ways of life, and the freedom required to preserve them. As we describe this role in more detail, we will revisit the non-sectarianism of the weak principle of secularism, arguing that, while the liberal state may not promote a particular religion, it may accord religious groups protective rights and material aid, just as it does secular groups deemed valuable to society.

The purpose of this study, conceived most broadly, is to advance our understanding of what religion, and the churches especially, can bring to secular liberal societies. For most post-secularists, religion can justify and perhaps enhance such liberal principles as liberty, equality

51 Habermas [e.g. 1983, 325, 333] generally uses a longer form of this phrase, such as “colonization of the lifeworld by system imperatives” or “by the inner dynamics of autonomous systems.” However, this study mostly avoids the concept of the lifeworld because Habermas has not made it clear how it relates to his later division of the liberal public sphere. On colonization by system see also Habermas 2008a, 107-8 and Fiorenza 1992, 72.
and human rights – principles often known collectively simply as social justice. Others have questioned this project on the grounds that it limits the transformative potential of religion or furthers its trivialization, but few have offered compelling alternatives to it. This study suggests that the churches can contribute to justice in a different, older sense of the balance that should exist between social structures, and between these structures and the state, in order for citizens optimally to order their lives.\footnote{See, for example, Demant 1933, 177ff.; Davis 1980, 153, and Reckitt 1932, 227-8: “[t]he key-word of [the] sociological question for the Christian is justitia, which…connotes a ‘rightness’ in political, economic and other social relationships….”} Justice in the sense of rightness in the relations between social structures has not been a major part of modern political theory, but for group-pluralists it is the most important task facing that discipline today.\footnote{See, for example, Barker 1997, 101 and Chaplin 2004 and 2005a.} This study takes up one small part of that task, arguing for the recognition and protection of a constitutional space in which diverse ways of life, particularly religious ones, can thrive.

The plan of this study

Charles Mathewes [2007, 3] reports that the dispute over the admissibility of religious arguments in public debate has been resolved in favour of the accommodationist side. The first chapter of this study surveys this dispute, mostly confirming Mathewes’ verdict on its outcome, while the remaining chapters ask how an academic defeat of separationism or strong secularism can translate into a society in which religious social and political ideas can make a positive difference. We will proceed by considering in turn the most common approaches to this question: that of Habermas and what we will call the civil religion approach (Chapter Two); contrast church theory (Chapter Three); group-pluralism (Chapter Four), and civil society theory
(Chapter Five). These chapters identify and retain aspects of each approach which are consistent with a pluralist theory of post-secularism, and Chapter Six applies this pluralist theory to the central challenge facing post-secularism, the reinvigoration of open and inclusive public debate.

Chapter One outlines the accommodationist critique of strong secularism, and particularly of the claim that the moral consensus necessary to liberal democracy cannot be guaranteed under conditions of pure accommodationism. We will see that many contested moral issues within the jurisdiction of the modern state are beyond resolution by public reason, and that debate on such issues would be divisive even under conditions of pure separationism, and we will argue that society benefits by an unfurling of the actual faith-commitments underlying public arguments. However, this chapter concludes that accommodationists do not adequately address the problem of religious extremism: their argument that inclusion in political procedures has a moderating effect on extremist groups is too sanguine about the danger that inclusion will merely provide opportunities to subvert these procedures.

Chapter Two shows how Habermas’s reformulation of the liberal public sphere, introduced above, corrects this weakness of accommodationism. Habermas’s model recognizes that consensus on political procedures is at once a minimum requirement of liberal democracy and a maximum possible expectation in a multicultural society. However, the second component of Habermas’s post-secularism relocates moral consensus from the state apparatus to his outer public sphere of political debate: for him, religious citizens can reinvigorate debate by adapting their public arguments to the normative principles of liberalism. We will challenge this “civil religion” approach from the “contrast church” standpoint that Christian public witness is most effective when articulated by ecclesial communities situated as the “other” of liberal society.
Chapter Three examines the contrast church position, and especially the concept of a parallel or shadow public sphere in which the churches exemplify an alternative polity of peace and justice. This concept permits the churches the time and space to develop original perspectives on public issues based on classical rather than contextual theology, on discipleship in ecclesial practices, and on a true consensus of the faithful. However, this chapter concludes that contrast church theory is so intent on manifesting the Kingdom of God on earth that it fails to recognize social realities which can contribute to the post-secularist project, including pluralist elements in the liberal tradition and alternatives to the liberal consensus preserved and passed down by non-ecclesial communities.

Chapter Four attempts a group-pluralist synthesis of civil religion and contrast church theory. It draws on the *modus vivendi* tradition of liberalism, which confines the liberal consensus to political procedures and encourages the greatest feasible accommodation of diversity outside the state apparatus. This tradition is, however, inadequate to post-secularism insofar as its underlying distinction between state and society historically takes the form of one between state and individual rights. Group-pluralism should therefore distinguish between Habermas’s outer public sphere and a constitutional space, the private sphere of society, in which religious and other normative groups can flourish. Central to this public/private distinction, we will see, is the concept of protective group-rights in the form of material support and exemption from certain generally applicable laws.

The final two chapters develop the state/society and public/private distinctions into a tripartite model of the social spheres, specifying the post-secular role of the churches in each sphere.
These chapters consider in turn two remedies for the reinvigoration of debate in the intermediate sphere of civil society. Chapter Five outlines the civil religion remedy, which seeks to render social groups consistent or congruent with liberal moral principles. The congruence remedy enables Habermas’s “ideal-speech situation” of rational discourse based on the persuasiveness of arguments rather than on the authority of traditional communities. As we will see, this approach is attractive to post-secularists in that it recalls the role of the early church in emancipating individuals from primordial kinship and territorial groups, as well as the timeless role of the churches in countering narrow, sectional interests with a concern for the public good.

Chapter Six presents the group-pluralist alternative to the congruence remedy, arguing that Habermas’s ideal-speech situation does not create but presupposes the social capital, the skills and virtues such as critical judgement and respect for otherness, required by public action and debate. We will see that these skills and virtues are formed in communities such as the churches which are not necessarily congruent with liberal principles and which are undermined or dismantled by the congruence remedy. The civil religion approach calls on the churches to strengthen the liberal consensus with Christian social ethics and to assist in its promulgation throughout society. In the pluralist approach, by contrast, the churches preserve particularistic and non-politicized contexts of meaning from which citizens can emerge capable of autonomous and creative reflection on the liberal consensus.

Habermas’s post-secularism addresses the challenge of both religious extremism and strong secularism by guarding against a religious polity or theocracy while opening political debate to religious believers. Post-secularists can build on Habermas’s position by developing measures which ensure that political debate remains open and inclusive, free from domination by
arguments derived directly from revelation or secular public reason. This study states the case for one such measure. It retains Habermas’s division of the liberal public sphere and provides for a third, private sphere which enables and protects an integrated faith-based life for such groups as are not congruent with liberal principles but willing and able to reach practical accommodation with a liberal regime. This model of the social spheres recognizes both the dissonance of religion and politics and the value of religious contributions to public debate. The model allows extremist groups to learn to speak politically in ways that are not confined to religious dogma and the mainline churches to develop a public theology which offers an original and effective perspective on public issues and events.
Chapter One
The Case Against Strong Secularism

The case for strong secularism, or the view that religious arguments should be excluded from the public sphere of liberal societies, rests largely on a distinction between empirically verifiable knowledge and faith-based values. For John Rawls [1996, e.g. 217], the duty of civility obliges citizens to model their contributions to public debate on the abstract, universal and value-free knowledge of the natural sciences, or on public reason, and to confine positions derived from sentiment, prejudice, authoritarian fiat or religious beliefs to their private lives. In rejecting strong secularist criteria of admissibility to public debate, post-secularists appeal to a convergence between the categories of knowledge and faith in ‘post-enlightenment’ schools of contemporary philosophy. All knowledge rests on faith, these schools argue, for the evidence on which we think and act is not apprehensible independently of faith in a context of understanding or a set of underlying propositions which we do not, and could not conceivably, put to tests such as the scientific method.

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54 Rawls specifies here that this is a moral rather than a legal duty. See also Davis 1980, 177 and Newbiggin 1986, 70. The point raises the question of the legitimacy of arguments derived from religious belief (or prejudice, sentiment etc.) which overlap with or are identical to those derived from public reason. Audi’s [1997, 28-9] principle of secular motivation addresses this question by disallowing such arguments on the grounds that they are motivated by considerations incompatible with “adequate secular reason.” As many commentators have pointed out, however, this condition would be virtually impossible to impose.

55 See, for example, Alexander 1993, 789-90 and Fish 1999, 255: “rationality and faith go together in an indissoluble package.” The concept of a ‘context of understanding’ is used by Taylor [2007, 3], who relates it to Heidegger’s ‘pre-ontology’. Strictly speaking, this context or pre-ontology is always religious in nature. See, for example, Chaplin 1985, 85, following Dooyeweerd: “in politics, as in every other sphere of life, participants are…influenced by powerful underlying religious convictions, whether ‘theistic’ or ‘secular.’” However, as Chaplin [2000, 642] also points out, the term ‘religious’ has become so closely associated with theism or belief in a deity that it is more useful to say simply that faith is inescapable for us in all thought and action.
The case against strong secularism does not deny all epistemic distinctions between knowledge and faith, but maintains simply that we should be more tentative or “ethically modest” about the claims of public reason, more open to the possibility that religious perspectives are rationally grounded, and more ready to engage those perspectives on their merits in public debate [Habermas 2008a, 110]. This chapter outlines the case for a renewed openness to religious public arguments. The first section shows that many issues currently in dispute in the public sphere can scarcely be addressed, let alone resolved, within the limits imposed by public reason; the second section suggests that religious groups and individuals can help to reverse a decline in the quality of public debate in Western democracies, and the final section considers what is often considered to be irrefutable evidence in the case for strong secularism, the politicization of extremist religious groups.

Religion, morality and contested public issues

A high watermark of strong secularist thought was reached with Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice* (1971), which attempted to derive a comprehensive theory of liberal justice from procedural as opposed to substantive moral principles. Four decades of criticism of this project have resulted in a near consensus among political theorists that, like other political systems, liberalism is inevitably a moral enterprise. The point holds for classical liberal theories in which the state is confined to the protection of individual rights and property since rights and property laws are not prior to, but rather presuppose faith in, particular conceptions of the nature and needs of the

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56 Habermas [2008a, 112-3] continues: “naturalistic worldviews based upon speculative elaborations of scientific findings… by no means enjoy *prima facie* priority over competing worldviews or religious outlooks in the political public sphere.” See also Markham 1994, 176-7 and Lamb 1992, 108. Lamb calls for a “second Enlightenment” to establish that religious faith and principles “do not by definition lack intelligence or reason.”
citizens who comprise the state.\textsuperscript{57} The point becomes clearer as governments take on greater responsibility for the well-being in addition to the security of their citizens, or for their positive as well as their negative liberty, for it is impossible to suppose that decision-making in the welfare state can proceed by means of public reason alone. As Francis Canavan [1981, 29] puts the case,

[a] state that acts vigorously on a number of fronts to promote people’s welfare must have some idea of what their welfare is. That necessarily implies some concept of what is good for human beings and what is bad for them.\textsuperscript{58}

One conception of the kind of faith at work in liberalism is that social life should be organized so as to enhance individual autonomy, choice and mobility; a more detailed consideration of the liberal faith will be necessary when we address the question of the public role of religion in a post-secular society. This chapter seeks simply to establish that faith in particular beliefs about the meaning and purpose of life is necessarily operative in debate on many public issues and events, and that religious contributions to such debate should not be excluded on the grounds that they are explicitly faith-based.

Many issues that fall under the jurisdiction of the modern state, besides those normally classified under welfare, would appear to be beyond resolution by public reason. These include abortion, assisted suicide, stem-cell research and other biotechnologies, obscenity, and sex education in schools, as well as the proper limits of religious arguments in public debate. In the case of abortion, for instance, many commentators point out that reason cannot furnish the resources necessary to decide between the fetus’s right to life and the woman’s right to choose. In this

\textsuperscript{57} See, for example, Gray 2000a, 19, 72 and 2000b, 95; Mooney 1986, 5, and Walsh 2003, 166-7.

\textsuperscript{58} See also Bailey 2003, 70: “The attempt to make political choices in a neutral fashion terminates in vacuity or utter incoherence.”
example, the principles endorsed by public reason are ‘underdeterminate’: without resorting to conceptions of the good they cannot determine whether the rights of the mother or of the fetus should be accorded priority.\(^{59}\) The underdetermination of public reason is evident in the position taken on abortion by liberal states, which have sought to steer a course between moral camps but have constantly taken substantive moral positions on the issue. In the U.S., for instance, the question of whether the fetus is a person and, if so, at what point it becomes one has been ruled to be a matter of private discretion, yet the state continues to exercise its own discretion on the issue, for example by deciding against third-trimester abortions and (in some jurisdictions) ruling that killing a pregnant woman constitutes a double murder.\(^{60}\) The views that first-semester abortions are acceptable and that a fetus can be murdered are derived from faith commitments and are not neutral between the moral positions encountered in public debate. In the terms of Neuhaus’ *The Naked Public Square* [1984, e.g. 86], nakedness, or decision-making without moral clothing, cannot be a lasting feature of the liberal public sphere.\(^{61}\)

The abortion debate is notable because of its role in the emergence of post-secular thought. In the 1990s, both Rawls and Habermas cited the debate in retreating from their earlier strong secularist positions. Rawls continued to resist the idea that citizens might appeal to religious

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\(^{59}\) See, for example, Quinn 1987, 149-50; Chaplin 2000, 638-9, n69; Perry 1997, 57, and Markham 1994, 160.

\(^{60}\) *Roe v Wade* 410 U.S.113 (1973) established both these points (that of private discretion and the “trimester” system). *Planned Parenthood v Casey* 505 U.S. 833 (1992) uses the criterion of fetal viability rather than the trimester system to define a state’s right to override a woman’s autonomy. *The Unborn Victim of Violence Act* (Public Law 108-212, 2004) allows two charges of murder to be brought against the killer of a pregnant woman. See Dostert 2006, 78-9 in regards to the moral distinction, or lack thereof, between first and third-semester abortions, and Carter 1998, 91-2 for this and other examples of the limits of public reason.

\(^{61}\) See also Connolly 1999, 37: the liberal claim to adopt a position on such issues without invoking metaphysical ideas “is soon seen to be a façade…. ”
principles to justify their stance on abortion, and Habermas [1993, 59] still hoped that “in the long run” the dispute could be “decided one way or the other on the basis of good reasons.” By the turn of the century, however, Habermas had concluded that abortion is but one of many “morally-loaded” public issues which are inextricably interwoven with particular conceptions of the good and which therefore invite or require perspectives from ethics as well as from public reason.

It was also in the 1990s that the Canadian courts reconsidered attempts to rule on morally contested issues by means of a concept of harm consistent with public reason, resorting instead to a “community standards test” which purported to reflect the moral consensus of the nation as gauged by the judiciary. The courts stopped short of a post-secular turn, however, for they provided assurance that they would continue to rule “without reference to… philosophical and theological considerations.” There is no consensus among post-secularists as to the considerations by which courts and legislatures should negotiate morally contested issues; their concern is mainly that if criteria such as the community standards test are presented or taken as

62 Rawls’ position is expressed in his well-known footnote on abortion [1996, 243n.]. See also Rawls 1997, 798n.

63 See, for example, Habermas 2008b, 20: “the divisive premises [of such issues] are so opaque that it is by no means settled from the outset which party can draw on the more convincing moral intuitions.” For an overview of this development in Habermas’s thought, see Harrington 2007.

64 The criterion of “prevailing community standards” was first adopted by Canadian courts in the cases of R v Brodie (1962) and R v Dominion News and Gifts (1962). In R v. Butler (1992) 89 DLR (4th) 449, the Court rejected the Hicklin standard of English common law, which frames the danger of obscenity as a threat to the “morally vulnerable,” in favour of a community standards test. In upholding the Criminal Code on the definition of obscenity against a Charter challenge on the basis of freedom of expression, the Court in Butler found itself unable to establish a causal connection between the material considered obscene and harm to any particular group of Canadians. For a history and critique of the community standards test, see Benson 2000, 524-6.

65 Rodriguez v British Columbia (Attorney-General) (1993) 107 DLR (4th), at 342. Similar statements can be found in cases such as Tremblay v Daigle (1989) 62 DLR (4th) (SCC) at 650 and R v Chaulk [1991] 2 WWR 385 (SCC) per McLachlin, J. However, contradictory positions on the role of moral norms in judgement proliferate in the decisions of the Canadian courts, and the broader picture is one of confusion as to the role of moral judgement in judicial decision-making rather than of its unanimous rejection.
matters of fact or public reason, they will be unexamined and unchallenged in public debate. The danger, as post-secularists see it, is that explicit faith claims, religious ones in particular, will be driven out of the public sphere, or at least left at a disadvantage in debate by what Ian Barns [2003, 245] calls liberalism’s “neutralist alibi,” while implicit or unacknowledged faith-claims, atheistic ones in particular, will prevail by default.66

We should recognize that identifying public issues as essentially morally contested falls short of establishing the case for post-secularism, for many secularists would exclude only religious and not moral perspectives from public debate. The assumption that morality and religion are inseparable, and that moral positions require a religious underpinning, lasted well into the twentieth century, but few theorists today would deny that, despite their close historical association, moral issues can be discussed independently of religion.67 Thus, for instance, recent educational reforms in the U.K. and the U.S. call for curricula which teach moral values without reference to religious doctrine.68 However, not only does teaching morality under the aegis of the state compromise extreme versions of strong secularism, but it casts doubt as well on the reasoning behind more moderate versions, for moral principles rest on beliefs which are not matters of empirical or logical entailment and which do not command universal agreement [Trigg 2007, 144-5, 178; Alexander 1993, 775]. If being controversial and divisive, rooted in unprovable premises, is a condition of exclusion from public debate, moral as well as religious

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66 Benson 2000, 521, 541 and Fish 1999, 201 make similar points.

67 For many people today, of course, the point that many normative principles of Western democracies are derived from Judeo-Christian sources provides no support for a post-secularist conclusion, for those sources are seen as being responsible for ecological exploitation, nuclear proliferation, and a variety of socio-economic injustices. On this point, see Forrester 1989, 37.

68 See Trigg 2007, 178-80. In Britain, the education reforms of 2004 call for a system of morals to be taught independently of religion, while a 2006 set of guidelines to US teachers stipulate that it is acceptable to teach morality, but not religion, in the schools.
arguments must be counted illegitimate [Schwarzschild 1993, 914]. In any case, post-secularists do not need to establish a continuing essential link between the two kinds of argument in order to suggest that both should be admissible; they can simply point out that many citizens cannot or prefer not to discuss certain moral issues in isolation from a more general worldview, and a religious worldview in particular. Religion may no longer hold a monopoly on moral discussion, but it has long specialized in social and personal moral issues, and for many citizens religious and moral beliefs remain inseparable.

Demonstrating that public issues are essentially morally contested does go some way towards establishing the post-secular case against strong secularism inasmuch as contributions to discussion on such issues by religious groups and individuals are in practice often simply moral rather than theological; they can be understood and evaluated without assenting to any religious doctrine [Lovin 1986, 24]. Strong secularism would, for example, exclude from public debate natural law arguments against abortion because they emanate from a tradition regarded as religious, though they use no specifically religious terms nor rely on the dictates of a religious text or authority [Chaplin 1998, 1003]. However, as Michael J. Perry [1997, 81] observes, one can embrace a premise about what it means to be human without necessarily counting oneself a participant in the tradition that has yielded the premise. The moral perspectives of groups and traditions can be both political and illuminating without their underlying commitments needing to be convincing to non-believers: for instance, a Marxist can articulate persuasive political positions which do not require us to subscribe to the theory of dialectic [Chaplin 1998, 1002]. The point holds for more explicitly faith-based outlooks, elements of which have been taken as guides for political thought and action in a variety of settings. Without converting to Hinduism, many have embraced aspects of Gandhi’s social thought, and many have endorsed the
implications for social justice of such concepts as *agape* and *imago dei* without becoming Christians. 69

Of course, some religious political arguments do depend on revealed or ecclesial doctrine for their justification. While most proponents of secularism would allow the possibility of reasoned discussion on moral issues by religious groups and individuals, they would maintain that the minimal level of consensus required by even a pluralist society could not be guaranteed if arguments based on religious dogma were admitted to public debate. 70 This is the conclusion, for example, traditionally drawn by liberals from the evidence of the Wars of Religion. Post-secularists maintain, however, that the conditions of political stability have been secured in Western democracies to the extent that we need no longer fear that religious arguments will endanger social peace and harmony; in their view, we have been largely delivered from the threat of theocracy [Dostert 1996, 82; Chaplin 2000, 628-9]. For post-secularists, the liberal-democratic principle of equal freedom demands that, as long as there is no danger to public security, both secular and religious citizens should be permitted to live privately and publicly as they see fit. 71

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69 The example of Gandhi’s social thought is Coleman’s [1982, 196]. The social and political implications of the Christian principles cited are explored below in Chapter Two.

70 See Habermas 2008a, 135: citizens may be able to reach a compromise on matters concerning money, security or leisure time, for “they all aspire to the *same* categories of divisible goods.” (Original emphasis) However, “this condition is no longer met as soon as the conflicts are triggered…by competing ‘goods of salvation.’” Conflicts over existential values between communities of faith cannot be resolved by compromise. They can only be alleviated by being depoliticized…. Likewise, Rorty maintains that “we shall not be able to keep a democratic political community going unless the religious believers remain willing to trade privatization for a guarantee of religious liberty” [cited Chaplin 2000, 627]. As McGraw [2010, 218] observes, “you can hardly peruse a book on religion and politics…without running into plenty of ominous rehearsals of how religion embodies, breeds and institutionalizes intolerance.”

71 See, for example, Benhabib’s [1996, 5] concept of the “common faith of deliberative democracy,” the faith that “the institutions and culture of liberal democracies are sufficiently complex, supple, and de-centered as to allow the expression of difference without fracturing the identity of the body politic or subverting existing forms of political
Maimon Schwarzschild [1993, 915] argues there are only two possible responses to secularism: either modern liberal democracies can hold their own, in which case there is no good reason to exclude religious arguments from public debate, or there is significant public dissatisfaction with them, in which case religious alternatives to their governing principles should be given a hearing. An important component of the case for post-secularism has been the record of the mainline churches in contributing to the development and fulfillment of liberal-democratic principles. The leading role of religious groups in the abolitionist and civil rights movements in the U.S. and the fall of the Raj, apartheid and communism abroad are widely cited as evidence that Christianity has often succeeded in opening the eyes of the majority to the full implications of liberty, equality and social justice.\(^{72}\) The leading role of Christians in these and many other radical social movements demonstrates that, as Habermas [in Mendieta 2010, 1-2] argues, a progressive, modernizing agenda need not be a secularizing one.\(^{73}\) Conversely, post-secularists point out, some of the most damaging attacks on liberal democracy, especially in the twentieth century, have been inspired by secular ideologies.

The case for post-secularism should not, however, rest on a listing of religious groups and arguments that fall within or fortify an existing consensus on liberal social and political norms.

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\(^{72}\) In regards to the U.S., Carter [1998, 28-9] comments that “[h]ad the nation tried to enforce in the 1860s or 1960s the depressing rules for public dialogue that liberals too often endorse today, our history…would have been radically different…for the worse.”

\(^{73}\) See also Habermas 2008a, 124-5: “the deep religious roots of the motivations of most social and socialist movements in both the Anglo-American and the European countries are highly impressive…[C]hurches and religious communities generally perform important functions for stabilizing and advancing a liberal political culture.” As Tinder [1989, 153] points out, the churches’ implication in social evils dates mainly from the days of their establishment and nationalization; the record of the disestablished churches is much more favorable.
Such a list would not convince those secularists whose position is developed principally in reaction to fundamentalist and extremist religious groups. Nor would it satisfy all religious citizens, for it would not include groups and arguments with the potential to transform liberal society and politics. As Richard Song [1997, 229] points out, liberal society can be sacralized like any other social order and, like other orders, it can benefit by arguments that challenge its assumptions and ideals. A recital of the liberal credentials of religious movements and arguments might help to allay secularist concerns about unbridled pluralism and the proliferation of illiberal viewpoints, but it would not address a quite different concern, shared by many religious and secular commentators, about a decline in the scope and level of discussion on the public good in modern liberal democracies. Jeffrey Stout [2004, 113-4], for instance, observes that public debate in liberal societies has been “thinned out”; that it has degenerated into an occasion for the exchange of material preferences and choices. Post-secularists therefore seek to demonstrate how debate would benefit by an unfolding of the faith-commitments underlying diverse political positions, and a full appraisal of their origins and implications, including the commitments of the large number of citizens who continue to subscribe to religious beliefs [Chaplin 2008, 85]. A useful approach to this component of post-secularism can be found in the

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74 For Fish [1999, 251], a religion deprived of the opportunity to transform the culture in its every detail is “hardly a religion at all.” Likewise, for Mouv and Griffioen [1993, 54, following Newbigin], “The Christian message… is first of all a critical force calling into question every culture.” As Mathewes [2007, 171] warns, we should be wary of religion which “permits...‘faith’ in public life, but only...so long as it stays within boundaries and does not destabilize the structures of the preset political order – that is, so that it always dances to the tune set by the immanent civic order.”

75 For similar points, see Connolly 1999, 5 and Casanova 1994, 205. Casanova welcomes the return of religion to the public sphere on the grounds that nonreligious normative traditions have “abandoned their public normative roles.” See also Boyd 2004, 317-8: Locke, Hume, Madison, and Smith did not see the possibility that public life would become “so thoroughly neutral, pacified, and uninspiring that it would cease to evoke any strong commitments whatsoever…. [For them], peace and civil order were goods whose merits could hardly be overvalued.”
position of the agonist school of political thought on consensus and difference in liberal societies.

Agonism, difference and Christianity

For one school of political theory, inspired by Machiavelli, Nietzsche and Carl Schmidt and represented today (among others) by Chantal Mouffe, William Connolly and Stanley Fish, disputes about conceptions of the good are intrinsic to politics, part of its very substance, and they cannot be avoided by denying full discussion to all interested parties. For Fish [1999, 242], liberal political theorists make the mistake of conceiving political conflict as a problem, whereas it is simply the nature of the human condition. These theorists reject the very possibility of a public sphere of rational argument based on neutral or universally accessible public reason and they affirm “the ineluctability of antagonism.” They are known as “agonist” because, for them, political contestation is beyond rational or consensual resolution and we must choose between endless struggles for power and resolving disagreement by means of agonistic decisions. The liberal aspiration to achieve seamless political unity is misguided, the agonist theorists argue, since the right and the good are inextricably mixed, and many public issues would be divisive whether or not all perspectives on them were admitted to debate [Perry 1997, 45]. Salutary political ideals (for example, economic growth and conservation, specialization and self-sufficiency) are often incommensurate, and consensual adjudication between them, a ruling that would be acceptable to all reasonable and well-informed citizens, would be unlikely if not

76 See Mouffe 2005, 7 and 2000, e.g. 32, 81ff. and 113, where she refers to the “sacralization of consensus” in the liberal tradition. See also Young 1996, 120-35; Johnson 2007, 84-5, and Chaplin 2006, 162.
impossible. As Mathewes [2007, 156] argues, “liberal political theory is, paradoxically, not a theory about politics at all, but a theory about avoiding politics.”

Agonists do not mourn but celebrate the passing of a hegemonic consensus on the good life, or “the dissolution of the markers of certainty,” as Claude Lefort [Cited Mouffe 2000, 18] puts it. For them, the aspiration to substantive neutrality as either a starting-point or telos of democratic discussion has exclusionary consequences; it limits argument to areas in which consensus is possible, privileges certain conceptions of the common good over others, and effaces significant differences between citizens [Mathewes 2007, 264].

Agonists consider a multiplication of conflicting perspectives on the good to be beneficial to society as well as inevitable because it helps to ensure that the shape of public space is constantly renegotiated, never finally determined, and that no one substantive conception of the good can gain a stultifying grip on society [Mouffe 2000, 33-4, 44-5, 113ff.]. A related benefit of multiple conflicting voices is that they encourage citizen participation in public life. Here the agonist position reflects the influence of the civic republican tradition, in which we are by nature citizens who find fulfillment in public debate and action and are stunted when confined to consumer and recreational freedoms in the private sphere of society.

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77 See, for example, Perry 1993, 710; Caney 1999, 22, and Gray 2000b, 96. In debates on such issues, as Stout [2004, 89-90] observes, reasons held in common will not take us very far towards a resolution.

78 See also Ronald Beiner, cited Fish [1999, 113]: “[w]hat defines liberalism is its desire not to be a regime, an organized social and political ordering of ends.” (Original emphasis.)

79 See also note 26 above. Honig [1993] calls these excluded conceptions and effaced differences “remainders.” For her, every political system or theory, including that of Rawls, which attempts to overcome dissonance and achieve political closure will find itself saddled with such remainders.

80 See also Mathewes 2007, 177; Johnson 2007, 85, and Walsh 2003, 166, for whom the strategy of removing conflict from the public to the private realm merely ensures that the public arena is evacuated of substance.
Agonist theorists have not typically celebrated the dissolution of secular markers of certainty by a post-secular resurgence, or shown much interest in the political participation of religious groups and individuals. As noted in the introduction, Christian movements in particular are rarely included among claimants to legitimate dissent or ‘difference,’ for they do not obviously lend themselves to the free-ranging discussion and individual choice that agonists demand of political debate. Christianity is widely associated with the view that the good life lies in obedience to traditional authorities, in subjecting oneself to a particular text and an institutional hierarchy. With its historically privileged standing in Western societies, Christianity is seen (in Connolly’s phrase [1999, 7]) as one more perspective “asserting its obligation to occupy the authoritative centre,” and therefore (as Mathewes [2007, 275] puts it) as “the sort of ‘final’ discourse that agonists cannot countenance” The agonist critique of the liberal ideal of moral consensus is most commonly invoked by movements that seek to affirm a group identity based on race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation. For Iris Marion Young, the criteria by which difference is politically salient have to do with their origin in oppression: only women, gays, blacks and indigenous peoples have the emancipatory potential to qualify.81

It is, in fact, secularist critiques of the public role of religion which have traditionally laid claim to the argument from exclusion and oppression. For Greenewalt, to appeal to religious doctrines in public debate is to privilege citizens who subscribe to those doctrines and to exclude those who lack the purported truth.82 Richard Rorty [2003, 142] argues similarly that “putting political

81 Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference, 191, 183, cited Rosenblum 1994b, 89. See also Sypnowich 2000, 104 and McConnell, cited Fish 1999, 251: in an age in which previously marginalized voices are increasingly welcomed to public dialogue, only religion continues to be privatized and excluded.

82 Cited Perry 1997, 50-1. In this tradition, as Fergusson [2004, 150] puts it, “[i]t is argued that the general effect of religious identity is to reinforce difference through the fixing of boundaries that divide citizens.” Or as Weithman
convictions in religious terms...[shows] contempt for people who should be accorded the same respect as the rest of their fellow-citizens.” From the standpoint of these theorists, secular citizens are disadvantaged outsiders in political communities which permit religious public arguments since they cannot reasonably be expected to endorse such arguments. 83 In contrast, these theorists maintain, it is possible that religious citizens can comprehend and assent to arguments reached by the universal principles of public reason, which differ from private faith in that they include all citizens at least potentially.

The agonist critique is certainly consistent with a conception of neutral or public reason developed in opposition to established or privileged religion. By the same token, however, it should also be compatible with post-secularist ideas developed in reaction to the strong secularist exclusion of religious arguments from public debate. As Stephen Post [2003, 127] points out, if fundamentalism is defined as the denial of epistemic diversity, then strong secularism qualifies. Like established or privileged religion, strong secularism creates two classes of citizens, one of which faces disability and disenfranchisement in that it may not voice many of its convictions in public debate. Religious citizens are deprived of the central democratic good of expressing

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83 See, for example, McGraw 2010, 104: “to the degree that a particular outcome reflects a particular religious claim, it may be impossible to expect citizens who do not endorse that religious claim to recognize the outcome as legitimate.”
themselves on matters about which they care deeply [Stout 2004, 64; Parekh 2000, 323]. The provision that they may present their concerns in the language of public reason does not adequately ensure their inclusion in debate, for many religious social principles are difficult or impossible to render in secular terms. And even if secular equivalents to all religious principles were available, religious citizens might not feel that they could advance them with integrity. It is largely this argument from the right to a religiously-integrated existence that brings Habermas to post-secularism: for him,

…persons who are neither willing nor able to divide their moral convictions and their vocabulary into profane and religious strands must be permitted take part in political will formation even if they use religious language [Habermas 2008b, 28-9].

From a post-secularist standpoint, citizens who hold religious positions on public issues and cannot or choose not to adopt a secular façade by formulating those positions in terms consistent with public reason are in the same category as those whom Young identifies as having their origin in exclusion and oppression.

The agonist critique of the status of moral consensus in liberalism seems to lend itself to strong secularism in that it requires conflicting perspectives to be offered as part of a genuine exchange of ideas and not as a means of establishing a new hegemonic or exclusive consensus. In the

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84 See also Carter 1998, 90: under strong secularism religious citizens may participate only if they leave behind the parts of themselves that they consider most vital, and Fish 1999, 41: those citizens must suspend “the very urgencies that move them to act in the world.”

85 As Fish [1999, 254] points out, to require religious citizens to rephrase their arguments in this way is, in effect, to ask them to become secular.

86 For similar points see Habermas 2008a, 127 and 130, and Habermas in Mendieta 2010, 12: “a constitutional democracy, which explicitly authorizes citizens to lead a religious life, may not at the same time discriminate against these citizens in their role as democratic co-legislators….The liberal state may not… censure the expressions of religious citizens, nor can it control their motives at the ballot box.” (Original emphasis.) The concept of a religiously-integrated life is defined by Weithman [1997, 152-3] as one unified by the role that religion plays in motivating one’s thoughts and actions.
strong secularist view, the very possibility of constructive dialogue between religious and secular citizens is ruled out. Religious arguments are incompatible with the give and take of reasoned conversation and compromise since they are based on subjective feelings immune to the light of public examination; they do not seek to understand the world about us in a way that is credible and open to verification by our common experience of reality.\(^{87}\) The best-known statement of this position is that of Rorty [1999, 171]: “[i]n political discussion with those outside the relevant religious community, [religion] is a conversation-stopper.” For strong secularists, in fact, religious groups and individuals do not simply stop conversation; they take it over, for their commitment to substantive convictions derived from ultimate truth results in the attempted domination of any discussion to which they are admitted. As Dostert [2006], 82 comments on the early Rawls, he seems to assume that “any claim made on the basis of a particular moral tradition is… nothing less than an attempt to (re-)colonize the public sphere.”\(^{88}\) This assumption is crucial to strong secularism because it follows from it that we must choose between religious establishment and the exclusion of religious arguments from public debate [Gamwell 1986, 108].

Post-secularists reject the view that religious contributions to public debate are necessarily intransigent conversation-stoppers. They point out that, while religious arguments are indeed based on substantive convictions about truth and falsehood, to state how one believes things to be is inevitably to invoke truth as one sees it, and without truth-claims there would be no communication, no exchange of ideas. In the same way, one cannot make declarative statements without implying that those who deny those statements are somehow committed to falsehood

\(^{87}\) See Fish [1999, 174] on the strong secularist position: “religious views are individualized preferences, as mysterious and unregulatable as a preference for a certain hair style or flavor of ice cream.” See also Trigg 2007, 205.

\(^{88}\) Waldron [1993, 841] makes the same point.
Truth-claims and implied allegations of falsehood are normal opening gambits of conversation and are not intrinsically intolerant or disrespectful towards one’s interlocutors [Stout ibid.]. It has often been said that it is not intolerant to judge the views of others to be false; what is intolerant is to insist that there is a reason to stop them from being held [e.g. Trigg 2007, 20]. Jonathan Chaplin [2000, 637-8] argues that the idea that we show respect for others by confining our speech to public reason is “idiosyncratic and counter-intuitive,” for it shows little confidence in the capacity of those others to enter imaginatively into our thoughts and to forebear with viewpoints that they may not immediately grasp.90 Theorists such as Chaplin [ibid.], Stout [2004, 72-3] and Johnson [2007, 235] offer an alternative conception of respectful dialogue, one that would require us to be true to our understanding of where truth lies; to offer our strongest explanation and defense of that understanding, and to assume that others are rational enough to discern its merits and weaknesses. For these theorists, the key to respectful debate is to take seriously the distinctive point of view that each other occupies and to trust in what can be gained through expressive and inclusive dialogue.91

Strong secularism is concerned, of course, with the content of religious arguments, in particular with their origin in revelation, and not just with the manner of their presentation. Post-secularists

89 As Post [2003, 125] and Alexander [1993, 782] likewise point out, agreement is supposedly the outcome of dialogue, not a requirement for entry into it.

90 See also Weithman 2002, 158: others may not see the reasons presented by us as moral, let alone as morally sufficient, and yet recognize that we do take them as such, and Waldron 1993, 842: “my own view may be improved, in its subtlety and depth, by exposure to a religion or metaphysics that I am initially inclined to reject.”

91 See also Perry 1997, 58-9, 64; 1993, 711, 2003, 48; Trigg 2007, 132; Habermas 2008a, 136, and Rosenblum 2000, 21: “expansive and inclusive dialogue is the key to reasoned respect.” Rawls [1996, e.g. 253] moves towards this conception of mutual respect in his later work: he recognizes that respect does not require us to offer reasons that all would be moved by if they were fully rational and informed, but only ones that they can recognize as being reasonable. By allowing for reasons that a rational citizen might (as opposed to would) accept, Rawls allows the agonist point that not all political disagreement is due to insufficient rationality or information.
deny, however, that arguments derived from revelation necessarily stop or take over conversation. For one thing, while the origin of revelation may be considered divine, its content takes the form of language, with all its obvious limitations, and it is clearly shaped by the traditions and narratives of its time [Markham 2003, 8-9; Parekh 2000, 334]. The element of the human in interpreting and communicating scripture further precludes certainty as to its meaning. Arguments derived from scripture have historically proven to be corrigible in the sense of being open to restructuring in the light of current philosophies. Christian social theorists, in particular, have typically drawn on their experience of history and current social conditions as well as on their scriptural expertise, the adaptation of Roman Catholic social doctrine to liberal-democratic principles in the twentieth century being one recent and striking example.92 Christian social thought has often been compatible with the reservation that further evidence or discussion will demonstrate that still more adequate interpretations of both scripture and social realities may exist or be discovered. Its proponents have shown that they can take revelation to be ultimate truth and yet remain open to debate, willing to persuade and be persuaded, prepared to entertain criticisms of their conclusions and to defend those conclusions by appeal to considerations that can be assessed by all rational persons [Gamwell 1986, 106-8].93

Much of the content of Christian revelation actually militates against apodictic certainty and in favour of reasoned dialogue. For instance, the doctrine that all about us, including our religion, suffers from the distorting effects of sin should serve to make Christians aware of their fallibility, their capacity for delusion and error, and to encourage their respect for those of different faiths or

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93 See also Johnson 2007, 243; Niebuhr 1945, 134, and Lovin 1986, 24.
no explicit faith [Niebuhr 1996, 155 and 1945, 95]. Another scriptural theme supporting
tolerance over intransigence is that, since God is intrinsically infinite, our understanding of
divine truth can be at best partial and provisional prior to the eschaton. Scripture portrays the
religious life as a struggle towards God; its imagery is of a journey rather than a destination, and
its truths are presented as equipment to strengthen us on that journey. It constantly reminds us
that our journey, and hence our knowledge of reality, will be complete only at the end of time.94
The eschatological provisionality of all religious truth suggests that Christians must cultivate an
attitude of continuous questioning and resist the impulse for final conclusions. This attitude is
further encouraged by another scriptural doctrine, that the Holy Spirit operates in non-believers.

Agonism appears to be allied with strong secularism in that the latter is presented as a defense of
a vibrant and uninhibited pluralism against the hegemonic tendencies of religious social
arguments.95 However, that face of secularism dates from the era of the established and national
churches and there is no longer any evidence that Christianity supports a uniform position on
social issues, much less that silencing its voice in public debate would unleash a wider variety of
perspectives. The pluralism of Christian social thought today is reflected in the substantive
disputes that occur between and even within denominations. The “culture wars” which broke out
in the late twentieth century have been waged among Christians as well as in the wider society,
and they have led to alliances between Christian and secular social movements which make for

94 The point is made, for example, by Carter 1997, 1635; Mathewes 2007, 196-7; Thiemann 1996, 162 and 2002, 86;
Mouw and Griffioen 1993, 103, and Trigg 2007, 202 For Barns [2003, 254-5], the logic of the gospel as public truth
does not imply that we should aspire to the restoration of Christian hegemony over public life, or “to recover a
religious public sphere.” See also Stout 2004, 110: “Christians, in affirming Christ as the Truth, are not properly
claiming to possess Christ. To the contrary, if Christ is the Truth, then a Christian who affirms him is not the truth.”
(Original emphasis)

95 See, for example, Munby’s claim, noted in the introduction, that “a secular society is in practice a pluralistic
society, in so far as it is truly secular” [Munby 1963, 17].
more genuinely plural public debate. Conversely, post-secularists point out, many contemporary secular ideologies, including Marxism, feminism, and environmentalism, have proven to be the match of Christianity in stopping conversations. As Perry [1997, 46-7] argues, at its worst religious public discourse is not more monologic, closed-minded and dogmatic than these at their worst, while at its best it is not less dialogic, open-minded and deliberative.

Some post-secularists go so far as to suggest that religious citizens may be more tolerant than their secular counterparts of the diverse beliefs encountered in a multicultural society. From the standpoint of religious believers, they point out, moral disputes with others concern the truth of a rational and intelligible universe. Since only God fully possesses that truth, it makes sense to engage in dialogue with those of other faiths in the hope of uncovering different, possibly higher aspects of ultimate truth [Trigg 2007, 134; Markham 1994, 193-4]. Religious believers may, at the least, be more likely to recognize the rights of those others freely to pursue their understanding of truth. Conversely, those who have given up on the search for ultimate truth may be the greater threat to tolerance and pluralism since moral deliberation and debate will not have the same urgency for them. They may partake of dialogue out of curiosity, and they may be informed by the ideas and perspectives they encounter, but they will not expect to be enhanced

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97 See also Perry 1993, 721 and Perry, cited Post [2003, 127]: “one need not be a religious believer to adhere to one’s fundamental beliefs with closed-minded or even fanatical tenacity.” Parekh [2000, 325] suggests that if our political life can accommodate these secular ideologies, there is no reason why it cannot accommodate religious ones too. For similar points, see Chaplin 2000, 628-9, 632; Post 2003, 120-1, Johnson 2007, 241-2; Schwarzschild 1993, 911, and Hitchcock 1981, 8.
98 See, for example, Thomson 2003, 140: “[t]he Christian tradition, by recognizing its storied and particular character, is…[well] positioned to respect other traditioned accounts of reality….” Mouv and Griffioen [1993, 58, with reference to Neuhaus] argue that the naked public sphere results in intolerance since “in the absence of an impartial, transcendent point of reference the criterion for what is tolerable becomes a matter of what best serves the survival of the whole.”
For Mouw and Griffioen [1993, 50], secularism has resulted in a “sterile monism” which is

the very opposite of a genuine pluralism: a mere juxtaposition of ideas bereft of their truth-claims, a deliberate indifference to the ideals and values that people actually profess.\(^99\)

Mathewes [2007, 112] concludes similarly that strong secularism encourages “an ethics of inarticulacy” whereby each generation becomes less and less able to explain why it thinks and acts the way it does. For these theorists, agonism, which stands for a vibrant and uninhibited exchange of viewpoints, would properly be aligned with post-secularism against the sterile and inarticulate monism of the modern secularist outlook.

The problem of religious extremism

The case for post-secularism should not invoke examples only of moderate religious arguments: it should acknowledge that some religious groups and individuals do not meet the minimal conditions of reasonable and tolerant dialogue but are hegemonic rather than dialogic, subversive rather than supportive of liberal norms and values. In particular, the rise of the New Christian Right (NCR) in the U.S. has bolstered the case for strong secularism to the point that many liberal religious theorists are reluctant to challenge its sanctions on religious public arguments. From the standpoint of agonism, however, the best response to many religious extremists may be to accommodate rather than to exclude them. Agonism is not merely a celebration of wild diversity; it has a practical side, derived from the principle that to eliminate antagonist positions

\(^99\) See George Grant 1969, 58: “when the religion of progress becomes the public religion we cannot look forward to a vital religious pluralism, but to a monism of meaninglessness.” See also Galston [1991, 255], who suggests that “[t]he greatest threat to children in modern liberal societies is not that they will believe in something too deeply, but that they will believe in nothing very deeply at all,” and Trigg 2007, 185.
from public life may result in their returning with a vengeance [Mouffe 2000, 31]. The secularist argument from the intolerance of religious groups can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is therefore more pragmatic to encourage a debate which faces up to sources of disagreement than to marginalize religious extremists who might then react against liberal-democratic principles and procedures [Trigg 2007, 37, 9]. Whether or not it is helpful to conceive of movements such as the NCR and radical Islam as eruptions of a repressed *agon*, there is certainly a case to be made that their emergence as political forces owes much to the success of strong secularism. Ironically, as Robin Lovin [1986, 11] argues, by removing the symbols of shared values from our public life, secularism has encouraged or at least permitted the rising prominence of extremist movements by creating a vacuum that they can fill. Sardar and Davies describe fundamentalist religion as “a grotesque projection of the worst nightmares of secularism on the world stage, an acknowledgment of the war that the secular mind has declared on the sacred” [cited Markham 1994, 78].

The immediate consequence of strong secularist measures is less likely to be violent eruptions of an *agon* than an apathetic withdrawal of fundamentalist citizens from public life. As Galston [2002, 116] points out,

> It is difficult to imagine that any liberal democracy can sustain conscientious support if it tells millions of its citizens that they cannot rightly say what they believe as part of democratic public dialogue.\(^{100}\)

The withdrawal of such citizens from public dialogue can develop from apathy to resentment and thence to political extremism. Exclusion is especially likely to result in extremism in the case of

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\(^{100}\) See also Trigg 2007, 42; Parekh 2000, 323, and Hollenbach 2003, 160. The editors of *First Things*, cited Connolly [1999, 23], point out that strong secularism casts the large number of religious Americans into the role of enemies of the public order.
followers of the NCR, who have a tendency to rely on media controlled by sources within their enclave at the expense of the kind of evidence which might strengthen mutual trust and respect. The NCR has become locked into world in which its differences from others, along with its suspiciousness and mistrust of those others, are magnified.\textsuperscript{101} It is arguable that we should worry more about ignoring this enclave and its partisan sources of information than about the consequences of attending to them in public debate.\textsuperscript{102}

If citizens are to take part in public debate, it is important that their actual positions, however objectionable, are made known. Since it is impossible to ensure that participants in debate are not influenced by religious doctrines, but only to stipulate that they do not cite those doctrines as grounds for their arguments, members of extremist religious groups who are admitted to debate under strong secularist conditions may find themselves engaging in deception, concealing their actual commitments by articulating and defending them in a language other than the one in which they think [Parekh 2000, 323; Trigg 2007, 36]. Examples of hiding behind public reason while smuggling in reasons that cannot be publicly acknowledged include representing anti-homosexual views derived from scripture as a concern for children, or anti-Islamic views as a commitment to the free speech of cartoonists [Dostert 2006, 193; Hitchcock 1981, 21]. This enforced bilingualism splits religious individuals, divorcing them from their motivations for entering debate and requiring them to choose between jeopardizing their status as political equals

\textsuperscript{101} See McGraw 2010, 236: the NCR “thrive on the perception that they are an out-group, under siege from the broader political culture.”

\textsuperscript{102} The point is made, for example, by Stout 2004, 114-5; Johnson 2007, 241; Skillen 1994, 40, and Trigg 2007, 148. Trigg [2007, 37] suggests that one does not overcome the divisiveness of religion by refusing to allow public discussion of it, and that by refusing discussion one may make it even more divisive. Mathewes [2007, 211] argues that the first step in bringing us closer together should perhaps be “backwards, in the form of recognizing differences and disagreements long denied, not least to ourselves.”
and misrepresenting their position by dissembling. The problem of misrepresenting political viewpoints is clear in the case of legislators, as there is an overriding value in knowing why they take up their positions, but mistrust and suspicion are never conducive to political debate, for, as Dooyeweerd observes, “[o]nly when men have nothing to hide from themselves and from their counterparts in the discussion will the way be opened for a dialogue that seeks to convince rather than repel” [cited Chaplin 2008, 86].

Since political participation entails dialogue, or some communication with those outside one’s enclave, it encourages the expression of commitments that would otherwise remain implicit in the viewpoints of citizens [Stout 2004, 112]. The process of articulating those commitments before others can serve to moderate those commitments, for it teaches the lesson that multiple perspectives exist, which should lead in turn to a recognition of the contestable character or one’s own beliefs, or at least of one’s inability to explain them in such a way as to convince all reasonable people [Mathewes 2007, 211-2; Connolly 1999, 8, 39]. The attempt to convince others helps us to examine issues from alternative viewpoints, and so to broaden our own viewpoints and to respect and compromise with those who dissent from them. Dialogue reminds us that we are not self-sufficient but reliant on the commitment and trust of others, as well as on the belief system of the wider society. Those who engage in dialogue can thus attain to what J. S. Mill calls an “enlarged sentiment,” the capacity to recognize shared humanity beyond

104 See, for example, Berger and Neuhaus 1996 and Galston 2002, 16-17.
superficial differences, or to Hannah Arendt’s “representative thinking,” the ability to consider or represent the viewpoints of others.\textsuperscript{105}

Inclusive participation can help to moderate extremism even if participants fail to attain to an enlarged and representative way of thinking, for extremists will find that they must compromise their views in order to secure the support needed to effect the changes they seek. As Jose Casanova [1994, 166] points out, “the… goal of legislating fundamentalist morality [can] hardly be reconciled with the kind of normative compromises and parliamentary horse trading that are usually required for legislative success.”\textsuperscript{106} Inclusive participation counters extremism as well by providing a relatively benign outlet or safety-valve for intolerant or undemocratic viewpoints [Rosenblum 1998b, 48, 110]. Religious extremism is more dangerous on street-corners, or in the private media of the NCR, than under the glare of public scrutiny, where it can potentially be rendered accountable and subject to democratic discipline.\textsuperscript{107} As Luke Timothy Johnson warns, if religious citizens are not permitted and encouraged to take part in public debate, the field of Christian hermeneutics will be abandoned to “those whose fearful and… sometimes hate-filled apprehension of Christianity will lead them to… claim scriptural authority for their own dark impulses” [cited Perry 2003, 40].

\textsuperscript{105} Mill, cited Weithman 2002, 78; Arendt 1961, 241. See also Tocqueville 1966, 487: when one participates in public-minded groups, “feelings and ideas are renewed, the heart enlarged, and the understanding developed… by the reciprocal action of men one upon another,” and Benhabib 1996, 71-2.

\textsuperscript{106} For similar points, see Weithman 2002, 142; Mathewes 2007, 215, and Lovin 2004, 32.

\textsuperscript{107} See Mathewes 2007, 266: by bringing conflict within the licit sphere of the political, one “reduces its propensity to whirl out of control,” and Fish 1999, 69: “[b]anishing hate-speakers from your… conversation leaves them all the freer to pursue their deadly work in the dark corners from which you have averted your fastidious eyes.” See also Trigg 2007, 234.
The moderating effect of political participation on religious extremism is most marked when a wide range of religious viewpoints are represented in debate. In particular, the inclusion of moderate positions challenges the extremists’ monopoly on religious discourse and helps to improve mutual understanding and respect between religious citizens of all kinds, as well as between religious and secular citizens. Extremists can better recognize the contestability of their own interpretation of the faith when faced with moderate interpretations, and they may be more likely to compromise with those who subscribe to religious rather than secular perspectives.

Mathewes [2007, 7] concludes that the alienation of religious citizens from civic discourse will end only when moderate religious believers stop reinforcing the extremists’ monopoly on public religious discourse by shunning such discourse themselves.  

We should, however, beware the liberal fallacy that inclusive debate will inevitably serve to moderate all forms of extremism. For example, Robin Lovin [2004, 33] is too sanguine in concluding that “[a]s long as ‘the affairs of the commonwealth’ are being well and openly discussed, we need have few worries about what sort of reasons will emerge from that discussion to shape the future of the law.” The Christian recognition of evil can be more realistic than the liberal assumption that, under conditions of fully inclusive debate, mutual understanding and respect must increase and prejudice be overcome. Inclusion may, for instance, merely present opportunities for extremists to subvert liberal democracy. One way to oppose strong secularist


109 Lovin calls this a “Christian Realist” position, which would seem to be a misnomer. Fish [1999, 68] portrays the liberal faith as being that all differences can be talked through and resolved by rational agreement. Elshtain [2001, 10] describes the faith as a “high anthropology,” one that is “shocked and unprepared any time the horrible happens.” See Rosenblum 1998b, 110 and Chapter Seven for further criticisms of this aspect of the liberal faith.

110 For Tinder [1989, 39], Christianity is realistic in understanding evil tendencies as something other than a malfunctioning of human nature which we can rationally comprehend and deliberately alter.
constraints on religious public arguments while guarding against the subversion of democracy is to distinguish between open public debate and the decision-making procedures of the state. A recognition of the nature of the most incorrigible extremists need not lead us to compromise the post-secular case for the full acceptance of religious arguments in public debate, for laws against hate speech and incitement to violence should already protect us against such threats as they pose. As Roger Trigg [2007, 222] puts the point, actual coercion rather than the protection of secular sensitivities suffices as the criterion for restrictions on contributions to debate, and it should not be necessary to adopt further strictures against them. Thus, some post-secularists conclude that, while strong secularist strictures on public debate are unacceptable, they may be legitimate when confined to the institutions of the state. This compromise post-secularist position, which has been developed most notably by Habermas, will be considered in the next chapter.

111 Similarly, Wolterstorff [1997, 180] and Benhabib [1992, 80] suggest that the legitimacy of contributions to public debate should be defined not by their content but by the manner of their presentation: Benhabib’s criterion of inclusion is that contributions not be accompanied by force and violence, which “destroy the specificity of public discourse by… silencing the voice of persuasion and conviction.”
Chapter Two

Habermas and Post-Secularism

This chapter considers a contribution to post-secularism, that of Jürgen Habermas, which promotes an unrestricted role for religion in public debate while guarding against the possibility that extremist religious groups will subvert liberal institutions and procedures. Habermas’s post-secularism contains two significant proposals, outlined in the introduction to this study, the first of which divides the liberal public sphere into the institutions of the state apparatus, from which religious political arguments are excluded, and an area of public debate in which strong secularist constraints on religious arguments do not apply. For Habermas, religious believers must find ways to express their contributions to decision-making processes within the state apparatus in the terms of secular public reason. We will consider the criticism that this proposal precludes salutary transformation of liberal structures and procedures by religious perspectives, and especially the point that Christian social principles are intrinsically stronger and more radical than any conceivable secular equivalent. This chapter defends Habermas’s reformulation of the liberal public sphere, however, and shows how his critics can better focus on the second component of his post-secularism, the regeneration of public debate between religious and secular citizens.

Habermas, Rawls and the liberal public sphere

While the early Habermas is critical of enlightenment thinking in many respects, he is clearly an enlightenment thinker, committed to an idea of progress which assumes the decline of religion and its influence in modern societies. The early Habermas is also to be numbered among the
strong secularists of modern liberal thought. While he recognizes that the sources of a secular, rights-based liberal state lie largely in Judeo-Christian religion, and he allows that his own theory of discourse ethics has been nourished by this legacy, he looks on the inevitable dissolution of religion as a positive development, one that will further the rationalization and universalization of liberal principles of law and morality. Central to this confidence is the idea that political theory can adapt or translate all important religious principles into secular language: Habermas believes that better terms, or at least adequate, “saving” or “conserving” terms for what the Judeo-Christian tradition has to say about politics and society, have been or will eventually be discovered. Thus, the principles of liberal democracy are largely successful distillations of Christian concepts of the person, and of freedom, emancipation and justice.

Habermas’s post-secular turn begins with his *Postmetaphysical Theory* (1993), which raises the possibility that the content of religion somehow eludes the explanatory force of social and political concepts, and his turn continues through the 1990s as he encounters instances of religious principles which have not been rendered adequately, or without remainder, into secular social ethics. For example, the idea of the intrinsic worth of the individual, which underlies modern theories of human rights, has been taken by many secularists as a conserving translation of the Christian concept of *imago dei*, that all humans are created in the image of God [Genesis 1:27]. But Habermas finds that the secular version has proven inadequate to the protection of individuals against the power of the state and the market. Or again, for the early Habermas the

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113 See, for example, Habermas 2008a, 110: “[t]he translation of the theological doctrine of creation in God’s image into the idea of the equal and unconditional dignity of all human beings constitutes one such conserving translation.”

114 See, for example, Habermas in Mendieta 2010, 4; Habermas 2002, 162-3 and 2008a, 142. (Several of the articles in which Habermas develops his post-secularism are collected in the latter volume.)
ideal of civic solidarity has freed itself from pre-political, religious anchors and secured a new and firmer basis in what he calls “the awareness of the constitution as an achievement” [Habermas 2008a, 106]. The later Habermas observes, however, that this awareness now seems insufficient to inspire co-operative efforts towards the common good in an individualistic and materialistic society. He concludes [2008b, 28-9] that civil solidarity may, after all, need to draw sustenance from religious norms, and he suggests that liberal societies should not cut themselves off from these increasingly scarce but still vital resources.  

Habermas’s turn to post-secularism stems primarily from his opposition to the growing influence of strong secularism or laicism on law, public policy and culture, but the position he develops is shaped as well by a continuing concern about the threat of intolerant religious groups, particularly the New Christian Right, to liberal societies. Habermas mediates between these extremes, as we saw in the introduction, by means of two significant proposals. The first begins by reconsidering the liberal conception of the public sphere, which encompasses the legislative and judicial institutions and procedures of the state on the one hand, and debate between concerned citizens on the public issues and events of the day on the other. Habermas retains the strong secularist demand for the expression of public arguments in the terms of secular reason but confines that demand to those who hold or seek office in a narrow or inner public sphere

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115 Habermas continues: “citizens make the principles of the constitution their own not merely in the abstract sense but also in the concrete historical context of their respective national histories.” See also Habermas 1983, 77: “the authority of the holy is... replaced by the authority of an achieved consensus.”

116 See also Habermas 2008a, 108: “the thesis that a religious orientation to a transcendent reality alone can show a contrite modernity the way out of its impasse is once again gaining adherents.” And again [2008a, 110]: “religious communities...can preserve intact something that has been lost elsewhere and cannot be recovered through the professional knowledge of experts alone.” In Mendieta 2010, 5, Habermas likewise suggests that religious ritual “has been a source of societal solidarity for which the enlightened morality of equal respect for all does not provide a real, motivational equivalent.”

117 See, for example, Habermas 2008a, 144, 264-5; 2008b, 24-5, and Mendieta 2010, 9
composed of the institutions and procedures of the state. Religious arguments in a wider or outer public sphere of political debate, a sphere that he describes at one point as “wild,” are subject to no such restrictions [Habermas 2008a, 131].

Habermas criticizes strong secularism for confusing the neutrality of the state in respect to competing worldviews with the purging of all religious perspectives from public debate. For him that confusion arises in part from the norm of tolerance, which governs the weak concept of secularism or non-sectarianism in the liberal tradition. Tolerance implies inherent limitations on what is tolerated, for it includes a “component of rejection” which contributes to a trivialization and marginalization of religion in liberal societies [Habermas 2008a, 257]. The second significant component of Habermas’s post-secularism is an attempt to enhance dialogue on religious arguments in the wider public sphere by means of a “complementary learning process” between secular and religious citizens. He calls for a new dialogical relationship between religious and secular citizens whereby both parties move beyond tolerance to understanding and respect for the other’s perspectives. Habermas [2008a, 111-2; 139] particularly stresses the inclusion of secular citizens in this process, their duty to adopt a self-reflective, critical stance in regard to their laicist and rationalist assumptions and to look upon their differences with religious citizens as reasonably expected disagreements which need not put an end to dialogue. He holds

118 Habermas [1992, 437] describes the outer public sphere more fully as including “self-regulated, horizontally interlinked, inclusive, and more or less discourse-resembling communicative processes…. ” He specifies [1992, 446] that the sphere includes “all those conditions of communication under which there can come into being a discursive formation of opinion and will on the part of a public composed of the citizens of a state.”

119 Habermas [2008a, 257] explains that: “[t]he challenge posed by tolerance consists in the fact that… there is no reasonable hope of a cognitive resolution of the disagreement.”

120 Habermas 2008a, 111, 119-121, 144, 253 and 2008b, 23-4, 28.
out the hope that secular citizens can perceive in religious beliefs “buried intuitions” of their own ideas [Habermas, 2008a, 131; 2008b, 29].

Habermas portrays the first component of his post-secularism as a departure from Rawls, who in turn also departs to an extent from his earlier strong secularism. In his Political Liberalism [1996, 224-5], for instance, Rawls introduces a new discrimination as to the kinds of argument to be excluded from public debate. He distinguishes between “constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice” and more general political arguments, and he maintains that only the former need be subject to the constraint of public reason: “in discussing constitutional essentials and basic justice we are not to appeal to comprehensive philosophical and religious doctrines….”

Rawls [1996, 254] does, however, retain public reason as the ideal if not the precondition of all political debate, calling on ordinary citizens who engage in debate to aspire to the standards set by public officials by confining themselves to such arguments as can be justified by public reason. It is here that Habermas departs from Rawls, for Habermas [2008a, 113, 132] recognizes no such ideal for public debate, but rather encourages a generous reception for explicitly religious arguments.

Habermas’s conception of the public sphere of society does, however, compromise his departure both from strong secularism and from the later Rawls. Since he affirms the exclusion of religious arguments from the decision-making process of the state apparatus, Habermas only adjusts and does not abandon the strong secularist ideal. His outer public sphere of inclusive and

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121 For Rawls [1996, 227], constitutional essentials include principles which specify “the general structure of government and the political process” along with the “equal basic rights and liberties of citizenship that legislative majorities are to respect,” while basic justice includes “the principles regulating basic matters of distributive justice, such as freedom of movement and equality of opportunity, [and] social and economic inequalities…."


unrestrained debate is clearly distinguished from his inner sphere of legislatures and judiciaries: between the two spheres Habermas [2008a, 131; 2008b, 28] envisages a filter through which only contributions formulated in secular terms may pass. He thus removes restrictions from political arguments based on their type or content, but reinstates these restrictions according to their location, a variation which would seem to have much the same effect as Rawls's position in *Political Liberalism*, given that the inner public sphere is where conversation about constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice takes place for the most part. From a post-secularist standpoint, Habermas appears to take back with one hand what he has given with the other.

We should note that both Rawls and Habermas are open to some compromise in the cases, respectively, of religious arguments concerning constitutional essentials and those located in the decision-making process of the state. Rawls’s compromise is a response to the widespread criticism of *Political Liberalism* that many leading political figures who have acted on religious principles in their struggle for a just society have not hesitated to appeal to those principles in contesting constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice. For instance, it seems unlikely that abolitionist and civil rights leaders could have initiated the changes they did in a society subject to (even the later) Rawls’s restrictions on religious public arguments. Those leaders intended the constitutional tradition and public policy to develop in step with their faith-based analysis of social issues.122 In his introduction to the 1996 paperback edition of *Political Liberalism*, Rawls [1996, li-lii] softens his position by allowing the admissibility of religious arguments about constitutional essentials provided that they strengthen the principles of public

122 The point is made, for example, by Carter 1998, 28-9 and Stout 2004, 69-70.
reason, and provided that, in the due course of time, they are replaced by properly public arguments.\textsuperscript{123} The conditions of this ‘proviso’ had, Rawls suggests [Rawls, 250], been met by the abolitionist and civil rights leaders, who helped to bring about "a well-ordered and just society in which the ideal of public reason could eventually be honoured.” Habermas [2008a, 123 n18] retains Rawls’s proviso, though he broadens it to include “virtually any controversial legal issues” as well as constitutional essentials.

The proviso has not satisfied all post-secularists, many of whom point out that it merely introduces a time delay into the demands of strong secularist exclusivism [e.g. Chaplin 2000, 637]. In Rawls’ account, only exceptionally and temporarily does liberal society have something to learn from religious perspectives; in the longer term secular arguments can incorporate what is useful in those perspectives and dispense with their religious content. This confidence in the eventual triumph of secular reason is evident as well in Habermas’s post-secularist work: for him, the long process of translation of religious into secular principles has only stalled and not irreparably broken down. While Habermas does not provide a systematic reconciliation of his earlier and later thought on secularism, he seems to retain his long-standing belief that discourse ethics can eventually take over discussion of political issues and principles from religious traditions, and his new solicitude for these traditions appears to arise mainly from the hope that they can lend their authority to this takeover [Harrington 2007, 552].\textsuperscript{124} While Habermas asks secular citizens to engage in a complementary learning process with their religious counterparts, there is no evidence that he expects that process to result in their conversion or even in a revision

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\textsuperscript{123} The idea is developed in Rawls 1997, 784ff.
\textsuperscript{124} As Harrington [2007, 547] comments, Habermas’s post-secularism seems to signify at most a retreat from an earlier, over-confident secular outlook. McGraw [2010, 116-7] is of the same opinion.
\end{flushleft}
of their ideas, except for the idea that religious perspectives are beyond rational consideration. On the contrary, he specifies that the task of secular citizens is to become more receptive to religious ideas in order to be able to assist in their translation into secular language. The extra effort of secular citizens is required mainly so that they might be more competent in identifying such religious principles as could prove useful to liberal society and in coming up with the appropriate secular equivalents. As with Rawls, the “expected disagreements” between religious and secular citizens are not expected to last indefinitely.

Some post-secularists have expressed satisfaction with Habermas’s compromise position, and we can surmise that they share his fear that to remove all strong secularist restrictions would be to permit religious extremists to dominate the polity. We can surmise further that the liberal principles to be legitimized and strengthened in the course of Habermas’s complementary learning process are ones that these theorists would espouse in any case. For many political theorists today the main problem with liberal principles is that they are incompletely observed and applied, especially in the case of marginalized groups, and fortifying those principles with religious social ethics would assist in their observation and application, if only by making them more appealing to religious citizens. Other commentators argue, however, that the strong secularist conditions retained by the later Rawls and Habermas are too restrictive to enable religion to be transformative of society. By placing a type of argument (constitutional essentials) or a particular area (the state apparatus) off limits to religious contributions, Rawls and

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See, for example, Habermas 2008a, 113 and 130: the task of secular citizens is to “cooperate in producing a translation” (i.e. of religious into secular language). And again [2008b, 29]: secular citizens are expected to “discover…in religious utterances, semantic contents and covert personal intuitions that can be translated and introduced into a secular discourse.” Calhoun [2008] comments that the complementary learning process is “a very cognitive conception, and one that implies parties to a discussion…who arrive at new understandings without themselves being changed.”
Habermas fail to recognize that liberal principles, like all political principles, are provisional and contestable, dependent on faith in a particular worldview. As Connolly [1999, 66] points out, attempts to acknowledge and incorporate the fruits of past religious arguments by means of saving translations or the proviso “freeze the… secular conception of public space today while everything else in and around the culture undergoes change.” Rawls and Habermas do not leave room for something new to emerge.¹²⁶ By admitting to the decision-making processes of liberal societies only such public arguments as are consistent with and supportive of liberal principles, they preclude the possibility that unheeded or unprecedented religious arguments could transform the liberal system as a whole, or form the basis of a comprehensive critique of liberal society.

A Christian critique of Habermas

The strategy of post-secularism, as introduced in the last chapter, has been simply to increase the volume and profile of religious arguments in public debate. The justification for this approach, we saw, is largely negative: that no convincing reasons have been presented by strong secularists to exclude religious arguments from debate. One critique of Habermas’s position offers the more positive justification for post-secularism that saving or conserving translations of Christian social and political principles cannot be found because those principles are intrinsically stronger than their secular counterparts. If this criticism holds, Habermas’s case for a reformulated neutral public sphere, which is premised on the possibility of saving translations, is untenable. This section argues, however, that Habermas’s reformulation is sound, and the following section

¹²⁶ See Connolly 1999, 58; Waldron 1993, and Dostert 1996, 73, 86. For Dostert [1996, 11], “much of the difficulty with political liberalism is its reluctance to concede the contestability and provisionality of liberal norms…."

suggests that the critique from the untranslatability of Christian social principles can be more effectively applied to the second component of his post-secularism, his call for a renewed public debate between secular and religious citizens.

An example of a Christian principle, noted above, which appears to resist adequate translation into secular terms is that of *imago dei*. Most secular theorists appeal to some equivalent of this principle in justifying such liberal principles as equal treatment and individual liberty, and many follow Kant in appealing specifically to the capacity of humans to transcend restrictions imposed by nature or subcultures by means of their reason [Kraynak 2001, 33]. As we will see in Chapter Five, for instance, Habermas does so in defining the “ideal speech situation” of liberal democracy in terms of rational-critical discussion based on intelligible arguments rather than on antecedently given norms. For Christian theorists, one problem with grounding equal dignity and treatment on the capacity for rational discussion and action is that it excludes those, such as the mentally impaired, who are not fully rational. The point extends to the justification of political norms by any human qualities, for there will always be those who do not attain to the stipulated quality, or not to the degree that others do [Hauerwas and Willimon 1989, 101]. In the doctrine of *imago dei*, by contrast, the love between God and individuals cannot be severed: individuals are to be respected not for their particular traits or capacities but because they are creatures made and loved by God, who bestows unconditional and unreasonable love on humans and commands them to do likewise [Tinder 1989, 24-5, 175].

This unreasonable love, known as *agape*, is a second example of a Christian principle that resists adequate translation into secular terms. *Agape* is warmer than the liberal equivalent of equal respect, which is a universal abstraction suggesting a cool, detached attitude, and it is stronger in
that it holds leaders to a higher standard of justice than mere fairness [Woodhead 1992, 47]. *Agape* does more than balance the rights of abstract individuals; it is a radical or unqualified gift or gracious act which typically gives others more than their due. It has been likened to the attitude of a mother who, recognizing that each child is uniquely significant, dispenses justice based on their individual requirements.\(^{127}\) The nature of *agape* is shown, for instance, in the parables of the prodigal son and the day-labourer, who had no actual right to the fatted calf and the full day’s pay. Similarly, in the Good Samaritan parable the promise to pay for whatever services the wounded victim might require suggests that responsibility is determined not by a prior moral law or set of rights, but by the victim’s needs.\(^{128}\) Rawls [1997, 786n] claims that the ethic implied by the parable of the Good Samaritan can be adequately rendered by his own difference principle. But this translation is not saving or conserving, for the difference principle is, as Chaplin [2000, 645n] puts it, “the outcome of a procedure governed by self-interested rational calculation from which altruistic motivation – the core of the Gospel ethic – is ruled out on principle.” For Timothy Jackson [1997, e.g. 204] and other critics of secularism, therefore, the political contribution of Christianity is compromised when the principle of *agape* is rendered by a secular counterpart.

One variant of this argument is offered by feminists such as Linda Woodhead [1992] and Grace Jantzen [1992]. Woodhead begins by noting that altruism, care and affective nurturing are traditionally conceived by liberals as belonging to the private sphere of society.\(^{129}\) Insofar as

\(^{127}\) See, for example, Forrester 1997, 222 and 235-6; Trainor 1998, 1028-9; Tinder 1989, 43-4, and Woodhead 1992, 50-1.


\(^{129}\) Woodhead 1992, 76. See also Benhabib, cited Forrester (1997), 20.
women are also assigned to that sphere, she continues, these virtues or attributes have been taken as feminine: as Rosenblum [1994b, 86] puts the point, “[t]he capacity for attachment and caring can be associated… with a range of life experiences and activities disproportionately attributed to women…”\textsuperscript{130} This argument is of interest here not so much for what it says about women and men as for its implications for the liberal conception of the public sphere. Thus, Jantzen [1992, 4-5] criticizes liberalism for confining the public sphere to procedural norms, which (besides being in some sense masculine) are based on the false assumptions that citizens are necessarily in competition for scarce resources and that the function of political institutions is to ensure, as far as possible, the fair distribution of these resources.\textsuperscript{131} In this critique, the adversarial stance of liberalism should be replaced by the feminine one of mutual care and regard.\textsuperscript{132} Likewise, Sara Ruddick argues that feminine social principles can bring to the public world a community of fellow-feeling and sympathy which liberal political principles cannot aspire to.\textsuperscript{133} Leaving aside the characterization of the genders once again, this conception of the public sphere commonly underwrites post-secularist arguments, including the critique of Habermas’s modified strong secularism. Richard Neuhaus, for instance, maintains that the public sphere requires an ethic that is grounded in moral convictions and that (as Cavanaugh [2002, 59] summarizes the argument) “the only way to prevent politics from degenerating into a violent struggle for power is by

\textsuperscript{130} As Rosenblum [1994b, 83-4] observes, this position reverses the more common feminist dissociation of civic virtue from femininity and domestic life and argues instead for their intimate connection. See also Sypnowich 2000, 103.

\textsuperscript{131} Jantzen [ibid.] ascribes this position to “philosophical patriarchs” from Hobbes to Kant, including especially Descartes and Calvin, who “gives himself up to the adversarial model and develops a strategy of government which he hopes will bridle such violence, without making any attempt to correct it at its source.”

\textsuperscript{132} As Sypnowich [2000, 103] puts the point, “the proceduralism of the public is a traditionally masculine orientation that ought to be complemented by a feminine orientation of affective nurture and concern.”

\textsuperscript{133} Cited Sypnowich 2000, 104. See also Benhabib 1992, 89-90 and Rosenblum 1994b, 85 on the position that “a political community of common interest and care is possible only if the maternal stance permeates the entire fabric of social life.”
constructing a public ethic built on the operative values of the American people.” Since these operative values are, in Neuhaus’s view [1984, 21], overwhelmingly religious, the public square must, he concludes, be clothed in religious garments.

The question that post-secularists must address, however, is not only whether Christian principles resist adequate translation into secular terms, or whether they can benefit society generally, but whether they belong in the public sphere in Habermas’s restricted sense. We noted that Habermas’s journey towards post-secularism begins with a concern that the epistemological distinction between secular and religious arguments may not, after all, bear the weight of excluding the latter from public debate. As his retention of a strong secularist conception of the state apparatus suggests, however, Habermas remains clear that the two kinds of argument are not identical. Like the principles of aesthetics, for example, religious arguments are neither purely subjective nor wholly amenable to the judgement of common sense and reason; faith and knowledge are still, for the post-secular Habermas, two essentially different modes of taking-to-be-true.134 That difference has implications for the legitimacy of public arguments, for it suggests that the distinction between the discourse of public officials, such as judges and ministers of state, which is addressed to the specific context of law and public policy, and confessional discourse which proclaims or defends particular philosophies of life, is valid and must be retained in some form. The particular form adopted by Rawls, who recognizes the distinction but muddies it by holding up the speech of public officials as an ideal for all civic-minded citizens, is too beholden to strong secularism. Habermas clarifies and rescues the

134 See Mendieta 2010, 4-5 and Habermas 2008a, 143, 140.
distinction by confining the requirement of secular reason to public officials and excusing ordinary citizens from that requirement in open public debate.

*Agape* as a norm of conduct may be well suited to individual relationships and even to social groups and communities, but it is not readily transferable to the decision-making processes of the state, for works of loving care can be performed only for some particular others. In the case of those with whom one is unacquainted, one cannot always know what true loving care would consist of; there is no agreed-upon way to arrive at a full understanding of the rules of conduct to be derived from *agape*.\(^\text{135}\) While social groups represent particular areas of human life, the state is a general association, touching potentially on all aspects of life and structured specifically to pursue the common good [Chaplin 2008, 77]. A state apparatus ruled by *agape*, one in which there was no tension or difference between social groups, is not a practicable ideal because politics (as the agonist tradition reminds us) is riddled with contestation and conflicts of interest. The state apparatus is a response to practical necessities, such as social and economic efficiency, peace and social order, judgment and retribution, which require norms derived from political rationality rather than from the treatment of individuals as infinitely valuable ends. Even in a sinless social setting some sort of collective decision-making would be necessary for the harmonious and predictable ordering of human affairs; to permit a common understanding of how various public issues relate to one another, and to decide what priority they should be accorded in public justice.\(^\text{136}\) The acts of power which the state must undertake in pursuit of public justice can benefit by virtues such as prudence and compromise, openness, honesty and


civility, but they cannot be fully subject to vindication by the extreme moral principles of Christianity. The state cannot be unequivocally good.\textsuperscript{137}

Christian social principles can, however, strengthen the virtues appropriate to public justice indirectly, from outside the public sphere of society. The virtues associated with \textit{agape}, such as compassion, kindness and generosity, occur as it were naturally in families and other communities not directed primarily to social utility. In private life it is not unusual to take the purposes of loved ones, especially dependent family members, as goods for which one sacrifices or defers one’s own interests and desires. The benevolent virtues of private life feed into public civility by means of what John Passmore [1974, 89] calls a “chain of love and concern”: to love immediate, intimate others gives rise to the concern that they should have the opportunity to love their own, and thence to care and regard for more distant others.\textsuperscript{138} The links of Passmore’s chain from self-sacrificing love to civic-mindedness can be strengthened by protecting a constitutional space of personal and communal interaction in which the benevolent virtues take form, flourish and in time issue in public virtues. Christian social principles can contribute to the integrity and autonomy of the private sphere of society by rendering marginalized or endangered communities more visible and a topic of direct public concern [Mathewes 2007, 203]. As Herbert McCabe points out, to give someone love is to give them themselves; it is to make available a concrete place in which they can become who or what God intended them to be. The


\textsuperscript{138} See also Sypnowich 2000, 93, 107; Kumar 1997, 221, and Tinder 1989, 20-1, 54.
development and growth of communities and their members can proceed, as McCabe puts it, “only in the space that others provide by their love.”

The state can help to strengthen a private sphere of integral and autonomous communities, specifically by creating and enhancing a climate for their formation; by recognizing and codifying their various rights and duties and mediating conflicts between them. But this role presupposes the neutrality of the state in regards to the doctrines of those communities. Neutrality is necessary because of rather than in spite of the requirements of a social sphere of diverse communities; ironically, the state cannot sustain too much pluralism without losing its public character and its capacity to furnish the conditions of pluralism in society. By declining to take a stance on religious questions, for instance, the state improves the climate for the formation and flourishing of diverse religious groups, particularly marginalized ones. The exclusion of religious perspectives from state institutions also facilitates the public contribution of religious and other communities by providing a site for collective discussion and action. Insofar as social groups act publicly, they tend to do so by joining other groups in struggles for common causes, but the dilemma of difference to which agonists and others draw attention means that many of these groups are distanced from one another; they disagree sharply on a range of issues and would have little interest in living together in community. The neutrality

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140 See, for example, Rosenblum and Post 2002, 8-9; Rosenblum 1998b, 60 and 1994a, 556; Chaplin 1994, 90-1, 95 and 2005a, 163.
141 See Mouw and Griffionen 1993, 55ff. and Marshall 1994, 158: “pluralism is possible in society, but the state itself cannot be plural.” As Walker [2002, 116] puts the point concisely, “[a]uthentic pluralism ushers in authentic war.” See also Galston 1995, 528-9: “the more seriously we take diversity, the more seriously we must take the unitary public structure that both protects and circumscribes the enactments of diversity.”
142 See, for example, Sypnowich 2000, 113 and Elshtain 1993, 59.
of the state apparatus is a precondition of a public arena in which groups can move beyond their actual divisions and polarizations to a workable collective life [Johnson 2007, 174]. Conversely, as we will see below, the inclusion of religious arguments in state institutions can undermine the autonomy and integrity of religion and religious groups by permitting paradigms of public life to intrude upon their distinctive traditions of thought and action.\textsuperscript{143}

Two approaches to post-secularism

We have seen that, for some critics, Habermas’s post-secularism is not sufficiently radical in that it does not allow for a comprehensive religious critique of liberal society, but seems to be motivated chiefly by a perceived need for religion to lend its authority and support to secular liberal principles. We considered a challenge to the restrictions that Habermas places on religious principles in the sphere of the state apparatus, but concluded that his defense of strong secularism in that sphere is justified. This section suggests an alternative way to radicalize Habermas’s post-secularism. As we noted, Habermas contributes two significant ideas to post-secularist thought, a compromise with strong secularists in the narrow public sphere and a call to move beyond mere tolerance outside this sphere to an engaged and critical exchange between secular and religious citizens. This section concentrates on the second of these components, considering two approaches to the regeneration of inclusive public debate. As we noted in the introduction to this study, the latter is the more important component of Habermas’s post-secularism since a strong religious contribution to public debate is bound to influence decision-

\textsuperscript{143} See Malesic 2009, 79, with reference to Kierkegaard, and Tinder 1989, 55: “society cannot be formed in accordance with sacred norms… and if the attempt to do so is made, the result will be less a sacralization of society than a degradation of the sacred.”
making at the level of the state even under restrictive conditions on explicitly religious public arguments.

The case for post-secularism as it was presented in Chapter One justifies religious contributions to public debate by denying that there are significant differences between religious and secular public arguments, either in their content or in the way that they are generally presented. One problem with this line of argument is that it stops short of explaining how debate between secular and religious citizens can be reinvigorated. As the introduction to this study noted, strong secularism is primarily an exercise in normative political theory rather than a description of the reality of liberal societies, which usually permit religious citizens full access to public debate limited only by the laws governing incitement to hatred and violence. It is incumbent on post-secularists not only to expose the shortcomings of strong secularist thought but also to explain how a post-secular society would differ from liberal societies as we encounter them. A critique of strong secularism for proposing discrimination against religious arguments is no more than a prologue to an account of a renewed public role for religion.

There are few indications today of religious groups and individuals initiating the kind of social transformation that post-secularists expect or hope of societies which are open to their full inclusion and participation. As Max Stackhouse suggests, the problem facing post-secularism is not so much public support for secularism as indifference to the religious arguments currently on offer:

modern religious movements have not made, and seem neither capable of nor interested in making, a case for the truth of what they are talking about in a way that might convince those not already convinced [Stackhouse 1984, 53].
The focus of post-secularists should be less on the volume of religious public arguments, and on impediments to their full expression in debate, than on the content and effectiveness of those arguments. Post-secularists must address the problem of public demand for their product, which in turn requires a consideration of the quality of the product itself.

Insofar as post-secularists do consider the content of religious arguments in accounting for the failure of the public to embrace them, they tend to adopt one of two positions. The first, which is commonly found among members of the mainline churches, is that religious public arguments have been too remote from the actual political principles and public issues of liberal societies. Thus, Habermas’s advice to religious citizens entering public debate is not only to be open to and respectful of secular liberal political principles, but to find within their faith traditions resources consistent with and supportive of them: religious citizens are “expected to appropriate the secular legitimation of constitutional principles under the premises of their own faith” [Habermas 2008b, 27].

 Faith traditions, for Habermas [2002, 151], are not to yield an alternative, non-secular and liberal set of political principles because “modern conditions are compatible only with a strict, Kantian form of universalism.” For example, religious citizens must embrace the universalistic language of human rights, which has become the only possible voice for the oppressed [Habermas 2002, 153]. In this position, as Nicholas Trainor [1998, 1025] points out, “religious utterances are reduced to an alternative form of liberal political rhetoric.” As we saw

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144 See also Habermas 2008a, 261: “[t]he major religions must reappropriate the normative foundations of the liberal state on their own premises....” (Original emphasis). See, likewise, Rawls 1996, 147 and at 218: “Citizens affirm the ideal of public reason... from within their own reasonable doctrines.”

145 See also Habermas 2006, 261: “[r]eligion must renounce [any] claim to structure life in a comprehensive way... once the life of religious groups becomes differentiated from that of the larger political community within pluralistic societies.”
in the last section, Habermas specifies the task of secular citizens in public debate as being to assist religious citizens in the development of this explicitly faith-based liberal rhetoric.

The second approach to the content of religious public arguments, one that is common among but not confined to theorists of the Radical Anabaptist and Radical Orthodox traditions, is to encourage religious citizens to develop positions that are distinct from those espoused in liberal society. Proponents of this approach have criticized the public contributions of the mainline churches for being tame, platitudinous, vacuous, and hence politically inconsequential. They have drawn attention to the irony that, as these churches have accommodated themselves to the secularist agenda, they have lost their unique underlying ethos and have ceased to count for much in secular society. William Cavanaugh [2002, 95], for instance, finds it ironic that “in our attempts to do social justice and to make theology public, we in fact consign the Church to public irrelevance.” From this standpoint, to pursue more unrestricted expression of religious arguments in public debate without attending to their originality would not suffice to overcome the problem of the public’s indifference to them and their ineffectiveness in transforming society.

The first approach, that of increasing the relevance of religious arguments to liberal societies, is reminiscent of the role of the churches prior to their disestablishment. In both cases, religious public arguments are tailored to debates the terms of which are set by those outside the churches. In both cases the arguments are subject to a kind of policing, by the state or by the dominant consensus of the wider society, with the consequence that the churches do not offer their

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146 See, for example, Hastings 1991, 25; Waldron 1993, 842, and Forrester 1989, 31 and 83.

147 See, for example, Hauerwas 1983, 18, 32-3 and Hauerwas and Willimon 1989, 44-5. This is a central thesis of Neuhaus 1984.
adherents or the public at large a distinctive perspective on social realities. Under such restrictions, Christianity becomes a functional civil religion, a “device for [securing] commitment to the polity,” as Mathewes [2007, 169] puts it.\footnote{148} Its role is to provide religious justification for secular projects promoting, for example, nationalism or social justice, and to encourage civic commitment to such ends. Accordingly, we can name the strategy of increasing the relevance of religious argument to society the “civil religion” approach to post-secularism.

Critics of the civil religion approach object to its strategy primarily on the empirical grounds that ineliminable differences exist between Christian and secular social principles.\footnote{149} The objections of these critics are normative as well: for them it is beneficial to society that religious contributions are discernibly at odds with the dominant perspectives in society – that, as Jonathan Malesic [2009, 15] puts it, the gospel retain its “hard edges.”\footnote{150} For Malesic [2009, 222], “the church…must maintain its distinctiveness with respect to the world, so that it has something to teach the world,” and for Stephen Carter [1997, 1646], similarly, “[t]he value of religion to democracy…is defined by its differences….” In support of this criticism of the civil religion approach, some have pointed out that the contribution of the churches to society has improved since their disestablishment and denationalization. The suggestion here is that the church allied to the state forfeits its calling to be the conscience and critic of social institutions;

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\footnote{146}{See also Mathewes 2007, 1: “[t]ypically, ‘public theologies’ are self-destructively accommodationist: they let the ‘larger’ secular world’s self-understanding set the terms, and then ask how religious faith contributes to the purposes of public life….” See also O’Donovan 1996, 225-6; Malesic 2009, 224, and Hirst 2000, 114, following J.N. Figgis, for similar arguments.}

\footnote{149}{See note 28 above.}

\footnote{150}{See also Forrester 1989, 42: there should be a place for “that which is distinctive, perhaps even abrasive, in Christian morality.” After all, he continues, “[c]onventional values of decency and conformity…led to the Cross.”}
that its obligation to support public institutions and principles blunts its prophetic witness.\(^{151}\)

The disestablished churches have been freed to speak on distinctively Christian grounds, to recover “Christian language as a distinctive mode of speech,” as David Martin [2005, 188] puts it.\(^{152}\) While few proponents of the civil religion approach to post-secularism would favour a return to establishment, it is arguable, as we noted, that they too dilute the unique content of the Christian message for the sake of securing acceptance by society. When that content is compromised, critics of the civil religion approach charge, the case for the inclusion of religious arguments in decision-making processes may be strengthened, but the capacity of these arguments to offer original perspectives on the decisions under consideration will be undermined.

For critics of the civil religion approach, providing a clear alternative to secular ideas and principles is beneficial to religion as well as to society. They argue that it is the experience of being the “other” in society which teaches religious groups what is important in their doctrine; what should be retained and what can be yielded.\(^{153}\) Thus, for David Tracy a religion comes to know its own narrative most fully through opposition to the world, through tension with those

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\(^{151}\) See, for example, Fergusson 2004, 179 and 142; Carter 1997, 1636-7; Coleman 1997, 285, and Peck 1933, 271, for whom this role of the church entails “a descent into that spurious monism which [makes] religion the handmaid of a social theory.” These points were fully perceived by Hobbes, who supported establishment chiefly because it rendered the ecclesial power subject to the secular authorities. Casanova 1994 includes many examples of the increased effectiveness of the Catholic Church following disestablishment, including that of church in Spain, which, having abandoned its support for the Franco regime, became a vehicle for democratic reform and free individual religious expression.

\(^{152}\) See also Fergusson 2004, 96 and 143: “[r]eleased from the burden of maintaining national identity, the church can function more authentically as the people of God. Its task of proclaiming Christ is carried out by speaking not for the nation but to the people.”

\(^{153}\) See, for example, Carter 1997, 1637-8, following Robert Cover, and Tinder 1989, 95-6.
who stand against it: “religions,” he concludes, “live by resisting.” Historically, religious groups which have succeeded in transforming society, or in achieving a measure of social justice, have rarely been allied to public institutions, but have been somehow marginalized from society and yet singled out by grace. The temptation to form alliances with public institutions and to lend support to their perspectives on society is, for Mathewes [2007, 170], “a trap, a false friend, taking away the liberty of religion to be religion…. Similar, for Kraynak [2001, 168], that approach saps the “spiritual energy” of the church, and for Fergusson [1998, 5] it results in “a loss of ecclesial identity and a failure of Christian witness.” In the view of these critics, the churches have been refashioned in the image of state or society and they suffer from excessive accommodation to political and social realities: as John Coffey [1997, 60] puts it, their members feel too much “at home in a world in which [they] should be pilgrims and strangers.” The idea that religious groups should offer a clear alternative to secular institutions and social principles suggests a name for this second approach to post-secularism, “contrast church theory.”

The concept of a contrast church alerts us to an important difference between the two approaches to post-secularism. The first, civil religion approach aims to produce and promote religious public arguments without necessarily distinguishing between those of individuals and groups or

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155 Tinder [1989, 59] cites, as an example of such groups, the remnants or minorities of the Old Testament which managed not to succumb to the sins of the Jews.
156 See also Forrester 1989, 48 and Malesic 2009, 15: “Christianity stands to lose its distinctive self-conception and, ultimately, the force of its message.”
157 See also Kraynak 2001, 177; Carter 1997, 1646, and Hauerwas 2003, 102: “as Christians we are at home in no nation….”
158 See Dulles 1987, 212 on the early church: “[t]he Christian community was a contrast society, maintaining a certain critical distance from its pagan environment.”
churches, while contrast church theorists consider an ecclesial community to be essential to the development and articulation of original and effective arguments. Thus, for example, the post-secular Habermas rarely speaks of religious institutions, but rather of the semantic contents of religion, its universal anthropological characteristics as opposed to any definite and specific religious authorities and structures. For him, as Harrington [2007, 552] comments, “[r]eligious message offers potential for discursive redemption, but religious form, it seems, is peripheral and inessential.”

To proponents of the civil religion approach, the relevance of religious forms to the events and issues of public life is, to say the least, not self-evident. Contrast church theorists, on the other hand, emphasize the importance of ecclesial rites and practices which unite religious believers and distinguish them from other citizens and groups. For these theorists, the religious message is embedded in the texts, traditions and practices of the churches, and it is perceived and understood only as these are lived by the faithful [Thiemann 1996, 162; Dostert 1996, 102].

Again, there are both empirical and normative reasons for the contrast church approach. Its proponents argue that the Christian faith is primordially and essentially communal rather than individualistic, and also that its social and political witness is strengthened when it is promulgated collectively. For them, ecclesial communities with their rituals, liturgies,
hierarchies and physical locations keep religion vibrant and at least potentially transformative. As Mathewes [2007, 205] points out, religious believers often do not know how to formulate their commitments in a way that invites interlocutors to enter into a dialogue about their meaning and validity. In fact, when believers are not schooled in discipleship, their contributions are often not grounded in any particular body of belief at all, other than the belief that all should have the right to believe as they choose. For Mathewes, [2007, 209], the idea that Christians can undertake prophetic public witness alone, “as virtuosi of the faith,” is “symptomatic of the atomistic individualism so pervasive today”; it is an idea that has absorbed the individualizing trends of the wider liberal culture.

We have suggested that a revival of public debate between religious and secular citizens is a more important task for post-secularism than disputing the rules governing contributions to decision-making within the state apparatus. Strong secularist constraints do not constitute a major obstacle to either of the approaches to the content of religious arguments that we have distinguished. Proponents of the civil religion approach, who seek to ensure the relevance of their arguments to actual social concerns, will find it prudent to translate their arguments into terms which ensure their widest possible circulation. Thus, for John A. Coleman [1982, 228-9], the only hope for gaining popular support for religious convictions is to base one’s case “simultaneously on secular warrant.” This strategy need not signal a commitment to strong secularism or any other ideology, much less the ultimate defeat of religion and the many goods that it brings to public debate; as we noted in the introduction, it may simply recognize the challenge of mutual understanding in a culturally diverse society. The obligation that

162 Stout 2004, 93-5, 97-8.
Habermas places on religious believers to adhere to secular reason while speaking in the inner public sphere does not betray Christian political principles, but rather acknowledges the need for an arena in which matters of public policy can be discussed free of established dogmas and customs.\textsuperscript{163} There does remain the problem of religious principles which cannot be rendered adequately in secular political terms, but proponents of the civil religion approach will agree that those terms should be adopted if it is at all possible to do so.

For contrast church theorists, public debate between religious and secular citizens benefits when religious identity is located in the distinctly religious spaces of worshipping communities because religious arguments are more likely to be original and effective when those communities are situated at a remove from political society. Exclusion from the public sphere of liberal societies permits the formation of members who are, as Hauerwas [1992, 12] puts it, “not at home in the liberal presumptions of our… society,” and who can therefore develop a critical perspective on it. There does remain the question of when and how these original and critical perspectives are to be raised in actual debate. Contrast church theory has a particular conception of the nature of Christian public witness, the strengths and weaknesses of which we will consider in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{163} Thus Hollenbach [2003, 170], having thoroughly criticized strong secularist constraints on religious public arguments, concedes that “the domains of government and policy formation are not generally the appropriate ones in which to argue controverted theological and philosophical issues….” See also Forrester 1997, 22-3.
Chapter Three
Post-Secularism and the Contrast Church

While post-secularism comes in many varieties, most of these are united in pursuing a more active public role for religion, specifically in promoting a just society. However, post-secularists are not always sufficiently reflective as to the means of pursuing this end, but are prone to assuming that raising the volume of religious arguments in the public sphere, while warding off strong secularist attempts to limit or exclude those arguments, will suffice for social transformation. The last chapter ended with some criticisms of this assumption and introduced an alternative approach to post-secularism, known as contrast church theory. This chapter undertakes a more comprehensive account of what contrast church theory can bring to post-secularism. The first section shows how it has developed by way of particular conceptions of religion and the secular liberal state; the second section outlines its understanding of public witness, and the final section assesses it from the standpoint of what we have identified as the major challenge facing post-secularism, the reinvigoration of religious contributions to public debate.

The development of contrast church theory

The two approaches to post-secularism distinguished in the last chapter, one that seeks to remove obstacles to religious arguments in public debate and one that emphasizes the contrast between religious and secular contributions to debate, have different conceptions of the genesis and development of the secularism that they aspire to supersede. Those who favour the civil religion approach to post-secularism tend to accept the widespread view of the liberal public/private
dichotomy as a consequence of the sixteenth and seventeenth century Wars of Religion, which allegedly demonstrated that religious political doctrines are too extreme and volatile to be permitted a place in the public sphere of society.\textsuperscript{164} To this day, strong secularists appeal to the religious wars in arguing that religious contributions should be excluded from public debate.\textsuperscript{165} Proponents of the civil religion approach to post-secularism accordingly seek to show that the argument from those wars no longer holds inasmuch as many contemporary religious political platforms are reasonable, even progressive, while secular political movements have hardly been immune to volatile extremism.

Contrast church theorists draw on an alternative account of secularism in liberal societies as having secured not so much peace between warring religious factions as the dominance of the state over competing, notably ecclesial authorities. For them, the Wars of Religion constituted one stage in a process whereby the state came to exercise paramount claims on the allegiance of citizens by taming or domesticating the church. William Cavanaugh [2002, 22] portrays the wars as “the birth pangs of the [modern] state… fought largely for the aggrandizement of the emerging state over the decaying remnants of the medieval ecclesial order.”\textsuperscript{166} In this account, further stages or moments in the domestication of the church by the state included the appropriation of its lands, the abolition of its courts and judicial proprietorship, and the

\textsuperscript{164} Mathewes [2007, 154] refers to the religious wars as “the nightmare of the liberal imagination.”

\textsuperscript{165} See, for instance, the Introduction to Rawls 1996, at xxvi-xxxii.

\textsuperscript{166} As Cavanaugh points out, the principle of civil dominance over the church in fact predates the Wars of Religion: the idea that the secular authority must possess sole right to the use of coercive force was argued, for instance, in Marsilius of Padua’s \textit{Defensor Pacis} (1324). The idea was developed by the fathers of modern liberalism, in particular Hobbes and Rousseau, who could cite the Wars of Religion as evidence that the state can be the peacemaker in society only if it is sovereign, absolutely without rival. However, as Cavanaugh observes, “warnings about the dangers of public faith… ignore the fact that the transfer of ultimate loyalty to the nation-state has only increased the scope of modern warfare.” And again: “the separation of the Church from power did nothing to staunch the flow of blood….The pitch of war has grown more shrill...” [Cavanaugh 2002, 43, 85].
emergence of a full range of state institutions which displaced its authority to minister to the physical, social, and spiritual lives of its adherents [Sheehan 2010, 223]. For contrast church theorists, the domestication of the church owed much as well to the development of three concepts which have deflated the sense of the church as an integral community and facilitated its subjection to or absorption by the state. The first was the concept of religion, understood as a set of individualized preferences or opinions as opposed to a communal practice; the second was the concept of the church as a voluntary association, confined to the private sphere of society, and the third was the concept of the public sphere, so defined as to exclude both religion and the church and to ensure their political irrelevance.

The medieval concept of religion presupposed what Barry Harvey [1999, 128] describes as “a context of ecclesial practices embodied in the communal life of the church.” As we noted in the introduction, the modern concept refers instead to certain inner states, types of conscience and sensibility, and to sets of doctrinal propositions rather than to corporal practices in an ecclesial setting. The modern concept can be traced to the fifteenth-century philosopher, Marsilio Ficino, who portrayed religion as an impulse which is common to all persons and which can take on a variety of cultural and symbolic expressions. As the symbolic expression of a universal impulse, religion has been interiorized and detached from specific communities of discipleship. The modern concept was shaped as well by the Reformation: with the

167 See Cavanaugh 2002, 33 and Sheehan 2010, 222. This position corresponds to David Tracy’s “experiential-expressive” conception of religion, a conception rejected by contrast church theorists, for whom (as Dostert 2006, 101) puts it, religion is not “fundamentally a symbolic representation of primary human experiences [but] rather… the source of those experiences themselves.” (Original emphasis.) For more on this conception, and on an alternative conception of religion, see Lindbeck 1984, 22.

168 See Cavanaugh 2002, 31ff. and 81 (with reference to Talil Asad): “religion as a symbol system theoretically detachable from communities of discipleship is a modern invention that facilitated the absorption of the Church into the modern secular state.”
splintering of Christendom and the emergence of competing confessions, the content of those confessions came to define the religion of their adherents, and ecclesial ritual became an enactment of doctrinal beliefs which could equally be displayed through cognitive representation. As Sheehan [2010, 222] comments, “once Christianity became the sum of its doctrines, the Church’s particular sphere of competence in the social order disappeared. In its place arose a newly reinvigorated state…."

The second concept assisting in the absorption of the church by the modern secular state was that of the church as a voluntary association – or, following the Reformation, as a number of voluntary associations, for there was no longer a Church universal but at least as many churches as there were states. This concept strengthened the continental states in particular, though not uniquely, as they could draw on the Roman legal precept allowing the sovereign to arrogate to itself the sole privilege of recognizing the existence of lesser associations [Cavanaugh 2002, 73]. As creatures of the sovereign, the modern churches could no longer be conceived as existing prior to or independently of the state, or as possessing protective rights to self-perpetuation except as these were granted by the state. This conception of the churches also undermined their protective rights against their own members, who could appeal to the enlightenment idea of collective endowments as having once been held separately but


170 See also Cavanaugh 2002, 73, n55: “[J.N.] Figgis points out that, although Roman law as such was never adopted in England, an equivalent doctrine of state recognition of associations developed as part of the general trend toward centralization in the sixteenth century, and after.” The problem with the doctrine is stated plainly by Carter [1998, 29]: the church henceforth “possesses neither power, because it is not a political sovereign, nor rights, because it is not an individual.”

171 A contemporary proponent of this position is Kukathas: “groups or cultural communities do not exist prior to or independently of legal and political institutions but are themselves given shape by those institutions.” And again: “The basis of the community’s authority is not any right of the culture to perpetuation, or even existence, but the acquiescence of its members” [Kukathas 1992, 110, 117].
subsequently ceded by autonomous individuals. In early modern contractarian thought the contracting individual generally retains rights even against the state, and *a fortiori* against private societies or associations [Locke 2010, 15-16]. The modern conception of the churches was further strengthened by the ideal, outlined in the next section, of the ‘invisible’ church, one that sheds its visible forms to concentrate on a core of doctrines addressed to the moral improvement of humanity.

The third concept assisting in the domestication of the church by the state was that of the public sphere, which stipulates how citizens and social groups may legitimately contribute to the resolution of matters of general concern. Under the conditions of the liberal conception of the public sphere, they can do so only by submitting to what the public, as represented by a nation-state which has displaced all other sources of authority, considers reasonable [Cavanaugh 2002, 62, 81]. Proponents of the civil religion approach to post-secularism maintain that “what the public considers reasonable” need no longer exclude religious arguments, most of which are quite compatible with, and even strengthen, loyalty to the public norms and principles of the liberal state. In an alternative understanding, the public sphere represents not an arena of reasoned debate to which the churches ought to aspire but one in which the state continues to subject the churches to its own terms by retaining the right to determine the legitimacy of public arguments. For contrast church theorists, the very distinction between public and private remains an instrument by which the state dominates the churches, requiring them to choose between private, sectional arguments and public arguments which do not compromise their allegiance to the sovereign state [Cavanaugh 2002, 54, 90].
The contrast church approach to post-secularism has been shaped by criticism of these concepts of religion, church and the public sphere. For instance, since the modern state has domesticated the church by means of the concept of religion as a set of beliefs to which the individual gives assent, contrast church theory takes the form of reconnecting belief to embodied ecclesial practice. Proponents of the contrast church respond to the individualized conception of religion by encouraging Christians to adhere to one another and to act as one body in witness to the world [Cavanaugh 2002, 89]; they emphasize what Harrington [2007, 552] calls the “non-discursive or semi-discursive aspects of religious life,” its “experiential, and emotional dimensions,” including “ritualized action and gesture, music, song, visual representation, and the sensuous space and event of worship.” Central to these aspects and activities, of course, is the church as a concrete, physical location. Thus, Hauerwas [2003, 107] places great importance on church buildings with their parking lots and potluck dinners, as does Mathewes on conversations about moral issues held in church basements [Mathewes 2007, 4 and 2002, 555-6].

Since the modern state has domesticated the churches by according them the status of voluntary associations, contrast church theorists seek to show how the churches differ from other associational groups in relevant ways. They argue, for instance, that the churches are a public presence irreducible to aggregates of individuals and their contractual arrangements.172 In this account, the churches do not presuppose a prior voluntarism; they are communities which came

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172 See Chaplin 2006, 166, following Gierke, and F.W. Maitland, cited Barker 1997, 101: An association or group is “no fiction, no symbol, no piece of the State’s machinery, no collective name for individuals, but a living organism and a real person, with body and members and a will of its own.” See also Justice Brennan in the case of Amos v Corporation of the Presiding Bishop, cited by Rosenblum 2000, 179: a religious community is “an organic entity not reducible to a mere aggregation of individuals.” As Rosenblum [2000, 183] portrays the “structural pluralist” position, “religious associations are not counterparts of the general array of secular groups but incommensurate, uniquely valuable, and constitutionally recognized as preferred structures.” (Original emphasis). Or as Chaplin [2008, 76] puts it, following Dooyeweerd, they are not “mere derivations from interindividual relationships,” but have a “distinct reality.”
into existence in answer to a call rather than as consumer-oriented associations offering self-fulfillment without regard to externally given ends. Contrast church theorists may be unable to challenge the positive legality of the conception of churches as voluntary associations, but they can question the normative understanding of churches as creatures of the state rather than as entities commended by revelation and antecedent, historically or ontologically, to the social contract and the formation of the state. The churches have been portrayed, for example, as resembling the family, which possesses rights (such as the right to make decisions about religious observance on behalf of its members) recognized as being older than the constitution and protected (with exceptions) against intrusions by the state [Carter 1998, 31; Kraynak 2001, 219]. In Chapter Four we will outline the case for protective group-rights for the churches as a means of ensuring their capacity to nurture the spiritual development of their members by transmitting core beliefs and practices to succeeding generations.

Since the modern state has domesticated the churches by means of a concept of the public sphere in which it holds ultimate authority to set the terms of debate, contrast church theorists do not

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173 See Figgis 1922, 41: the medieval church was seen not as “an artificial contrivance for satisfying ephemeral needs” but as a “divine organization revealed by Christ, as part of the eternal order of the universe.” See also Song 1997, 99; Hauerwas 1991, 96, and Kraynak 2001, 208, who points out that, for Christians, the foundations of the church are divine; it is not merely a private, voluntary body but a mystical one, possessing supernatural authority.

174 See Cavanaugh 2002, 73 and Lockwood O’Donovan 1994. We could say that the churches are among what Novak [2004, 55] calls “the plurality of cultures that in fact precede and transcend [civil society’s] construction through the social contract.” For Dulles [1987, 226], similarly, “the community of disciples is in some sense prior to its own members.”

175 See also Chaplin 2006, 156n, following Galston, and Novak 2004, 60: “to reduce familial existence to a series of contractual arrangements is to belittle it and to detract from the richness of an existence many people very much desire.”
succumb to the strategy of increasing the volume of religious arguments in that sphere. As we have noted, religious arguments are generally not prohibited in the public spheres of Western democracies, strong secularism notwithstanding, yet these societies cannot, on these grounds at any rate, be considered post-secular. An alternative strategy takes off from Robin Lovin’s paradox, noted in the introduction, that “religion serves its public purpose by turning its back on the public” [Lovin 1986, 17]. Like most post-secularists, however, contrast church theorists are not content to place the churches in the private sphere of society, confined (as Mathewes [2007, 8] puts it) to “a mere spirituality,” for this would effectively ensure that they could not secure the public influence needed to influence social realities. From the standpoint of contrast church theory, both solutions, public churches and private religion, fall short of the post-secularist mark. Cavanaugh [2002, 83] and Johnson [2007, 220], among others, propose the alternative solution that the churches should attempt not so much to influence the public as to constitute a public, or to be a public on their own terms. If we were to situate the churches, as envisioned by these theorists, in relation to the liberal model of public and private, we could describe them as residing in an alternative or parallel public sphere, one that challenges, and perhaps bids at some future time to replace, the actual public sphere of modern liberal societies. As Richard J. Mouw [2007, 52] portrays the contrast church position,

the Way of Jesus embodies economic, political, and social norms that are so antithetical to the patterns of collective life in the larger human culture that Christians are required, in effect, to create an alternative ‘public,’ embodied within the life of the Christian community.

As Johnson [2007, 220] argues, a people united through worship of God can be counted as a public just as much as one united through common national allegiance. Mathewes [2007, 10]

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176 See, for example, Hauerwas 1988, 12: the secular state does not have the right to decide what is and is not political, and Cavanaugh 2002, 90 and 46, who points out that if the modern state is false copy of the Body of Christ, the last thing church should want is state power.
likewise speaks not of the legitimacy of religion in public life but of the legitimacy of public life in religion. In their alternative public space the churches can engage in a kind of political practice which takes its ideals from the needs and requirements of the churches themselves rather than from those of state or society, and which cannot be pressed into the service of secular ends. This conception of the role of the churches can draw support from the notion of multiple publics, adopted by some secular critics of the liberal public sphere.\footnote{See for example Calhoun 1997, 238, for whom “no… integrated, comprehensive, unitary public sphere can exist under contemporary sociological conditions.” See also the essays in Calhoun 1992, especially those by Nancy Fraser and Benhabib, who deny any sharp distinction within the public sphere between the state apparatus and other ‘publics’. The distinction was affirmed in Chapter Two, Section Two above.}

The concept of an alternative or parallel public sphere is inspired in part by the early church, which could have taken refuge under provisions in Roman law for the autonomy of particularistic cultures, but refused to acquiesce even tacitly to Caesar, preferring to position itself as the other of Roman society and to promulgate its own laws and modes of behaviour as a distinct nation.\footnote{See Harvey 1999, 18 and 138, where he calls the ecclesial community “a parallel polis in the truth.”} The concept has been influenced as well by Augustine, for whom membership in the heavenly city is necessarily in tension with citizenship in the \textit{civitas terrena}.\footnote{See, for example, Augustine 1950, 445 (XIV, §4): “because some live according to the flesh and others according to the spirit there have arisen two diverse and conflicting cities….”} Augustine does not simply proclaim an alternative, ecclesial public space on earth, for he sees the church rather than the state as being the true \textit{res publica}. As Rowan Williams puts the point, in Augustine’s view “it is life outside the Christian community which fails to be truly public, authentically political.”\footnote{Cited Johnson 2007, 222.} Augustin{e} [1950, 699-700 (XIX §21)] considered the Roman Empire to be a false copy of the body of Christ, a competing but failed attempt to fulfill the human quest
for unity and peace. In his view, a true *res publica* is founded on the kind of justice that gives God his due, for only where God is loved can there be love of others and a mutual acknowledgement of rights.\(^{181}\)

Augustine’s critique of the Roman Empire is mirrored by the position taken on liberal democracy by contrast church theorists today. Thus, for John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas the common good as conceived by liberal societies cannot fulfill our deepest needs, which require a relationship to God and a community of those committed to such a relationship. These theorists maintain that the role of the church is indeed social and political, though they do not accept the liberal understanding of society and politics; for them, only the church as an alternative or contrast public qualifies as a polity consistent with the real needs of humanity.\(^{182}\) Two practical functions of the post-secular church follow from this position, the exemplification of that true polity and the formation of citizens with the requisite characteristics to people it. We can consider these functions now in more detail.

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\(^{181}\) This position is espoused today notably by Oliver O’Donovan, for whom it is the church and not the nation that bears the seeds of the true, eschatological political form. O’Donovan [1996, 285] states that “the church never was, in its true character, merely the temple of the city; it was the promise of the city itself.” The title of O’Donovan 1996 – *The Desire of the Nations* – refers to what he identifies as the nations’ desire to be (as Mathewes 2007, 182)puts it, “overcome, disintegrated, and reconstituted in the church.”

\(^{182}\) See, for example, Hauerwas 1987, 92; 1981, 85, and 1992, 130: “the church is the only true polity we can know in this life.” As Hauerwas [1981, 2] states the point more fully: “[t]he proponents of ‘political theology’ are… right to claim that the meaning and truth of Christian convictions cannot be separated from their political implications. They are wrong, however, to associate ‘politics’ only with questions of social change. Rather the ‘political’ question central to the church is what kind of community the church must be to be faithful to…. “ This kind of community, Hauerwas concludes, is one based on Christian convictions.
The public role of the contrast church

The public role of the contrast church has been portrayed most notably by Yoder and Hauerwas. For them, the church is ideally a distinct, delineated colony or island, self-consciously set apart not only from the state but from the prevailing culture of the wider society. The church itself is the Kingdom of God, a new polity of justice and peace, and its role is principally to realize the full establishment of the Kingdom by living out the story of Israel and Christ. The contrast church does not overtly act as an agent for the transformation of state and society, yet in the view of its proponents it does contribute to and even transform society in indirect ways, for instance by exemplifying a new and unprecedented polity and by cultivating in its members the virtues appropriate to that polity [Hauerwas 1987, 89, 90; 1981, 73-4].

One way to approach the public role of the contrast church is by means of the distinction between the visible and invisible church. The most important contributor to these concepts is Kant, for whom the true service of the church has to do with the moral improvement of humanity rather than with maintaining the visible forms of ecclesial life. For Kant [1960, 106], those forms are dispensable, having “no moral worth” and being “merely acts induced by fear or hope – acts which an evil man can also perform.” While Kant recognizes the uses of the visible church in the initial spread of Christianity, he sees progress as lying in a transition to an invisible church with guiding principles based on scripture alone, purified of superstition and fanaticism, without hierarchy or sacerdotalism. “An (invisible) church which includes within itself all right-

183 See note 46 above.
184 See, for example, Hauerwas 1992, 74-5; Hauerwas and Willimon 1989, 45-8, and Thomson 2003, 4.
thinking people... can,” he maintains, “alone be the true church universal” [Kant 1960, 164]. The concept of the invisible church gained strength during the Constantinian period when it was commonly held that the distinctive character of Christianity is chiefly inward and moral once society as a whole is Christian [Malesic 2009, 226]. While Western societies may no longer be even nominally Christian, the emerging consensus, which we have noted on several occasions, that the Christian faith has social and political implications has further strengthened the concept of the invisible church, if only because the relevance of liturgy, sacrament and ritual to social problems is, as we said in the last chapter, not at all obvious.

The concept of the visible church is central to the primary practical role that contrast church theorists assign to the church, the development of an alternative and just polity. For Hauerwas, “the church is a social ethic,” and Christian teachings about society and how to live in it are not separable from the concrete historical practices of the church. As we noted, proponents of the contrast church place it neither in the public nor the private sphere of liberal theory, but rather in a parallel public sphere where it manifests and realizes the Kingdom of God. The public role of the contrast church is to exhibit or demonstrate the characteristics of the polity of the Kingdom of God. Thus, for example, while most churches seek to counter the individualism and materialism of liberal society, the contrast church presents a living example of a communal and non-acquisitive society. While Christian social principles tend to underwrite and strengthen such norms as equality and mutual respect, the contrast church shows what the abolition of differences based on race, class and gender would look like in institutional form. Rather than

185 Hauerwas 1992, 74, 196, and see Malesic 2009, 222. As Thomson [2003, 30n] points out, for Hauerwas, “ecclesiology is the pre-requisite for theology.”

186 See Dostert 2006, 194, following Yoder, and Hauerwas 1981, 92.
advocate peace and justice, the contrast church stands as a provisional sign of a coming eschatological order which promises to manifest peace and justice.\textsuperscript{187}

The first task of the contrast church, to live out and so to exemplify the just politics of God’s Kingdom, necessitates the second, the formation of members with the virtues required to discern the faults of liberal society and to meet the standards of the one true polity.\textsuperscript{188} The contrast church conception of virtue-formation follows the Aristotelian and Thomist tradition of virtue ethics, which focuses on the character of the self rather than on resolving particular moral quandaries. In this tradition, virtue is formed not by rationally apprehending moral principles separately from our particular history and identity, but by inculcating habitual dispositions, qualities such as integrity and responsibility, which enable us to live as we ought [Cavanaugh 2002, 32].\textsuperscript{189} Virtue is best understood, as Mathewes [2007, 195] puts it, “not…as an epistemological state, but as a way of life, a physical practice.” Here we can see the importance of the distinction between the two concepts of religion outlined in the last section, as well as of that between the visible and invisible church. The pre-modern concept of religion referred specifically, as we noted, to the liturgical rites of the visible church rather than to sets of doctrinal propositions and their corresponding beliefs. For contrast church theorists, the physical

\textsuperscript{187} See, for example, Yoder 1964, 20-1; Hauerwas 2003, 103, 105; Woodiwiss 2001a, 162; Barns 2003, 256, and Stout 2004, 146.

\textsuperscript{188} See Hauerwas 1981, 2: “the truest politics… is that concerned with the development of virtue.” See also Hauerwas in Performing the Faith, 15, cited Malesic 2009, 222: “the church gives no gift to the world in which it finds itself more politically important than the formation of a people constituted by the virtues necessary to endure the struggle to hear and speak truthfully to one another.” See also Rasmusson 1995, 262.

\textsuperscript{189} See also Jenson 1992, 286: quandary ethics refers to “the dominant varieties of modern ethics that conceive the moral life as the making of problematical choices between encountered alternatives.” Beem [1995, 119, following Miscamble] calls the alternative conception “an ethic of disposition rather than action”. See also Hauerwas 1981, 113-7 and 1991, 103-5, and Rasmusson 1995, 261, for whom “Christian ethics is nothing else than… Christian discipleship. The first question then becomes who we are, not what we should do. Who we are determines what we should do.”
elements of those rites are the means of developing the habits and dispositions which constitute
civic virtue. As Talal Asad says of medieval monastic life, the liturgy remained “a practice…
essential to the acquisition of Christian virtues….Each thing…was…done in order to make the
self approximate more and more to a predefined model of excellence.”\textsuperscript{190} Church-membership
is a condition of attaining virtue since learning the requisite rites and practices requires initiation
into a community which, in Harvey’s phrase, “marks out the performative dimensions of life in
the truth” [Harvey 1999, 140].\textsuperscript{191}

Here we can see as well the significance of the modern concept of churches as voluntary
associations. For contrast church theorists, individual autonomy and choice have become the
dominant ethical principles of liberal societies, providing (as David Walsh [2003, 172] puts it)
“the horizon within which all social and political discourse must take place.”\textsuperscript{192} Hauerwas
observes that modern liberals give no account of how virtue is formed other than by liberation
from external authority and the assertion of individual autonomy. For him, this approach to
virtue-formation is inadequate, since to become free we must be trained to desire the right

\textsuperscript{190} Cited in Connolly 1999, 25. Connolly [1999, 25] also cites Nietzsche to the effect that “the distinguishing
characteristic of the Christian…[is] not a belief but a doing.”

\textsuperscript{191} See also Cavanaugh 2002, 81, who questions the notion that “Christian symbols can elicit transformations apart
from participation in a community of discipleship.” For Cavanaugh [at 88], “virtues are acquired communally,
within the ‘public’ practices of an ecclesial community.…” See also Hauerwas 1981, 91, 116, and Hauerwas and
Willimon 1989, 97.

\textsuperscript{192} Walsh [ibid.] continues: “[a]utonomy becomes the watchword almost as if its promotion constituted the whole of
the moral universe. Anything that obstructs or fetters its unfolding must be removed as anathema to the central
conception of what a human being is.” See, for example, Amy Gutmann, cited Dostert 2006, 219-20n: to teach the
skills and virtues of democratic citizenship in a diverse society is to teach the virtues and skills of individuality or
autonomy. Similarly, for Rawls [1996, 313], moral power is to realize the capacity to form and revise conceptions
of the good “in accordance with the full, deliberate, and reasoned exercise of our intellectual and moral powers.”
For a critique of individual autonomy as a governing principle of society, see Canavan 1981, 34.
things. Thus, Christian virtue is attained by submitting oneself to the standards and practices of a church in order to learn how to feel, think and act as a Christian [Lindbeck 1984, 35]. The discipline of an ecclesial hierarchy and the example of models, most notably the saints and martyrs, are required if we are to overcome self-absorption and be initiated into the Christian life. Likewise, many civic virtues, such as personal responsibility and self-control, loyalty and commitment, honor and heroism, demand some sacrifice of autonomy and choice; in Cochran’s phrase, they “travel with authority” [Cochran 1989, 434]. Such virtues entail training and apprenticeship – concepts which will inevitably appear to be authoritarian in a liberal society. Being subject to the reigning principles of autonomy and choice, as well as to the corrupting influence of a utilitarian and commercial culture, the associational groups of a liberal society are, in the view of contrast church theorists, inadequate to the task of virtue-formation. The principle of autonomous choice undermines the ties of reciprocal obligation and interdependence that virtue-formation presupposes [Elshtain 1993, 11]. A contrast church cannot therefore be conceived as a voluntary association if it is to fulfill its public role of producing virtuous citizens.

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194 See, for example, Kraynak 2001, 233, following Edward Goerner; Hauerwas 1991, 98 and 1981, 85, and Hauerwas and Willimon 1989, 98-103. This need for models can be simply pragmatic: as Malesic [2009, 223] points out, “one needs to see [the] actions performed so that one can imitate them, and one needs…to be taught the right way to perform the actions.”

195 For O'Donovan [1996, 16-18], the problem of the West is a suspicion of authority, an inability to acknowledge its necessity or good. This problem stems, he argues [at 30-1], from our voluntarist heritage: we have an inadequate “ontology of human freedom.”

196 See also Mathewes 2007, 193-4: “[o]ur… need to be fully in charge of ourselves – to be in control – encourages us to ‘loosen’ our attachments to one another and our beliefs.”
Finally, the modern concept of the public sphere can help us to understand the contrast church approach to civic virtue. In modern liberal societies, the ideal civic virtue in public debate is that of tolerance, which has been taken since the Wars of Religion as the means by which diverse factions can co-exist and interact peacefully. Thus, proponents of the civil religion approach to post-secularism appeal to the virtue of tolerance in arguing that religious viewpoints should be admitted to public debate. Not only do religious viewpoints qualify as objects of tolerance, they point out, but Christian principles such as *agape* and *imago dei* strengthen tolerance as a civic virtue. For contrast church theorists, however, tolerance is a virtue inextricably linked to the liberal public/private dichotomy, a virtue preached and practiced by those at the centre (in the public sphere) in respect to those at the periphery (in the private sphere).

Liberal societies subscribe to the norm of tolerance, contrast church theorists argue, only insofar as the beliefs which are the objects of tolerance have been quarantined so that those who tolerate can be confident that what they tolerate will not inconvenience them unduly [Fish 1999, 202, 207]. More specifically, tolerance is honoured only in the case of purely inward, and hence innocuous, religious doctrines, while troubling religious views, such as those which lay claim to a privileged purchase on the truth or which entail public, political practices, are taken by the modern liberal as being unworthy of tolerance. Such troubling views follow largely from the pre-modern conception of religion, in which body and soul are one and discipline can act on the soul (and thence on society) through the body and its practices. Liberal tolerance presupposes the modern...

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197 See F. R. Ankersmit, cited Griffioen 1994, 166: “It was the idea of toleration which privatized [the] public terrain of religious opinions....”

198 As Cavanaugh [2002, 40] points out, “Lockeian liberalism can afford to be gracious toward ‘religious pluralism’ precisely because ‘religion’ as an interior matter is the state’s own stepchild.” See also Fish 1999, 191: disagreement is acceptable unless you really mean it; “unless your response to error is not ‘appreciation’ but a determination to stamp it out....” For Fish [40], the claim to a privileged purchase on the truth “defines a religion as a religion as opposed to a mere opinion.” Carter 1998, 57-61, argues similarly.
conception of religion, in which body and soul are split and the conditions of freedom of religion are secured by handing the body over to the state while assigning the soul to the private realm of individual conscience and choice [Cavanaugh 2002, 87]. For contrast church theorists, liberal tolerance is one more means by which the state succeeds in dividing and conquering the church and transferring loyalty to itself.

The civil religion case for post-secularism rests largely on the principle of tolerance of religious arguments in public debate, but as we noted in the last chapter those arguments have been so shorn of original social and political content that they are widely met only with indifference. For contrast church theorists, the problem of indifference arises in part from a confusion of the virtue of tolerance with the liberal norm of individual autonomy, which prescribes acceptance of substantive convictions on the grounds that individual preferences should not be judged as being better or worse than others. Tolerance as indifferent relativism, an unwillingness to engage with convictions on their own terms, may strengthen the right of individuals to hold diverse viewpoints – a right that seems in any case to be relatively secure in Western democracies – but not the viewpoints themselves or the communities which develop and pass them down. Some contrast church theorists go so far as to maintain that liberal tolerance results in the rejection of all truth-telling traditions save for liberalism itself.

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199 See Trigg 2007, 87, 183-5 and Connolly 1999, 62. See also Fish’s [1999, 56ff.] concept of “boutique multiculturalism,” which does not take seriously the core values of diverse communities, and Mathewes’ [2007, 114] critique of “a proposal for tolerance that actually comes down to a sort of laissez-faire indifference, a willed ignorance and self-blinding concerning the other with whom one is engaged.”

200 See Thomson 2003, 77 and 140, with reference to Hauerwas: liberalism believes that “other traditioned accounts of reality… must ultimately bow before its singular account.” See also Insole 2004, 12: “tolerance becomes either an indifferent relativism, or itself a paradoxically intolerant ideology which makes impossible more ‘coercive’ forms of life and traditional communities.”
Criticism of the liberal public/private dichotomy and the liberal virtue of tolerance is common in modern political theory, both in radical democratic and communitarian traditions. Contrast church theorists are unusual, however, in that theirs is strictly an ecclesiological communitarianism: for them, the exemplification of an alternative to the liberal conception of politics and civic virtue is possible only within one particular community, that of the church.201 A danger of contrast church theory, therefore, is that, like liberalism as conceived by its proponents, it will result in rejecting or ignoring all truth-telling traditions save its own. At any rate, contrast church theory gives few practical indications of ways in which communication between such truth-telling traditions as persist in liberal societies can be enhanced; much less does it offer guidelines for reinvigorating Habermas’s open public debate between religious and secular citizens. Contrast church theory teaches the churches to develop an original and radical perspective, but it confines them to living and exemplifying that perspective, and so it has little to say about what the churches can offer to public debate. The contrast church critique of liberal tolerance as mere indifference to the content of competing moral arguments is no more than a prelude to a statement of the churches’ possible contribution to public debate.

Instead of or in addition to tolerance, public debate requires the stance of critical responsiveness, which differs from tolerance in that those who respond critically to difference place their own convictions at the risk of revision [Hollenbach 2003, 163].202 Critical responsiveness is not a virtue that fits comfortably into the public sphere of a liberal democracy, for it may not conform to a consensus on the abstract, universal principles of liberalism. Like agonist theory, introduced

201 See, for example, Rasmusson 1995, 272-3 and Jenson 1992, 292-3.
202 See also Markham 1994, 188 and Tinder 1989, 132 on the need to move beyond tolerance to active engagement and concern in the lives of others.
in Chapter One, it is willing to sacrifice a degree of normative consensus for what it sees as the
intrinsic goods of diversity and pluralism. However, critical responsiveness should not be
confined to a parallel or shadow public sphere, for it will not be content with living and
exemplifying an alternative to the dominant liberal consensus, but will rather seek to renegotiate
the ways by which diverse alternatives to that consensus have been trivialized and marginalized
[Connolly 1999, 62]. Like the agonists, we should expect or hope that this renegotiation would
result in a modification of the relationship between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ a shift in the identity of
insiders and outsiders which would involve a reconception as well of liberal pluralism [Connolly
ibid.; Johnson 2007, 84-5]. Unlike agonist theorists, however, whose commitment to difference
over consensus renders them suspicious of all normative traditions, we should look to a kind of
pluralism which is not purely individualistic but encompasses recognition of a variety of
normative, including religious, traditions and communities. The next section suggests that one of
the conditions of this pluralism, a strong private sphere, can be found within traditional theories
of liberalism.

The contrast church and public debate

For proponents of the civil religion approach to post-secularism, one reason for the trivialization
and marginalization of religious public arguments in Western societies is the liberal model of the
public and private spheres, and specifically the assignment of religion to the private sphere. The
civil religion theorists maintain that Western societies no longer require the protection from
religious strife which the model was intended to ensure, and they argue that societies have, by
and large, benefited by the social change which has been initiated or supported by the modern
churches. The churches have been able to contribute to social change, these theorists point out,
only insofar as they have rejected their placement in the private sphere and adopted a public role. Critics of liberalism commonly agree that social change is unlikely to be effected from the private sphere of society, which is prone to individualism, cocooning and political apathy, and which tends to be inherently conservative, intent on policing the integrity of what has been received rather than on facilitating new perspectives on existing political structures and ideas. Post-secularists therefore call on the churches to become publicly engaged; to offer, as Mathewes [2007, 161] puts it, “a real communion …of the sort that contemporary liberal theory, by seeking to quarantine it within the domestic ‘private’ sphere, too simply denies.” Contrast church theorists typically adopt this critique of the private sphere, disputing only the kind of public role that the deprivatized churches should fulfill.

The last chapter suggested, however, that the trivialization and marginalization of religious public arguments has been due not just to the liberal model of public and private spheres, but to the quality of those arguments, which have too often been redundant or unconvincing. One way for the churches to increase the effectiveness of their arguments is to confine themselves to speaking publicly only when they have something distinctive to communicate, as opposed to interjecting a Christian perspective on every contested issue that arises. This strategy should prompt us to reconsider criticisms of the liberal model of public and private, for the private sphere has the merit of protecting the churches from society (as well as society from the strife induced by religion) so that they can cultivate original public arguments. The private sphere provides the time and space for the churches to function as forums for moral deliberation,

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203 See, for example, Malesic 2009, 195 and Forrester 1989, 10.

204 See Yoder 1964, 21-2 “the church should speak only when she has something to say…. Only such matters as can be clearly identified by the church as presenting a clear moral challenge or abuse can justify their being given more than perfunctory attention.” Post [2003, 123] argues similarly.
deciding what issues to engage and developing effective counter-arguments to prevailing positions on those issues.\textsuperscript{205} The inference of critics of liberalism from privatization to trivialization should be questioned, as we said in the introduction, for if Christian perspectives on social and political issues are indeed at odds with prevailing viewpoints, some withdrawal and distance of the churches from the public gaze may be in order [Quirk 1987, 79; Rorty 1999, 170]. Here the distinction between Christian discipleship and witness is helpful: the process of discipleship, which precedes witness, encompasses the formation of arguments which are both true to the Christian tradition and germane to public issues [Malesic 2009, 215]. While witness presupposes a public presence, discipleship benefits by being concealed or quarantined in the private sphere where the uniqueness of the churches’ arguments can be nurtured so that their contribution to public debate, when warranted, can be radical.

Churches contribute to public debate by way of two kinds of theology: a contextual kind, corresponding to witness, which is formulated in the midst of actual events, and classical theology, corresponding to discipleship, which is not always clearly related to the public issues of the day [Forrester 1989, 19]. From the standpoint of contrast church theory, the mainline churches in particular have concentrated too narrowly on contextual theology in their bid to offer useful public witness; they have sacrificed originality and effectiveness in an attempt to achieve relevance. As Mathewes [2002, 563] comments, the mainline churches often seem to lack a theological rationale for their civic engagement: they “preach little actual theology; instead their

\textsuperscript{205} See, for example, Forrester 1989, 96-7, Biggar 2000, 142-3, and Benne 1995, 208. As Mathewes [2007, 217] points out, the success of the civil rights movement in the U.S. was due in large part to the fact that “the African-American churches had been developing powerful ‘counter-publics’ to the Jim Crow ‘public’ of the post-Reconstruction South, and had been organizing and training their congregants for half a century….” Bernstein [1986, 47] makes a similar observation. Mathewes [2007, 2000] extends the point to the New Christian Right: “the political mobilization of conservative Christians was well advanced before it began to achieve legislative victories in the 1980s….”
primary languages typically are fundamentally secular sociological, political, or psychotherapeutic visions of community.”^206 The argument that the trivialization and marginalization of religion has to do with an exclusive reliance on contextual theology finds support in the work of secularization theorists such as Grace Davie and David Martin. As noted in the introduction to this study, Davie identifies a tendency in Western societies to believe without belonging: she finds that personal religious conviction has not declined in those societies, or at least not to the extent that church-membership has.^207 For Martin, as for Davies, declining church-membership is one aspect of a general malaise affecting confidence and participation in public institutions and activities. This argument raises the possibility that the persistent attempts of the churches to pursue a role in the public sphere of society has contributed to the loss of their appeal to those who retain religious beliefs.^208 The danger of political activism by the churches may be not so much to liberal democratic society as to the survival of the churches themselves [Carter 1997, 1660], which is, after all, a condition of their fulfilling any sort of role in society.

One consequence of an exclusive reliance on contextual theology is that the churches declare firm positions on issues about which Christianity is equivocal and Christians divided. Like other social groups, churches today typically reflect the ideological divisions of the wider society, and when they precipitously take sides on public issues they can exacerbate those divisions,

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^206 See also Mathewes 2007, 9 and Stout in *Ethics after Babel*, cited Forrester 1997, 31: “To gain a hearing in our culture, theology has often assumed a voice not its own and found itself merely repeating the bromides of secular intellectuals in transparently figurative speech….Serious conversation with theology will be greatly limited if the voice of theology is not recognizably theological….Conversation partners must remain distinctive enough to be identified, to be needed.”

^207 See notes 44 and 45 above.

^208 The argument is made, for instance, by Temple [1927, 29-30], for whom the church cannot retain its rightful authority in the spiritual realm if it pursues a mistaken claim to authority in the political and economic spheres.
rendering their witness less authoritative.\textsuperscript{209} Church-members tend to recognize a necessary connection between their religious faith and their civic lives, but not all of them have arrived at a considered outlook on the practical social implications of their faith, and the process of their discernment may be undermined when the only models for faithful witness that they encounter are closely tied to particular ideological agenda [Mathewes 2007, 5-6].\textsuperscript{210} It is possible, in such cases, that society’s indifference to the public arguments of the churches will be compounded by that of church-members themselves. The churches should therefore seek to base their contributions to public debate on the religious sentiments and beliefs of church-members, which they can develop by means of discipleship in religious practices and in classical as well as contextual theology. Then, when the churches do speak publicly, their arguments will at least be based on a \textit{consensus fidelium}, and not merely on the consent of the faithful to their leaders speaking for them.

From a contrast church standpoint, as we have seen, classical theology is best pursued not only at a certain remove from public events and debate, but also in an ecclesial setting. Classical theology is more ecclesiocentric than the contextual kind: it takes its markings from the needs of the church rather from those of state and society, and it is shaped by church doctrines and rituals, as well as by scripture [Woodiwiiss 2001a, 160]. In the modern conception of religion, as we noted above, ritual is a primitive enactment of beliefs which could equally be represented

\textsuperscript{209} See Forrester 1989, 33: “taking sides on political matters easily threatens the unity of the church and the fulfillment of its pastoral functions....” However, Forrester [ibid.] goes on to warn that “this kind of caution...can verge on the irresponsible if it is made a more or less binding guide-line.” See also Post 2003, 123.

\textsuperscript{210} See also Mathewes 2002, 563: the social justice language of the churches aims to be prophetic, “yet, it seems unpopular among congregants and associated with an absolutism that seems shrill, self-righteous, and essentially intolerant.” Stout [2004, 115-6] observes similarly that religious communities often have trouble accepting theologians as spokespersons, feeling that they (the theologians) have abandoned the basic faith commitments of the communities.
cognitively: first comes revelation, then doctrines and beliefs derived from revelation, and finally rituals symbolizing doctrines and beliefs. But classical theology does not precede ritual in this way, for (as we noted in the last section) its truths are embedded in the practices of the churches, and they are understood and known only as they are lived by the faithful.\textsuperscript{211} Theological truth is the outcome, not so much of experts deducing ideas and concepts from revelation, as of communities engaged in a religious way of life. Classical theology is a communal practice in that it emerges from the formal processes of liturgy and worship and from the less formal processes of story-telling and listening, debating and arguing in an ecclesial setting.\textsuperscript{212} These processes do not just assist in the formation of theological doctrine; they embody it [Mathewes 2007, 10]. The primary role of the churches, therefore, is not to announce a truth that they possess in full, but rather to develop and enhance that truth by means of faithful discipleship [Johnson 2007, 244].\textsuperscript{213} However, a regeneration of inclusive public debate requires a secondary role of the churches, that of communicating their provisional and unfolding truth.

We can allow that forming theological doctrine, along with a \textit{consensus fidelium} to underwrite it, requires a community set aside from public life, but we might question how the contribution of a community to public debate would benefit by such a separation. An exclusive emphasis on particularistic doctrines and practices would seem likely to limit the extent to which social and political arguments arising from them could resonate with citizens in the wider society. As Jeanne Elshtain [1993, 75] observes in regard to the politics of identity, mired in retribalized

\textsuperscript{211} Thiemann 1996, 162; Dostert 1996, 102.
\textsuperscript{212} See, for example, Barns 2003, 256 and Johnson 2007, 242.
\textsuperscript{213} See also Mathewes 2007, 198: “[t]he believer is part of a communal project – not of individuals acquiring true beliefs, but of a community collectively moving through time towards understanding.”
identities we cannot “negotiate the space between our pre-given differences.” However, communication between communities does not subsist exclusively in the verbal exchange of reasons and arguments, but takes the form as well of interaction between ways and manners of life [Johnson 2007, 235]. Dialogue is first a practice and religious practices are, in themselves, a form of communication, one that does not necessarily require agreement on premises or translation into a public or neutral language in order to be understood. Communication as interaction between ways of life presupposes simply a practical orientation towards common understanding, a willingness, as Charles Davis [1980, 173] puts it, “to live together, to listen to one another’s stories, to interpret and become familiar with alien symbols, to respect different customs and join in the rites of others.”

This common understanding and respect finds little recognition or encouragement in the idea that the churches should constitute an “other” to liberal society in an alternative or parallel public sphere. In the private sphere of society, however, the churches can embody and live out their particularistic narratives at a remove from political society while still engaging with other comparable communities. The role of the churches in the private sphere contributes as well to Habermas’s debate between religious and secular citizens in the outer public sphere. One concept that helps to explain this contribution is that of waiting [Tinder 1989, 105]: the stance of the churches should be one of hesitancy, waiting (to recite the points of this section) for the appropriate issues, for the development of a unique perspective on those issues, for solid internal

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214 Johnson [ibid.] points out that in scripture, as in history, “conversation has…often been associated with this broader picture of interaction.” Conversely, as Mathewes [2007, 210] notes, when faith is expressed publicly to those who do not share it, it can be estranging, reminding us of our fundamental separateness from one another.


216 See also Johnson 2007, 244.
support for that perspective, and for a common understanding with other communities. Waiting has a theological rationale, that God is already ruler of all reality and that time is needed to discover the will of God, as well as to receive the divine grace necessary for effective action.\textsuperscript{217} Waiting also has the pragmatic justification that public engagement by the mainline churches has been met by indifference outside the churches and falling membership within them. The churches must \textit{reculer pour mieux sauter}: they must retreat from public action in order to discover a fresh approach to it. The next chapter attempts to develop such an approach by drawing on the tradition of group-pluralism.

\textsuperscript{217} See Tinder 1989, 114 and Niebuhr 1996, 148. Mathewes [2007, 11, following Michael Raposa] points out that the word “wait” derives from the verb “to watch” and is associated with “wake.” It connotes alert watchfulness (i.e. for the needed grace) rather than inertia, and it is a manifestation not of helplessness but of hopefulness for the receipt of that grace.
Chapter Four
A Pluralist Approach to Post-Secularism

Contrast church theory shows how the churches can develop and sustain original viewpoints on public issues and events, but it is less helpful in explaining how they can represent and promote these viewpoints in public debate. This weakness results from its sectarianism or isolationism, which takes the form of an uncompromising critique of liberalism and an unwillingness to take part in political debate under the terms of the liberal public sphere. This chapter proposes an approach to post-secularism which overcomes the contrast church stance of non-engagement in public debate while retaining its central insight that the primary task of the churches is to maintain a vigorous and distinctive institutional life. The first section attempts to move contrast church theory in a group-pluralist direction, towards forming alliances with non-ecclesial groups which also qualify as contrast communities in a liberal society. The second section shows that post-secularism can draw on a tradition within liberalism which is committed to the accommodation of difference, including that of distinct social groups, rather than to societal consensus on substantive moral principles. The final section argues that the conditions of this *modus vivendi* tradition of liberalism can be met today by means of protective group-rights for the churches and other contrast communities of liberal society.

A pluralist critique of the contrast church

Post-secular approaches to political action and debate can be portrayed in terms of the relationship between the visible and invisible church. The tendency of the civil religion approach is to subsume the visible by the invisible church, which can give rise to an over-
emphasis on political engagement at the expense of maintaining ecclesial forms. Conversely, a possible consequence of subsuming the invisible by the visible church, as in contrast church theory, is a rejection of participation in practical politics and an extremely non-activist account of the inauguration and spread of the Kingdom [Insole 2004, 121]. While proponents of the civil religion approach may assume too readily that Christian doctrines and principles help to remedy social and political problems, contrast church theorists are prone to condemning the world beyond the church to utter darkness [Stout 2004, 115]. The dualism or stark contrast between ecclesial and secular ways of life posited by contrast church theory helps to warn against exclusive preoccupation in worldly affairs, but it can also suggest that society has been so pervaded by our collective fallenness that it is little more than a sphere of rebellion against God’s Kingdom, destined in the fullness of time to pass away [Barns 2003, 258]. This dualism or contrast permits, if it does not entail, the belief that God does not operate within history but will reveal the meaning of history, and expedite all necessary justice, only at the end of time [Mathewes 2007, 239-40]. In that case there would be little point in looking outside the church for signs of God’s restorative activity in society and in the present. Or as Mathewes [2007, 241] portrays the danger, we may elect not to confront the conditions of our lives in the world in the belief that Jesus offers us a way to avoid those conditions.

The subsumption of the invisible by the visible church has two broad manifestations: it overemphasizes the purity of actual churches and it underestimates the potential of extra-

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218 See also Insole’s critique of Radical Orthodoxy theorists for their “too smooth...identification of the visible with the invisible Church...”[Insole 2004, 151ff.].
219 For Yoder, as Mathewes puts it here, “justice is reserved until the last judgement, and attempts to realize actual justice in this world are impious attempts to usurp God’s power.”
220 See Mouw 2007, 51, following Kuyper, for an example of the opposing position.
ecclesial social movements and ideas. Contrast church theory has been charged with being sectarian or isolationist in that it encourages both these tendencies.\textsuperscript{221} Thus, Hauerwas sees the church as an island of peace and unity in a liberal society, uniquely offering security, truth and fellowship. By favouring procedural principles over substantive conceptions of the good, he argues, liberal society has become a site of competition between self-interested and atomistic individuals and groups bereft of any history and plagued by fear, envy, and a warring, fragmentary culture.\textsuperscript{222} For Milbank \cite{Milbank2000,402} similarly, only the church provides "absolute consensus, agreement in desire, and entire harmony amongst its members…." Contrast church theorists tend not to recognize that the churches partake of the ambiguity of the temporal realm; that they are subject, like all human institutions, to conflict, complacency, corruption and mediocrity.\textsuperscript{223} The churches may provisionally anticipate the Kingdom of God, but they are not, as Earl Shaw \cite{Shaw1986,58} puts it, "ripped out of history," for their leaders and members remain sinners, intent on their own, egocentric ends. At the same time, contrast church theorists fail to see that, as Barth observed, the will of God has been fulfilled outside as well as within the churches – and often better outside them.\textsuperscript{224}

\textsuperscript{221} See Quirk 1987, 81: "'[s]ectarianism,' in its usual sense, entails the impossibility of any rational dialogue with those outside the 'sect,' on the grounds that their…central convictions are corrupt…." The critique from sectarianism comes up in most commentaries on the Radical Anabaptists: the best known statement of the critique is probably Gustafson 1985, especially 84-5. Other terms used in such commentaries include "fideism", "tribalism," and (in the case of Mathewes 2000) "polemical othering." See also Rasmusson 1995, 231ff. and Fergusson 1998, 64ff. Fergusson \cite{Fergusson1998,7} comments that this sectarianism seems to be "at odds with much of what Christian theology has historically tried to articulate in terms of natural law, common grace, and the orders of creation."


\textsuperscript{223} See Insole 2004, 7 and Tinder 1989, 93-4. See also Fergusson 1998, 67: "the principal weakness in Hauerwas’s theology is its overdetermination of the distinctiveness of the church."

\textsuperscript{224} Cited Insole 2004, 67. See also Stout 2004, 110 and Fergusson 1998, 74-5.
The danger of contrast church theory is that it can lead to the false conclusion that the worldly responsibilities of Christians are fulfilled by being faithful and active church-members. It is, in fact, not necessary to choose between political involvement and a uniquely Christian way of life, for the pursuit of particular social and political ends is compatible with the contrast church ideal of exemplifying the principles and practices of the Kingdom of God. In the Augustinian Two Cities or Kingdoms tradition, social and political processes take place in the *saeculum*, a time of incomplete redemption between the birth of Christ and the end of the world [O’Donovan 1996, 211ff.]. While utopia is beyond our reach in the *saeculum*, it does not follow that nothing good, true or beautiful exists in that period; that every word spoken then is one of false prophecy; that there is no hope.\(^{225}\) We can acknowledge that the primary duty of churches is to live out the manifestation of the Kingdom of God and yet identify a subsidiary duty to identify and celebrate aspects of the material world consistent with the ethos of the Kingdom. Christians can and should form judgments about other searches for meaning in society, distinguishing between true and false words spoken outside the churches and affirming the former in the face of the dominant, utilitarian culture.\(^{226}\) For Mathewes [2007, 164], Christians keep the faith, not by withdrawing from civic commitment but by engaging in it more fully, and for Tinder [1989, 155] “[t]o anticipate the coming of the Kingdom of God is merely sentimental…unless one seeks ways of reshaping society according to the form of the immanent community.”

\(^{225}\) See Johnson 2007, 229, and Stout 2004, 110, with reference to Barth. The Thomist position, similarly, is that the doctrine of apprehending divine truth on earth is denied.

\(^{226}\) Dostert 2006, 114, following Yoder; McClay 2003, 52-3, and Stout 2004, 111. See also Fergusson 2004, 101: “on some moral issues we have more in common with our contemporaries outside the church than [with] our ancestors within it.”
In reality, few contrast church theorists are entirely sectarian or isolationist: most support a number of social and humanitarian projects that reach across religious and cultural divisions [e.g. Hauerwas 1987, 89-90]. But their overriding commitment is to the ecclesial community, and they have proved reluctant to build on the common ground between ecclesial and other communities revealed by such projects, or to explore ways in which the two kinds of community can be beneficially transformed through mutual interaction [Dostert 2006, 125]. Because of their critique of liberalism from social atomism, they have been unwilling even to acknowledge that Christians generally belong to multiple particularistic communities. Contrast church theorists tend not to recognize that individual identity, including that of church-members, is shaped and sharpened not just by the values of a single community but also by conflicts within and between communities [Gray 2000a, 120-1]. Consequently, they are not adequately open to the possibility that their understanding of the Kingdom of God may be, as Mathewes [2007, 185] puts it, “problematically provisional, too tightly tied to [a] limited perspective in space and time.”

A pluralist development of contrast church theory would expand the concept of a contrast community to include other, non-ecclesial groups. The charge of sectarianism against contrast church theory can be allowed to the extent of acknowledging that, even in a liberal society, many social groups fulfill some of the conditions of a contrast community. For Hauerwas, as we noted in the last chapter, only the church can sustain its members as a people who are “not at home in

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227 See also Jenson 1992, 290: Hauerwas is “most reticent” on the question of whether communities have stories that work for them as the gospel does for the church.

228 See also Johnson 2007, 226, following Sandel, and Fergusson 1998, 75-6. Mathewes [2000, 351] points out that, in Hauerwas’s view, we see ourselves as “unencumbered by any relevant past....” (Original emphasis.)
the liberal presumptions of… society.”

Hauerwas appears to envisage all non-ecclesial groups in a liberal society as uniform, ruled by the principles of individual autonomy and choice and confined to the purpose of social utility. As we noted in the introduction, however, not all social groups ground their legitimacy on the autonomous consent of their members or on utilitarian purposes: besides the religious groups approved by contrast church theorists, many communities are governed by substantive conceptions of the good discovered through revelation or tradition and confirmed by custom and use. The churches do not enjoy a monopoly on moral virtue, or even on spiritual development. Non-ecclesial communities can lay claim to something of the inherent spiritual life that is the basis of the churches’ claim to constitute contrast communities within liberal society. As John Courtney Murray [1960, 203] points out, “sacred” includes much that is part of the temporal life of humans – *res sacra in temporalibus* – including notably the family.

It is hard to arrive at a satisfactory definition of contrast communities in a liberal society, in part because the principles of liberalism require all social groups to be voluntary associations in the sense of respecting freedom of exit and (to an extent) of entry. Religious groups (including those not endorsed by contrast church theorists) are, however, a useful example of the kind of community that cannot adequately be understood as the product of voluntary choices by individual members. Members of religious groups do not always conceive of their faith as having been chosen by them in the way that they have selected careers or hobbies; rather they may consider that their faith has called or elected them, or placed an encumbrance on them, so

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229 Hauerwas [1992], 12.

230 Lockwood O’Donovan 1994, 11-14. Novak [2004, 66] characterizes these as groups which have to do with our biological or communal origins, without any consent on our part.
that responding to its demands is best understood as an imperative, an act of conscience or duty rather than one of autonomous deliberation and choice [Sandel 1993, 484-6]. What gives their way of life significance, many religious citizens believe, is that God has shown them the way to live [Dostert 2006, 45]. Non-religious groups based on common descent, language or some other ascriptive quality may likewise appear to their members to be directly ordained by nature or history, or at least not to be reducible to an aggregate of individual members. One does not so much join such groups as one finds oneself in them. Even in the case of freedom of exit from ascriptive groups there are important if subjective differences from exiting a voluntary association. In fact, it is not always clear that one can extricate oneself from ascriptive groups: in what sense does one leave a language or an ethnic group, for instance?

As the last chapter suggested, one way to distinguish contrast from other communities is by means of the social spheres of liberalism. Like the churches, communities such as the family, neighbourhood and ethnic groups constitute communal spaces in an atomistic society,
alternatives to a public world which is increasingly, as Cady [1993, 27] puts it, “common, objective, and unaffected by historical and social location.” Like the churches, they are communities of memory, guardians of traditional views on the nature of humanity which typically diverge from the materialist conceptions of the wider society. All accounts of humanity which suggest that we are, in Tinder’s words [1989, 148], “grounded in a source of life beyond the state and… perfected in participating in a destiny that …may defy [the state]” help to mark out and fortify a private sphere of society by cultivating dissatisfaction with the institutions and principles of public life. As Mathewes points out, the view that we can find fulfillment only in a spiritual realm places all social and political institutions in question, not only on their own terms, because of the particular injustices that they permit or foster, but for the broader reason that our ends or purposes are fundamentally not this-worldly and no institution can do justice to them.Communities of memory help to ensure that we will not identify any political institution as the object of our ultimate faith or, as Mathewes [2007, 171] puts it, “idolatrously accept some immanent description of societal well-being as [our] summun bonum.”

For most post-secularists the churches should aspire to a role in the public sphere, or in an alternative or parallel public sphere, so that they can challenge the cultural hegemony and homogenization of liberal societies. A pluralist approach to post-secularism would situate the churches in the private sphere, where communities with diverse views and ways of life persist to some extent, in order to develop alternatives to the dominant liberal consensus. This approach would begin with a recognition of what is being thought and done in a society rather than with a

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235 Mathewes 2007, 259. See also Tinder 1989, 7, and Lovin 1986, 9. Elshtain [2001] argues that to put aside this doctrine of human nature poses a threat to the constitutional conception of the limited state. For her, the French Revolution and twentieth century totalitarianism failed because they radically misunderstood human nature.
conception of what ought to be thought and done.\textsuperscript{236} The churches can affirm and value the ideas and ways of life extant in society by emphasizing, not so much the normative doctrines of Christianity as its collection of indicatives, its stories of the life of Christ and the material world he inhabited.\textsuperscript{237} This approach would help to demarcate and strengthen a private sphere of society since the Christian collection of indicatives need not be – indeed generally cannot be – translated into the abstract and general terms of public reason. This approach would also support the concept of a contrast and visible church since (unlike the principles of public reason) stories and descriptions do not float free of an institutional setting but are remembered and passed down by the practices of particular communities. Yet an emphasis on stories over normative principles would also allow the churches to find common ground with other communities of memory, to form bonds of neighbourly affinity with them and to assist them in preserving their own distinctive narratives.\textsuperscript{238}

A pluralist approach to post-secularism would depart from contrast church theory not only by placing the churches primarily in the private sphere of society, but also by recognizing their occasional participation in the public sphere. As we noted, contrast church theory confines the churches to an alternative or parallel public sphere on the grounds that liberalism, being inherently secular and individualistic, is necessarily inhospitable to a public role of the churches.

\textsuperscript{238} See Woodiwiss 2001a, 162-3, with reference to Gadamer. The point seems to me not inconsistent with the well-known conclusion to MacIntyre 1984 [at 263]: “[w]hat matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us.”
The next section develops the pluralist approach to post-secularism by identifying aspects of liberalism which permit and enable competing norms and ways of life, especially religious ones.

Liberalism, pluralism and the churches

We have seen that the liberal model of public and private spheres is widely cited as one cause of the trivialization and marginalization of religion in Western societies. A second alleged cause, the substantive moral consensus of liberalism, was noted in the introduction to this study. Many political theorists have drawn attention to the disjunction between liberal-democratic theory, which stipulates a requirement for consensus in public life only on particular political structures and procedures, and the reality that the liberal consensus extends beyond procedural to substantive moral principles. Critics of liberalism focus on various components of the liberal moral consensus; the concern of post-secularists is, of course, mainly with agreement on public reason as the sole legitimate criterion of political arguments. Contrast church theorists in particular have become associated with a thoroughgoing critique of liberal regimes based on their culturally hegemonic and homogenizing tendencies. For them, as Thomson [2003, 77] puts it, difference in liberal societies “must ultimately be denied and excised.” This conception of liberalism underwrites the idea that the churches should inhabit an alternative or parallel public sphere in liberal societies.

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239 See note 26 above.

240 As Polet 2009, 114 points out, however, contrast church theorists do not necessarily have a particular animus against liberalism; they see themselves as oppositional, so in a liberal society they tend to oppose liberalism.
In the Two Cities tradition of Christian political thought, no political system or regime in the earthly city in the period of the *saeculum* can embody the *summum bonum*; none can satisfy our deepest needs or spare us from ultimate disaster, so we must resist the temptation to install any regime or political ideology as the object of our ultimate faith. For theorists in this tradition, however, we may approve in a qualified way such regimes as provide a measure of peace and justice in society.\(^{241}\) A qualified approval of liberalism would allow that it does, despite its self-understanding, favour certain substantive conceptions of the good, and yet acknowledge that it has proved reluctant to move from such conceptions to the full-blown coercion of individuals [Galston 1991, 89]. Even if liberals do believe that definitive, universal truth is at hand, they have been less likely than proponents of other regimes and ideologies to impose that truth throughout society. Following the Wars of Religion, liberalism was notable for its *modus vivendi* of multiple Christian denominations; today for its diversity of ways of life more generally [Crowder 1999, 8].\(^{242}\) As critics of Hauerwas and Yoder have pointed out, it would be hard even to imagine the contrast church in a non-liberal society.

We have noted that the primary historical influence on modern liberalism was the devastation caused by the Wars of Religion, which gave rise to fear and suspicion of the partial consensus represented by factions within society. One response to that factionalism has been to work towards a society-wide consensus on moral principles in the public as well as in the private sphere of society. This response is inspired and enabled largely by the Enlightenment belief that

\(^{241}\) See, for example, Mathewes 2007, 172; Johnson 2007, 229; Kraynak 2001, 94, and at 66: early Christians took positions on the particular issues of slavery, infanticide, suicide and so forth, though they “developed no real political theory and demanded no revolutionary changes in the politics or social structure of the Roman Empire.”

\(^{242}\) See also Walker [2002, 120], who points out that liberalism’s exclusions have historically proven to be less oppressive than those of non-liberal regimes.
laws immanent to society and in the interest of all citizens can be discovered through reason, and that a societal consensus on those laws would establish a just and stable foundation for political life. An alternative response to the religious wars can be found, however, in a tradition of liberalism, originating with Hobbes, which favours a procedural over a moral consensus in the public sphere. In this tradition, societal consensus on moral norms is not a *sine qua non* of a healthy liberal society, nor moral disagreement necessarily incompatible with it. In order to be able to co-exist in society, we require principally institutions and procedures capable of resolving such differences as arise, or cultural accommodation rather than cultural solidarity.\(^{243}\)

We can refer to these two traditions of liberalism as ‘enlightened’ and ‘modus vivendi.’\(^{244}\) The enlightened tradition is moralist and ameliorist; it aspires to produce better citizens in a better society. (Hence liberal theorists in this tradition are sometimes known, following Rawls, as “perfectionist.”) The *modus vivendi* tradition is pre-moral in the sense that it is guided by the practical concern of containing and minimizing conflict under conditions of social diversity; it limits itself to securing the arrangements which can best cope with diversity while proving acceptable to those who live under them. As Fish [1999, 63] portrays the *modus vivendi*

\(^{243}\) Or as Song [1994, 164] puts it, what we require is “a willingness to co-operate, without a commitment to shared substantive values.” For similar positions, see Gray 2000a, 121; McGraw 2010, 174-5, and Chaplin 2008, 77.

\(^{244}\) Comparable distinctions include those between comprehensive and political liberalism [Rawls 1996]; Lockean as opposed to Hobbesian [Gray 2000a, 2-3], and civic assimilationist as opposed to proceduralist liberalism [Parekh 2000, 199-200]. Parekh recognizes a third, ‘millet’ category, corresponding to the group-pluralism advocated in this chapter. However, this chapter suggests below that the proceduralist category would be compatible with group-pluralism if the individualistic bias of many of the category’s major proponents could be challenged and overcome.
tradition, it is demographic rather than philosophical, a matter of learning how to live together without coming to blows.\(^{245}\)

Political theorists within the enlightened tradition have historically sought to broaden the substantive consensus of liberal society to include previously marginalized groups and ideas. For instance, the narrow consensus of Lockeian liberalism has been expanded to encompass Roman Catholics, atheists, and those of non-Christian faiths. The civil religion approach to post-secularism continues this tradition, challenging a narrow societal consensus on secular reason by showing that the contributions of the churches to public life have posed no threat to liberal democracy but rather have often strengthened it in many ways. One problem with this approach, however, is that it will be met by strong secularists armed with counter-examples of groups, such as the New Christian Right, whose commitment to liberal democracy is demonstrably weak. An alternative, pluralist approach to post-secularism would not engage the content of the actual consensus of actual societies so much as the purported need for such a consensus in the first place. It would build on the *modus vivendi* case for (what Galston [2002, 119] calls) “the maximum feasible accommodation of diverse legitimate ways of life limited only by the minimum requirements of civic unity.”

The visible, contrast church can contribute to the development of the *modus vivendi* tradition to some extent. A church confined to invisibility, as in the Kantian ideal, may succeed in

\(^{245}\) See also Fish 1999, 180-1 for a more detailed portrayal of this approach. In McGraw’s account, this approach seeks to secure the goods that are necessary for politics and then does its best to honour the desires of citizens to live as they see fit [McGraw 2010, 243].
expanding and shaping the liberal consensus, but not in offering a true alternative to it.\textsuperscript{246}

Historically, the claims of the visible church to independence as an institution, rather than any particular theological doctrine, prepared the way for the central liberal and \textit{modus vivendi} principle that state and society are separate entities and that the state is limited in its rights over society. Chaplin [2004] observes that

\begin{quote}
[a]s classical civilization unravelled, the appearance of a historically unprecedented institution asserting a transpolitical, transcendent, origin and authorization – the church – changed the nature of Western political thought…forever.\textsuperscript{247}
\end{quote}

Western political thought became, in Charles Taylor’s term, “bifocal”: the assertion that the church precedes the state, historically or ontologically, resulted in a dual source of authority in society, \textit{imperium} and \textit{ecclesia}, and so in a principle of resistance to the force of sovereign political power [Taylor 1995, 211].\textsuperscript{248}

The implications of the divinely authorized and visible church go beyond the freedom of religion and the church from state interference to that of other social groups and their ways of life. The intent of pre- and early-modern church leaders was, for the most part, to establish simply that the church was not a creation of the state, subject to its sovereignty in all particulars. By pursuing this limited end, however, those leaders helped to carve out a space beyond the reach of the state in which other, non-ecclesial groups could also thrive.\textsuperscript{249} As Lucy May Hawkins [1928, 167-8] points out, to admit the essential freedom of social groups in spiritual matters is to open the door

\textsuperscript{246} See Malesic 2009, 226, citing Hauerwas’s critique of Bonhoeffer.

\textsuperscript{247} See also Cavanaugh 2002, 54-5, following John Courtney Murray.

\textsuperscript{248} See also Kraynak 2001, 105-6 and Hollenbach 2003, 156, for whom “the assertion of the right to religious freedom was a key factor in the movement that brought about modern constitutional democracy.”

\textsuperscript{249} See, for example, Hollenbach 2003, 157; Tinder 1989, 104, and Nicholls 1975, 33.
to their claims to freedom in other matters too. The contribution of the visible churches to social
diversity persists today: in Dostert’s view, religious liberty in the U.S. has been achieved, not so
much by abstract principles as by communities waging struggles on behalf of their religious
convictions [Dostert 2006, 52]. Lovin [1986, 14] concurs that such struggles have helped to
guarantee the freedom to live our lives as we see fit: “by their very existence,” he argues,
“[religious] groups taken together secure a whole range of freedoms for all persons in the
society.”

The modus vivendi tradition can be developed as well by classical theology, distinguished in the
last chapter from the contextual theology generally proclaimed by today’s mainline churches. A
number of doctrines of classical theology lend support to the pluralist principle of the maximum
feasible accommodation of diversity. For instance, the doctrine of eschatological dualism denies
the hope for an immanent, this-worldly realization of the Kingdom of God by suggesting that
society as a whole will succeed in coming together in love and community only at the end of
time [Johnson 2007, 233–4]. The doctrine of human sinfulness also implies that society cannot
be fully redeemed in history; that there is unlikely to be any final overcoming of evil by good
prior to the eschaton. If violence and evil are pervasive features of human nature, all power in
the saeculum should be exercised with hesitation and humility, and political structures should be
designed primarily to inhibit the freedom of power-holders to impose their conceptions of the
ideal society.250 Oliver O’Donovan [1996, 255] identifies further doctrines supporting modus
vivendi liberalism, including “a sphere of individual responsibility before God in which the
public good is not immediately at stake” and the necessity of creating space for mission. As

250 See, for example, Mathewes 2007, 188; Insole 2004, 34-5, following Edmund Burke, and Elshtain 2001, 9-10.
O’Donovan [269] points out, an area of openness to diverse forms of speech is required by the injunction to accommodate the word spoken by servants “lest the voice of true prophecy should go unheard.”

The doctrines of contextual theology, in contrast, tend to underwrite the enlightened tradition of liberalism. Thus, while the eschatological dualism of classical theology invokes an apocalyptic cosmology to warn against perfectionist visions of the good life, contextual theology commonly appeals to cosmic eschatology to develop conceptions of the ideal, just society [Fiorenza 1992, 76-7]. Similarly, contextual theology transforms the language of sin from moral condemnation into socio-political and moral diagnosis. Where classical theology subscribes to a concept of liberty as an acknowledgement on the part of the state that it is not supreme and that it must not transgress certain limits in its dealings with society, contextual theology today generally conceives of liberty in terms of rights granted by the state to its citizens. Arguments from individual responsibility before God and openness to prophecy likewise find their contemporary equivalents in the principles of personal autonomy and individual rights. As Mathewes [2007, 254] observes, “the language of rights and of individuals as fundamentally bearers of rights” has achieved “absolute hegemony” in the political platforms of many churches.

The distinction between state and society may seem secure today, but it increasingly takes the form of one between the state and individuals. From a group-pluralist perspective, the problem

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251 See Tinder 1989, 106 for further examples of Christian principles supporting *modus vivendi* liberalism.

252 See, for example, Mathewes 2002, 564-5 and Tinder 1989, 165.

253 See also Walsh 2003, 187: “the Christian churches…now increasingly see the nexus of human rights as the primary focus of their public authority.”
with liberalism is that it concentrates exclusively on these two components of society, while the real conflict in modern political history has been between the state and local, particularistic communities. In this account, the sovereign state has gradually assumed the powers and responsibilities formerly present in such communities, resulting in an increased directness in the relationship between the state and its citizens [Cavanaugh 2002, 72-3]. Proponents of group-pluralism argue that individual rights cannot provide a principle of resistance to state sovereignty because they are, in effect, a concomitant of the rise of the modern state to absolute power: as David Nicholls [1975, 82] puts it, the powers of the state and the rights of individuals have grown in tandem as “two sides of the same coin.” Individual rights lack any equivalent of the claims of ecclesia to represent an eternal, transpolitical authority which renders the temporal power of imperium relative and provisional and invites rulers to acknowledge the proper limits of their sovereignty over society. The claims of ecclesia, unlike those of individual rights, suggest that the state is not based on sacral foundations and they lend support to the idea that society is not identical to its political order. The core liberal and modus vivendi principle that state and society are separate orders is therefore not secure today: there are many examples, some of which we will consider in Chapter Six, of the politicization of the private sphere as well as of the privatization of what should properly be public.

The churches can help to preserve the distinction between state and society by means of an ecclesial life and a theology which resist the homogenizing tendencies of liberalism. The very existence of a visible community that lays claim to predating the state has, as we noted, the effect

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254 See, for example, O’Donovan 1996, 252; Taylor 1995, 211; Kraynak 2001, 87, 164, 208, and Voegelin 1952, 106. See also Mathewes 2007, 254: “[w]hat the state lays claim to is not its proper possession; it is on loan, as it were, from the heavenly kingdom.”

255 The danger of a fusion of public and private is a principal theme of Elshtain 1997.
of placing limitations on the institutions of the state apparatus. In today’s multicultural societies, however, it is too much to expect the churches alone to shoulder the traditional role of *ecclesia* in the face of competing ideologies, most of them secular and many statist and/or individualistic. Here we return to the pluralist critique of contrast church theory introduced in the last section, for the churches can find support in other social groups which would seem also to qualify as visible and contrast groups in a liberal society. Post-secularists can help to develop pluralist elements in liberalism by recognizing a variety of groups which sustain and pass down alternatives to the societal consensus on substantive conceptions of the good.  

This approach to post-secularism finds some support in the *modus vivendi* tradition of liberalism, which would sanction independent social groups to the extent that they could establish practical accommodation with the wider society [Galston 1995, 519]. However, virtually all classical liberal theorists, including Hobbes, are subject to a bias in favour of the autonomy of the individual in relation to both social groups and the state, as against that of the social group in relation to its own members and the state. This bias continues to shape theories of liberalism today, despite the apparently diminishing threat of factionalism to the social order since the Wars of Religion. The next section considers one means of rectifying this imbalance, a means which also provides a suggestion as to the proper content of the public witness of the churches.

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256 As Plant [1985, 327] portrays the pluralism of J.N. Figgis, it “assumes a framework of moral agreement between plural groups which, while not necessarily resting on a Christian morality, is at least consistent with it.”
The churches and protective group rights

A post-secular society should not publicly sanction, much less impose, a particular body of religious beliefs, but should simply ensure the conditions under which religious beliefs can be meaningful for those who subscribe to them.\textsuperscript{257} The post-secular ideal should be a pluralist society in which diverse groups co-exist peacefully while maintaining their autonomy and distinctive identity. This ideal is partly negative or defensive in that it involves the demarcation and protection of a sphere of communities from infiltration by the state and majoritarian culture; it is negative since (as Tinder [1989, 68] points out) community presupposes liberty and cannot be deliberately constructed. Liberal pluralism traditionally requires only that religious groups are treated no differently from other groups; that they are left alone to pursue the ways of life stipulated by their faith. Today, however, with constant interference by states in those ways of life, and with the homogenizing and secularizing effects of liberal culture, a pluralist society may need to make distinctions between groups in the form of preferential treatment.\textsuperscript{258} If the liberal state has a positive obligation to create and maintain the conditions under which diverse social groups can flourish, that obligation should extend to according religious groups special protective rights.

A wide range of social groups – hospitals, symphony orchestras, zoos and so forth – enjoy regular state support in liberal societies, as do many religious groups in the form of charitable

\textsuperscript{257} See, for example, Bailey 2003, 83 and Grasso 1995, 43.
\textsuperscript{258} See, for example, Williams 1994, 57; Novak 2004, 56, and Habermas 2006, 268-9. As McGraw [2010, 242] argues, “[i]t is perhaps unavoidable that political institutions will unfairly advantage some ways of life over others,” but “liberalism properly understood will seek to mitigate that unfairness as a means of making toleration politically effective.” This is, of course, a central argument of the politics of identity and recognition, and (in the particular case of religious groups) of Stephen Carter’s work [e.g. 1997, 1998].
and tax-free status.\textsuperscript{259} Because of the principle of the separation of church and state, however, such material or “external” protective rights are not secure in the case of religious groups and there is little sign of their expanding to include other forms of public support. The extreme form of public support is establishment, which clearly does violate liberal neutrality, but few post-secularists subscribe to establishment as an ideal. Many post-secularists do maintain, however, that (like zoos and orchestras) religious groups are valuable social institutions which contribute to society in a variety of ways and which should therefore be entitled to receive their share of public benefits.\textsuperscript{260} In Slovakia, for instance, the state has elected to support a range of churches on the grounds of their role in shaping the moral values of society [Trigg 2007, 16]. Many post-secularists argue further that conditioning state support for groups on their secular purposes infringes the weak principle of neutrality in that it does not treat all comprehensive doctrines without prejudice. Thus, in the consocialist model of Holland and Germany, not only churches but a variety of social institutions governed by a religious ethos, including educational, welfare and charitable groups, are treated equitably with their secular counterparts in regards to state funding.\textsuperscript{261}

A second type of protective right, known as “internal,” exempts certain groups from laws requiring behaviour which might undermine the ways of life that bind those groups together. An example of such rights is provided by the case of \textit{Wisconsin v Yoder} (1972), in which an Amish

\textsuperscript{259} These examples are Hitchcock’s [1981, 12]. Hitchcock comments that “in the area of religion…it often appears that the courts, from a separationist standpoint, take a certain satisfaction in permitting as many financial burdens as possible to develop.”

\textsuperscript{260} See Carter 1998, 36 and Trigg 2007, 215, who both make the argument specifically in regards to religious schools and colleges.

\textsuperscript{261} The point is central to McGraw 2010, e.g. 246-7. See also Rosenblum 2000, 11 and 182.
community argued successfully that a law requiring its youth to attend school between the ages of 14 and 16 would cause the community to lose its defining identity.\textsuperscript{262} In a comparable case, parents in a fundamentalist group argued in \textit{Mozert v. Hawkins County Board of Education} (1987) that their children should not be required to attend classes which adopted a ‘survey’ or comparative approach to religion.\textsuperscript{263} The point made by the religious groups in both cases was based on the premise that faith and ways of life are interdependent. The way of life required by the public schools of the children in \textit{Mozert}, for instance, allegedly had the effect of undermining the children’s faith in beliefs not reached by the exercise of their unaided reason.\textsuperscript{264} The justification for internal protective rights is that the integrity of a community, its capacity to constitute itself according to its own meanings, depends not just on its right to subscribe to beliefs of its choosing, but also on its freedom to engage unhindered in courses of action mandated by those beliefs and to ensure that succeeding generations within the group retain that freedom.\textsuperscript{265} Internal group rights are necessary to the kind of pluralism that encompasses a diversity of social groups as well as of individuals, for they help to create the conditions, the effective practices and relationships, which generate in their members a disposition to live up to the ideals of their community and to co-operate in furthering those ideals [Rosenblum 1998b, 55]. The churches in particular require authority over their members because religion entails

\textsuperscript{262} \textit{Wisconsin v. Yoder} 406 US 205 (1972).

\textsuperscript{263} \textit{Mozert v. Hawkins County Board of Education} 827 F.2d 1058; 1987, U.S. App. LEXIS 11385; 102 A.L.R. Fed. 497. The \textit{Mozert} case is of particular interest because the ‘survey’ approach to religious education is often a matter of public policy. For example, a 1998 Circular from the U.S. Department of Education stipulates that “public schools may not provide religious instruction, but they may teach about religion, including the Bible or other scripture.” Cited Trigg 2007, 178.

\textsuperscript{264} See Fish 1999, 198; Rosenblum 2000, 177, and Dostert 2006, 44-5. See also Marshall 1994, 150: “the child learns implicitly that each religion has a claim as good as any other so that what is paramount is the priority of her own individual choice… the pupil becomes trained in the dogmatics of liberalism.”

\textsuperscript{265} See Marshall 1994, 149: the priority of individual choice “undercuts the ability of a community to shape its members and succeeding generations so that they will uphold the truth at all costs.” See also Carter 1998, 56 and McGraw 2010, 272.
commitment and discipline: certain practices must be adhered to and others proscribed [Thomson 2003, 212].

While external protective rights exist in tension with the principle of liberal neutrality, internal protective rights may clash with the substantive liberal principle of individual autonomy. From a group-pluralist perspective, however, internal group rights can help to rectify an undue emphasis in liberal societies on the state and the individual. In Chapter Two we noted that for Habermas the liberal norm of tolerance is a barrier to the regeneration of public debate on religious norms because of its inherent limitations on what is tolerated. Group-pluralists identify the barrier to debate more narrowly: for them, liberal tolerance masks a prejudice specifically against the often authoritarian forms of traditional communities. Because liberal tolerance extends mainly to beliefs (which groups may adopt more or less at will) rather than to actions (which are generally subject to the principle of autonomous individual choice), it can impede the capacity of religious groups to transmit their beliefs to members by means of substantial religious practice as well as by appeal to their individual rights of conscience.266 As Paul Marshall [1994, 158] suggests, the choice that we face is not so much between authoritarian groups and autonomous individuals, as between individual choice within homogenous institutions and group diversity with some limits on individualism.267 Without those limits, many groups could not form or, having formed, maintain their distinct identity for long. From a group-pluralist perspective, religion thus requires protection for its corporate as well as its individual expression, even when this

267 See also Galston 2002, 21 and 1995, 521ff.
protection results in some discomfort for individuals and minorities within groups. As we shall see in Chapter Six, however, while internal protective rights do limit individual choice in one way, they expand it in the sense of helping to ensure a range of alternatives for all citizens in society.

Internal group rights have been criticized as well for undermining the liberal principles of equal regard and respect [Habermas 2008a, 263]. One common example of internal rights is exemption from the non-discrimination requirements of employment law: the churches, along with their secondary or satellite religious groups such as schools, have at times been granted the right to restrict offers of employment to those who share their faith commitments. The best known instance here is the Roman Catholic Church, which is not legally required to ordain women. In the case of some fundamentalist institutions, this right has been invoked to justify discrimination on bases which (like that of gender) appear to violate equal regard and respect, such as sexual orientation. However, group-pluralism is by no means bound to approve all instances of internal group rights: while it seeks to curtail the power of the state by demanding the greatest possible autonomy to social groups, it does permit the state to act within groups in


269 See, for example, Justice Brennan in Amos, cited Rosenblum 2000, 179-80: “the furtherance of the autonomy of religious organizations often furthers individual religious freedom as well.”

270 For example, in Caldwell vs. St Thomas Aquinas High School (1984) 2 SCR 2603, the right of a Roman Catholic denominational school to its insist that its teaching staff obey the marital rules of the Catholic Church was upheld; in Trinity Western vs. British Columbia College of Teachers (2001) 1 S.C.R. 772, (2001) SCC 31, the Court found that Trinity Western’s policy prohibiting homosexual behavior did not violate the B.C. College of Teacher’s anti-discrimination policy, and in Vriend v Alberta (1998) 1 SCR 493, the right of a private Christian college to dismiss a laboratory instructor on the grounds of his sexual orientation was affirmed. These examples are not intended to suggest that the courts have consistently or even predominantly favoured group over individual rights, but simply to show that the concept of internal rights for religious groups is not without precedent.
Group-pluralism does not require a libertarian or minimalist state. Nor does it presuppose value-relativism, or the view that values are invariably relative to particular groups and individuals; it is compatible with the value-pluralist position that the state must distinguish between fundamental human goods, to be upheld throughout society, and diverse conceptions of the good above that baseline, to be accommodated as far as possible. The churches can contribute to this value-pluralist position by providing a religious perspective on, and justification for, the set of fundamental goods which must not be overridden by protective group-rights.

Habermas’s turn to post-secularism has been motivated in part by a concern about increasing value-relativism in liberal democracies, which he ascribes to individualism and secularism. He argues that the exclusion of religion from public debate relies on an outdated conception of the incommensurability of viewpoints, a conception in which diverse perspectives on the good appear to be “semantically closed universes,” sealed off from constructive dialogue with one another [Habermas 2008b, 25]. Habermas encourages debate between religious and secular citizens partly in the hope that religion can contribute to developing an encompassing social ethics, independent of the norms of actual individuals and communities and authoritative for all. However deep the perspectival differences that they bring to debate, religious and secular citizens can potentially agree on the need for a core of fundamental civic values, a moral

[271] See Chaplin 2008, 78-9 (following Dooyeweerd) and 1994, 90: “associations should… in general be left free by the state to adopt their own internal rules…[but] these must be conducive to realizing their natural moral purpose. The freedom of association…carries with it the duty to see that the association fulfills its morally legitimate purpose. If this duty is not fulfilled it may be necessary for the state to intervene to ensure that it is.”


[273] For Habermas [ibid.], the problem stems from “a cultural relativism beefed up with a critique of reason on the one side, and a rigid secularism pushing for a critique of religion on the other.” See also Fiorenza 1992, 73.
threshold below which life cannot be considered minimally human, decent and acceptable.²⁷⁴

These core values can be brought to bear on particular cases of internal group rights claims in order to distinguish between those which should be accommodated and those which should be denied on the grounds of public justice.

If the churches are to contribute to shaping a set of fundamental or core values, they cannot be restricted to exemplifying a contrast polity in an alternative public sphere. For the most part, however, debate on these core values would not require access to Habermas’s narrow public sphere of the state apparatus, but only to his outer public sphere of debate between concerned citizens. (It is preferable, in fact, that the debate not be confined to the institutions of the state because its end or purpose is to formulate the moral limits within which not only social groups but also the state and public bodies must act.) The most important part of the contribution of the churches to shaping fundamental or core values takes place, however, in the private sphere of society, where they can discern and build on shared moral agreement between communities of memory. A pluralist approach to post-secularism would therefore develop Habermas’s division of the liberal public sphere into a tripartite model of social spheres to replace the simple dualism of public and private. As we will see in the next chapter, this model would consist of the state apparatus, an intermediate sphere of civic associations and open public debate, and a private sphere of communities as well as of domestic life and unorganized individual activities.

²⁷⁴ See Galston 2002, 50, following Isaiah Berlin, and Gray [2000b, 99], who refers to “a universal minimum morality that specifies universal goods and bads that mark the boundaries of a worthwhile human life.”
For Augustine, as we noted in the introduction to this study, the church may intervene in matters of state in order to challenge intrusions into ecclesial practices. A pluralist approach to post-secularism would widen that stipulation to include violations of the ways of life of non-ecclesial communities of memory. The churches belong in the private sphere of society, but they can enter public debate in order to promote and defend protective group rights and the fundamental values that both underwrite and circumscribe these rights without compromising the authority of their voice. A role confined to this exceptional political intervention would situate the churches between the civil religion approach to post-secularism, which courts redundancy through over-exposure, and the contrast church approach, which too often renounces engagement in practical politics. However, the central insight of contrast church theory should be retained, for even occasional public witness will not be effective unless the churches can maintain a dynamic and vital profile as private communities of discipleship [Casanova 1994, 224]. The common ground between the churches and other communities should not be developed to the point that the distinction between them is lost; the aim is coalition rather than union. The churches can bring a radical perspective to public debate only if they retain their unique identity as what Coffey [1997, 60] calls “God’s counter-cultural community,” or Coleridge [1976, 114], “the sustaining, correcting, befriending Opposite of the world.”

275 Augustine 1950, 696, 698 (19 §17 and §19).
276 Augustine seems at least to open the door to this position when he states in the same chapter [1950, 698 (19 §19)] that “[n]o man has a right to lead such a life of contemplation as to forget in his own ease the service due to his neighbour…”
277 See Hauerwas 1987, 87: the question is not whether to withdraw from political society, but “how to relate discriminatingly both to the cultures and the corresponding political forms in which Christians find themselves.” Fergusson [1998, 159] makes a similar point.
Chapter Five
Post-Secularism and Civil Society

This study has suggested that a revival of debate between secular and religious citizens on public issues is the most important task facing post-secularists. For Habermas, as we saw in Chapter Two, that debate takes place in an outer public sphere where the rules designed to prevent the domination of law and public policy by religious groups do not apply. This chapter relates the concept of an outer public sphere to that of civil society, which is generally situated between the public and the private spheres of the traditional liberal model. The first section of this chapter demonstrates how civil society theory has been useful to post-secularism by providing an alternative to what Jeff Weintraub [1997, 15] calls the Procrustean dualism of the public and private spheres. The second section shows how the crisis of civil society, as measured principally by declining membership in civic associations and rising political apathy, constitutes an obstacle to the post-secular project of reviving inclusive public debate. The final section discusses a remedy for ‘uncivil society’ [Boyd, 2004], one that draws on the work of Habermas and the civil religion approach to post-secularism.

Civil society and the public churches

Prior to the eighteenth century, “civil society” usually referred to the whole of politically organized society; today it denotes more specifically an area of social existence differentiated from the state.\(^{278}\) The concept of civil society was not central to political theory for most of the

\(^{278}\) See Seligman 1992, 3-4; Chaplin 2008, 69, with reference to Christopher Beem, and Chaplin 2004: “in classical, medieval, and early modern times, this whole was characterized variously as *polis*, *civitas*, *respublica*,...
twentieth century, in part because of the expansion of the modern state, which has left only a small area, generally conceived as the private sphere, beyond its reach. The concept returned to common currency late in the century at first as a way of illustrating the independent areas of social activity that emerged in the latter years of the Soviet empire. A new term seemed to be needed to describe these decentralized, self-regulating domains within the communist states, which had been characterized by the myth of collective harmony. The concept of civil society was adopted too in Latin American studies, where it helped to portray democratic resistance to state power in the form of new human rights groups. The concept was soon taken up by Western theorists of liberal democracy, who saw that it could help to redress problems with the liberal model of the public and private spheres. For most political theorists today, the public sphere consists of more than policy decisions reached by executives, legislatures and judiciaries; it includes discussion on matters of general interest by citizens linked by public forms of communication and supported by rights such as free speech and access to information. A related problem of the liberal model is the implication that all social life beyond the public sphere is to be understood in terms of the activities of individuals. Taken together, these aspects of the liberal model result in a near exclusive concern with just two components of society, the

commonwealth, body politic, or political society. These were not synonyms; they suggested different understandings of the relation between the institutions we now call political and those that were referred to as their parts or members or organs. But none seemed to permit the isolation of a sphere of social reality that was not political.” (Original emphasis)

279 For accounts of these usages, see Rosenblum 1994a, 545; 1994b, 71, and 1998b, 34; Chaplin 2008, 67; Skillen 2004, 22, and Habermas 1992, 454-5.

280 See, for example, Griffioen 1994, 163; Hollenbach 2003, 158-9 and 1994, 45; Mouw and Griffioen 1993, 80-2, and Calhoun 1997, 235. For Habermas [1989a, 231], “[c]itizens act as a public when they deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion; thus with the guarantee that they may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicize their opinions freely.”
state and the individual, an assumption that the central problems confronting societies today can be reduced to the relationship between them [Chaplin 1994, 81; Skillen 1994, 28-9].

Civil society theory amends classical liberalism by introducing an intermediate sphere to the public/private model, allowing for a public sphere of the state apparatus as well as one of public opinion and discussion. Where Locke and Blackstone ground the social order on the prior, natural rights of individuals, in particular their rights to political freedoms and private property, the civil society model recognizes that we are not only political citizens and economic producers but also cultural beings who require what Maurice Reckitt called “an associative quality” in society, manifested in a complex of social groupings with an inherent life of their own. Civil society theory accords a place to groups which have both a public and a private face, including labor unions and professional societies, schools, sports and leisure associations, co-operatives, neighborhood and workplace organizations, political interest groups and charities. Such groups are not public in the sense of being part of the institutionalized polity, and public policy is not the immediate aim of all that they discuss, but their ideas and interests are germane to the public interest and they do have a political impact inasmuch as the considerations that ultimately shape policies are often developed and articulated in them. By expanding the liberal model to include a third sphere of society, one of civic associations, civil society theory attests to the growing appreciation of the group-pluralism discussed in previous chapters [Chaplin 2006, 146].

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281 See, for example, Cavanaugh 2002, 53: civil society “names a space that, above all, is public without being political in the usual sense of direct involvement with the state.” Other terms for the sphere include an informal or voluntary sector, an autonomous sphere, and a sphere of mediating structures.


283 See, for example, Berger and Neuhaus 1996, 3; Honohan 2000, 169, and Thiemann 1996, 152.
Contemporary churches are a prime example of the semi-public groups of civil society. As we noted in the introduction, the liberal model is especially problematic for post-secular accounts of the role of the churches as it suggests that they will either aspire to hegemonic control over state institutions or confine themselves to the individual spiritual concerns of Christians. The model falls short empirically in misrepresenting the role that the disestablished and denationalized churches fulfill both in the industrialized and in many developing countries, where they are no longer allied to the state yet deeply involved in public issues [Weithman 2002, 56-7]. For the most part, modern churches do not seek to impose their doctrines on society by means of legislation, but rather contribute to public life indirectly, using avenues provided for public debate and action in civil society. Their efforts are directed towards state policies by creating and sustaining arms or groups devoted to social justice, and by working in concert with other, like-minded groups.\textsuperscript{284} Civil society theory envisions a form of political life that is communal without being statist, and so allows us to recognize the public activity of the churches while countering the charge that whenever religion becomes public, religious coercion will ensue [Hollenbach 2003, 153; Cavanaugh 2002, 53-4]. The concept of civil society has therefore been helpful to normative post-secularists, those who seek not just to record and explain the semi-public role of the modern churches but, in the face of strong secularist schools of thought, to defend and promote the freedom of the churches to participate in public debate.

Civil society theory has proved to be of interest to political theorists concerned by declining opportunities for political participation in modern democracies. The associations of civil society help to provide a remedy for a problem identified by Habermas as the “isolation of system,” or

\textsuperscript{284} See, for example, Coleman 1997; Cavanaugh 2002, 58; Mathewes 2002, 555, and Fergusson 2004, 163-4.
the “uncoupling of system and lifeworld,” which refers to the growing immunity of politics and economics (or in Habermas’s terms, the administrative areas of modern society coordinated by money and power) to the norms and values of everyday life. Traditional theories of liberalism cannot help to address this problem since they do not endorse a public or collective realm distinct from that of the state of the apparatus, one in which common values are pursued and accorded legitimacy, nor recognize alternative sources of political power to those of electoral politics and parties. Proponents of deliberative democracy are concerned by the isolation of system because they consider rational control by citizens over politics and economics to be essential to social justice [Chambers 2002, 96ff.]. For theorists in the civic republican tradition, inspired by the Aristotelian-Thomist vision of political life, the isolation of system is a problem because political participation is an inherent or intrinsic good, essential for human flourishing. The associational groups of civil society are of interest to both these traditions in that they provide the resources that citizens require to act together to shape their common life. From one direction civic associations transmit the norms and ideas of private life to the public sphere, helping to determine which policies the state should establish and enforce; from the other, they help to make public the reasons for state action, and they provide a site for debate about those reasons [Rosenblum 1998b, 25ff.; Chambers 2002, 96-7].

It is here that we find the post-secular case against the liberal concept of privatized religion at its strongest, for studies show that churches are prominent among the associations through which

\[\text{285} \text{ Habermas 1983, Chapter Six, part 2 and 307-309; Fiorenza 1992, 70, 72.}\]

\[\text{286} \text{ As Mathewes [2007, 177] puts it succinctly, in this tradition, “[p]olitical engagement does not make the nation; it makes citizens….“ (Original emphasis.) See Kymlicka and Norman 1994, 362 for an introduction to this tradition.}\]
citizens become involved in the lives of their communities. The motivation to become politically active and the development of the skills to participate successfully have been found to be closely related to membership of churches, which have been described as "incubators for tomorrow’s political activists." Voluntary political activity, voting in particular, is twice as frequent among church members as among members of any other civic associations [Weithman 2002, 41-2]. Church members typically learn to speak in public, to communicate with representatives, to organize and chair meetings, and to recruit others to political activity as successfully even as members of specifically political organizations and labor unions [Weithman 2002, 43, 40-1]. Further, church-membership has been shown to empower the weakest members of society, those whose voices are often disregarded. As a general rule, political skills are more common among the rich and well-educated, but churches differ from other associations in that the relationship between family income and political skills is much less significant in them. In the U.S., for example, African-American church-members are more involved in politics than white members, and citizens without a high-school diploma are five times more likely to be recruited for political activity when they are members of a church.

Civil society theory has been embraced as well by communitarian critics of liberalism, for whom the celebration of the individual in modern society had resulted in a corrosion of traditional

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287 Verba et al. 1995, e.g. 18-9, 282-3. Coleman points out that in the U.S. no other organization (i.e. besides the church) receives as much money, time, and commitment from its members, nor generates as much voluntary activity outside its boundaries. In fact, citizens donate more time and money to religious groups than to all other voluntary organizations combined [Coleman 1997, 286]. See also Wuthnow: 40% of the U.S. population is involved in small groups and two-thirds of those groups are sponsored by religious organizations or devoted to spiritual development [Wuthnow 1996, 62].

288 Cited by Hollenbach 2003, 158. See also Weithman 2002, 49, 76.

289 Weithman 2002, 46, 44-5. See also Mathewes 2002, 556: “often congregations cross wealth and culture divides in ways few if any other associations do.”
values and a crisis of social integration [Bellah et al. 1985]. For these theorists, the liberal model of public and private contributes to the social atomism and anomie following from the disintegration of communities and kinship groups. Berger and Neuhaus [1996; 1st ed. 1977] were among the first to direct attention to the importance of an intermediate sphere of civic associations in mediating the adverse effects, not only of the predatory power of political and economic megastructures (as in Soviet and Latin American studies), but also of egoism and individualism in modern societies. (Soviet and Latin American theorists, being focused on stimulating pluralism by encouraging a variety of personal and social activity, were or have been typically less concerned that the new, extra-statist areas of society would prove to be dominated by individualistic values [Rosenblum 1994b, 71].) A significant portion of civil society theory is devoted to showing how associations nurture and form civic virtues, the habits and attitudes such as trust, compassion and responsibility for others – in Robert Putnam’s term, “social capital” – which contribute to social integration as well as to political participation and self-government, and which the state is arguably incapable of nurturing [Putnam 2000, e.g. 22-4].

For John A. Coleman [1997, 278], “the civility that makes democratic politics possible gets learned in the associational networks of civil society.”

Here again civil society theory has helped the case for post-secularism, for churches have been cited by many communitarians as the kind of community which counters a culture of separation.

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290 This position is currently called communitarian, but there have been similar concerns about modernity, industrialization and the disintegration of traditional institutions, kinship groups and so forth from at least the 18th century. See Chaplin 2008, 69-70, for a classification of some of these proto-communitarian positions.

291 See also Parekh 2000, 329 and Mathewes 2002, 559, for whom churches can have only limited influence on politics in the sense of setting national policies and governing the nation, while “America’s political system requires reservoirs of civic commitment that lobbyists’ cash cannot replenish; so this larger sphere of activity serves as the humus from within which the more narrowly ‘political’ movements can emerge.”
and alienation, specifically by linking individuals and families to wider communities, and in providing a vital source of meaning and social values. Churches have been able, as Mooney [1986, 5, and see 10-11] puts it, “to orient toward the public sphere those highly individualistic searches for meaning and self-fulfillment which have come to characterize much of contemporary life.” Studies show that the motivation for political participation by church members is less likely to be personal gain than a commitment to community and civic duty. This may be due in part to the moral tradition of Christian social ethics, its teachings on the sacred character of obligation and the relational character of justice, which are clearly at odds with the individualism of liberal society. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, justice is not a quality that individuals possess in isolation, but has to do with the links of care, obligation, and responsibility which bind a people together, and a people to God. As Tinder [1989, 89] points out, Christians have always insisted that humans are to be called together, not only at the end of time, but now in history. The ideal of fellowship is especially important in the Catholic tradition, which maintains that we are to be saved through redemption of the social relation; that we attain to the divine likeness in and through human fellowship. In contemporary political theology, Roman Catholic proponents of subsidiary and neo-Calvinist sphere sovereignty

293 See McGraw 2010, 254, with reference to Weithman, and George Klosko: religious believers are more likely “to include the ‘moral order’ as among the goods that political authorities might rightly be made to secure.”
294 Weithman 2002, 35, 41, 48, 50, 87, and at 91: churches “encourage their members to think of themselves as bound by antecedently given moral norms with which political outcomes must be consistent.” See also Mouw and Griffioen 1993, 104-5.
295 See Forrester 1997, 208 and Hollenbach 2003, 153. Some theologians deduce this point from Trinitarian ontology: God’s existence, for them, is not one of monistic autonomy but intrinsically one of relationship. See, for example, Barns 2003, 255, following Colin Gunton.
296 Because of the church, Tinder [ibid.] continues, “the solitude of historical existence is already in some sense behind us.”
theorists argue alike from natural human sociability rather than from the satisfaction of individual rights and interests.\textsuperscript{297}

The evidence as to the contribution of the churches to political skills and social capital is important to the case for post-secularism since, if these are necessary to the success of liberal democracy, the task of nurturing and promoting them is not purely private but belongs to the public interest [Rasmusson 1995, 261-2]. Thus, for Hollenbach [2003, 157] “an active, public role for religion…would seem to be one of the preconditions of a vibrant democratic life.” For Coleman [1997, 285], likewise, “the fate of the public church and a vital…civil society rise and fall together.”

Civil society and public debate

Civil society theory re-emerged in the late twentieth century with considerable idealism for the possibilities of political education and participation in an intermediate sphere of civic associations. Enthusiasm for the promise of civil society has, however, declined over the last couple of decades. The problems of political apathy and extremism, along with individual self-centeredness, have proven more persistent than expected, and it has become harder to suppose that a sphere of associational groups could enable us to overcome them. Kymlicka and Norman [1994, 361] find that civil society theorists have been “overly optimistic”; for Nancy Rosenblum [1998a, 100] they have been too “sanguine,” too prone to “a naïve liberal expectancy,” and for Richard Boyd [2004, 304] they have suffered from the “jejune faith that modern individuals will

\textsuperscript{297} See Bailey 2003, 82 for more on this point.
spontaneously avail themselves of a wide range of substantive moral purposes in civil society.”

An example of the naïve or jejune idealism of civil society theorists is their portrayal of contemporary associational groups. Preoccupied by the dangers of individualism for liberal democracy, these theorists have been inclined uncritically to embrace all associational groups as being, in Gary Simpson’s phrase [2003, 45], “highly charged with moral and ethical sensibilities, commitments, and undertakings.” The rethinking of civil society theory began with the “culture wars” of the 1990s and continued with a number of historical studies of vibrant civil societies plagued by anti-democratic groups [Hunter 1991]. Civil society theorists have become more willing to recognize that, as proponents of pluralism and freedom of association, they must face the reality of social groups with undemocratic ideologies and/or internal structures. Many social groups are schools not of liberal-democratic norms and virtues but of ethnic and religious hatreds, and many, while technically or legally voluntary, are based on blind tradition and even surveillance [Rosenblum 1994b, 73 and 1998b, 59-60]. As Rosenblum points out, coercive intrusiveness is not confined to the public institutions of the state, nor despair, loneliness and poverty of spirit to individuals adrift in mass society. The potential for despotism within associational groups may, she argues, actually be greater than in large, public

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298 See also Chambers 2002, 97.
299 See also Rosenblum 1987, 65 and Boyd 2004, 14.
300 The subjects of the studies referred to here include pre-war Italy, the Weimar Republic and the former Yugoslavia. See Chambers 2002, 101.
301 Boyd [2004, 298] uses the phrase “pathological pluralism” to refer to associations which, as he puts it, “range from the cynically ambivalent... to the morally monstrous.” See also Insole’s discussion of the adverse effects of well-knit communities in Northern Ireland [Insole 2004, 145].
institutions, since the former can more easily pursue individuals into what Constant called the “interior of their existence” and brainwash them into conformity [Rosenblum 1987, 140].

A more common problem than that of bigoted and despotic groups, and one central to the crisis of civil society, is political apathy, as reflected in the decline of voluntary participation in such groups as might be expected to enhance citizenship and democracy.\(^\text{302}\) The churches are, of course, among the associations that have suffered the most from declining membership, and it is notable that the denominations which have proved most resistant to the effects of secularization include those, such as the Pentecostalists, which are least concerned with social and political issues. The trend towards privatism or cocooning is apparent throughout society, fuelled by the fear of violence and the general decline of the urban environment, the rise of cyberspace and home entertainment, and new forms of mobile, short-term employment. Civil society increasingly consists, as Mathewes [2007, 147, 149] puts it, of “atomized, anomic, privatized subjects of government rather than of participants within it,” subjects who are content “to wallow in consumerist spectatorship” and to look on government as “something we have [rather] than as something we do.”\(^\text{303}\) While membership in authentically civic associations declines, many groups that continue to flourish are unpolitical; in Boyd’s phrase, “group life has become a haven of privatism from the demands of public life” [Boyd 2004, 319].

More common still than groups catering to the desire for privatism and cocooning are those that are political in the limited sense that they aspire simply to secure material benefits for their


\(^{303}\) Mathewes [2007, 151] makes the point that, especially when it comes to certain high-profile single issues, citizens today are “paradoxically more politicized, but curiously less politically organized and mobilized.”
members. Bernstein [1986, 44] complains that it has become hard to find vestiges of civic-minded groups:

the town meeting, the neighborhood, the local community council are either destroyed or deformed in our society…. What seems to begin as the creation of a public space based on mutual recognition soon becomes another form of interest politics.

Wolterstorff [1997, 178] comments likewise that many groups today appear to be little more than means of promoting private interests and entitlements: “[they extend] beyond egocentric self-ism only by introducing group self-ism into the picture.” Individuals typically bring their private interests ready-formed to such groups, which merely amplify them without attempting to modify them by means of political education except insofar as the business of politics requires negotiation between competing claimants [Rosenblum 1994b, 74]. A civil society composed of such groups is, in Melzer’s phrase, “a community of interests instead of beliefs,” or, as Cady puts it, a collection of autonomous individuals “quantitatively configured” rather than “substantively constituted by the concrete particularity of its members” [Melzer 2008, 133, 13 (original emphasis); Cady 1993, 69, 67].

The crisis of civil society can be portrayed by means of Hannah Arendt’s concept, “the rise of the social,” which signifies the disappearance of a common concern for the res publica and cultural pursuits, and the emergence of a pseudo public space in which private interests assume public significance [Arendt 1958, 38-49]. With the rise of the social, as Arendt [1958, 41] puts it, citizens lose any integral relationship to a common world, along with the capacity to care for

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304 See also Rosenblum 1994a, 546: “[t]oday… the specter is not mass society void of intermediate structures, but the fact that powerful intermediate associations magnify arrant self-interest and serve arid interest group pluralism.”
it. They no longer really act, but merely behave as economic producers and consumers.\footnote{Arendt [1958, 28] portrays the resulting society as a collection of families organized into a meta-family, the affairs of which are to be taken care of by “a gigantic, nation-wide administration of housekeeping.” Such a society falls short of Arendt’s civic republican ideal in which our fulfillment requires opportunities to be publicly seen and heard by others and to achieve something relatively permanent in public life. As she points out [1958, 38], the concept of privatization is linked to that of deprivation, namely of the possibility of such fulfillment.}

Another concept helpful in conveying how societies today fall short of the ideals of civil society theory is Habermas’s “ideal speech situation,” which is a version of the classical enlightenment principle, formulated most notably by Kant, that individuals should speak for themselves as opposed to allowing authorities to determine their viewpoints.\footnote{An ideal speech situation entails disinterested, rational-critical discussion on the goods and ends that ought to govern our lives and order our material interests. It requires discussion to be open to and respectful of all contributors, and to be based on intelligible arguments rather than on subjective feelings or antecedently given norms other than those required for the continuity of free deliberation itself [Habermas 1992, 447].} One consequence of the decline of civic-minded associational groups is a widespread skepticism about even the possibility of such rational discourse. We can hardly conceive of a common good by which particular claims on the good could be adjudicated, and

\footnote{See also Benhabib 1992, 75.}

\footnote{See Habermas 1990, 63, 68-9, 71-2 and Cady 1993, 11-12.}

\footnote{Communicative discourse is contrasted by Habermas to strategic action, in which one actor seeks to influence the other by means other than rational persuasion: “I call interactions ‘communicative’ when the participants coordinate their plans of action consensually, with the agreement reached...being evaluated in terms of the intersubjective recognition of validity claims” [Habermas 1990, 63]. See also Weithman 2002, 75 and Chambers 2002, 93.}
we grow increasingly uncomfortable with and suspicious of any claim to be speaking disinterestedly, assuming that all political positions are merely assertions of purely selfish ends [Mathewes 2007, 148]. Instead of an ideal speech situation, we find in liberal societies what Habermas [1992, 451] calls a “generalized particularism,” or “the privileged assertion of local and group-specific special interests that…has provided the arguments of a democratic elitism.”

Habermas is not a typical civil society theorist in that, for him, the conditions of the ideal speech situation are actualized not in social groups at all, but in the universal collectivity of society. Rational-critical discourse ideally requires conditions of substantive material equality, conditions which are rarely met in societies or social groups, but the modern constitutional state governed by liberal-democratic principles can at least furnish the conditions of formal equality, whereby inequalities are bracketed for the purposes of discussion and members can participate on a par with one another regardless of their status and wealth. For Habermas [2008b, 22-3], citizens can experience this form of equality only when they are released from the embrace of subcultures and can mutually recognize one another as members of one and the same political community. The unifying bond of the “unrestricted communication community” which replaces the traditional community is, for him, essential to a democratic process in which the correct understanding of the constitution is ultimately under discussion. Here Habermas follows Hegel, for whom to enter civil society is to tear oneself away from pre-modern groups with their particularistic outlooks and concerns.

308 Habermas 1990, 86 and 2008a, 105. For Habermas [2008a, 106], “constitutional patriotic bonds form and renew themselves in the medium of politics itself.” (Original emphasis.)

309 Hegel’s entry into civil society corresponds to what Habermas [1990, 106] calls “a transition to the postconventional stage of moral consciousness…[in which] moral judgement becomes dissociated from the local
Still, it is fair to say that some social groups come closer than others to actualizing the conditions of the ideal speech situation.\textsuperscript{310} Of the two types of groups distinguished in the last chapter, voluntary associations and normative communities, the former can be expected to be more open to rational-critical discourse based on the persuasiveness of arguments, as the ideal speech situation requires. Voluntary associations are more likely to grant members an equal opportunity to offer opinions on matters of general interest, and those opinions are more often autonomous, authentic and effective. Normative communities tend to fall short of the ideal speech situation because, being subject to particularistic, hereditary-ascriptive affiliations, they are closely associated with sectarianism and the passive reception of ideas. The merits of arguments raised in them typically count for less than the personas and social positions of those who formulate the arguments. Tradition and status trump reasoned debate [Kymlicka and Norman 1994, 363-4, 366].\textsuperscript{311}

One way to explain the crisis of civil society, then, is by the strength and persistence of traditional normative communities. The boundaries that such communities set up to demarcate themselves from other groups restrict the autonomy and capacity for independent judgement of their members, who are then less able than other citizens to overcome the isolation of system and to participate effectively in decision-making either within their communities or in society at

\textsuperscript{310} See Weintraub 1997, 13: membership in a community does not necessarily constitute citizenship. It must be a willed community with fundamental equality and consideration of public issues through conscious and collective decision-making.

\textsuperscript{311} See also Fiorenza 1992, 73: for Habermas, attempts to establish ethics on the basis of a lived ethos do not take into account the question of how one is critically to assess the morality of the form of life itself and its ethos.
Members of traditional communities may suffer from a low sense of political efficacy, or from a consciousness of their incapacity to influence decision-making, which leaves them susceptible to political apathy or extremism. We could say that, in this account, the private sphere of society has persisted or grown too strong at the expense of the public sphere, and that a remedy for uncivil society would entail a certain deprivatization of society, or an emancipation of individuals from the relatedness and dependency of traditional social groups so that they could exercise independent judgement and choice in regards to their group memberships and their contribution to public life.

This approach to the problem of uncivil society finds support in the Christian principle that God’s concern is for the salvation of each human being, not just as a member of a particular nation such as that of Israel, but as a unique individual [Tinder 1989, 75-6]. Thus, the early church sought to secure the freedom of individuals from traditional, primordial communities based on kinship or territorial identity. Its rituals, the Eucharist in particular, both symbolized and furthered the differentiation of an individual selfhood from one defined by communal or collective attributes, for example by eliminating ritual barriers between gentile and Jew. The principle of what Troeltsch called the “individual-in-relation-to-God” was developed by the early Protestant sects, with their understanding of persons as autonomous entities freed from

312 See, for example, Honohan 2000, 161-2 and Rosenblum and Post 2002, 13.

313 See also Malesic 2009, 195: in principle all can join the Christian church, unlike a family or nation, which could never include all comers.

314 See Seligman 1992, 69 and Forrester 1989, 37-8 (with reference to Weber): “the resolution in favour of eucharistic and general commensalism of the debate in the early Church about whether Jewish and Gentile Christians should eat together was not simply a matter of tremendous importance for the first Christians. It profoundly shaped the western conception of community, and of the proper form of human relations.” As Cavanaugh [2002, 87] points out, the divisions overcome were not only those between gentile and Jew: “[i]n this gathering [the ekklesia] those who are by definition excluded from being citizens of the polis and consigned to the oikos – women, children, slaves – are given full membership through baptism.”
communal ties and possessing moral and metaphysical uniqueness [see Seligman 1992, 66]. For Reinhold Niebuhr and other neo-Augustinians, the group even more than the individual is fallen; it cannot be salvific of our individual frailty and vices, but rather magnifies our perverse and sinful tendencies.\(^{315}\) Nor, of course, is it capable of repentance and the reception of grace. Nevertheless, Christians maintain that the community which is the church preserves the principle of the individual-in-relation-to-God.\(^{316}\)

The “deprivatization” approach to the decline of civil society outlined in this section informs or underlies many current models of civil society. As we have noted, civil society is generally conceived as an intermediate social sphere, which suggests that there are distinct social spheres on either side of it. However, most theorists allow only for a separate public sphere, that of the state apparatus, and assign all social groups, including those which we have called traditional or normative, to the sphere of civil society itself. What appears to be meant by “intermediate” by these theorists is that civil society lies between the state and the individual.\(^{317}\) Those who adopt such models may allow that normative communities differ in significant ways from voluntary associations, but conclude that these differences are overshadowed by attributes, such as

\(^{315}\) The point is most closely associated with Niebuhr 1960, the central thesis of which is that self-interest is compounded when sinful individuals come together in groups. See also Insole 2004, 145 and Benne 1995, 164.

\(^{316}\) See Cavanaugh 2002, 86, with reference to Mark: 3:20-35: the church itself is a new ‘family’ which breaks down the isolation of the old family unit.

\(^{317}\) For Rosenblum and Post [2002, 3], “the elements of civil society…range from circles of friends…to single-purpose advocacy groups….From many perspectives, the family counts as an element of civil society…..” Wolfe 1997, for example, recognizes a public sphere of government, a private sphere of individual rights and property, and in between a range of “publics”, including families, ethnic and religious groups. The groups cited by Wolfe are ones that I would assign to the private sphere. As Chaplin [2008, 80] comments, an analysis that embraces both families and social movements under the one category of civil society would seem to be in danger of obscuring the distinctive social purpose and political import of both. Charles Taylor [1995, 219] points out that civil society has historically been defined as “a pattern of public social life, and not…[as] a collection of private enclaves” See also Fergusson 2004, 146 for further examples of the incorporation of communities into the category of civil society.
consensual membership and an untrammeled right of exit, which are or should be common to all groups in a liberal democracy. Civil society theorists may recognize that many normative groups fall short of these ideals, yet maintain that the democratic legitimacy of such groups can often be confirmed “discursively”; that is, group-members agree, or would probably agree if consulted, to the hierarchies and other restrictions to which they are subject. For these theorists, the distinctiveness of traditional, normative communities does not warrant their assignation to a distinct sphere of society.

Like the liberal model of public and private, such models of civil society have a normative component. As we have seen, the public/private dichotomy is intended largely to protect society from religious groups. In the case of civil society theory, a distinct and strong private sphere is seen as constituting a threat to society because it harbours and promotes individualism, privatism and political apathy, and by extension perhaps political extremism. The liberal model of public and private suggests a remedy for the problem of politicized religious groups, that of secularization and a neutral public sphere. The tripartite model of state, civil society and unorganized individuals likewise suggests a remedy for the decline of civic associations and public debate, a remedy that we can now consider in detail.

The congruence remedy and civil religion

To recapitulate, the solution to the decline of civil society, as outlined in the last section, would seem to lie in the deprivatization of social groups, traditional or normative communities in

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318 Chambers 2002, 106, with reference to Cohen and Arato. In Chambers’ example, members of the Roman Catholic Church would presumably consent to the hierarchy of their church, if questioned on the matter.
particular. One means to that end, which Nancy Rosenblum calls the congruence remedy, involves extending the universal principles of liberalism throughout society in order to ensure that all groups are consistent or congruent with them.\footnote{See Rosenblum 1994b and 1998b, 36ff. and Rosenblum and Post 2002, 12ff. In Coleman’s [1997, 282] useful phrase, civil society is becoming “both a terrain and a target of democratization.”} Social groups are congruent with liberal principles, for example, when they recognize the voluntary character of membership, admit unwanted members, and eschew any claim to shape the lives of their members comprehensively. One way to portray the congruence remedy is to say that it incorporates the groups and communities of the private sphere into civil society, or at least ensures that the private sphere is not construed as an inviolable space, isolated and insulated from the wider society [Cady 1993, 85].

The congruence remedy is concerned primarily with ensuring that social groups conform to the requirements of public justice, especially those involving human rights and due process. However, this kind of congruence takes only one step towards meeting the conditions of Habermas’s ideal speech situation. Public justice can enshrine and protect rights and freedoms in particular areas of conduct, typically in places of employment, social service, and accommodation, where it can help to protect citizens against force, fraud and private despotisms, but it cannot guarantee the consistency of social groups with liberal principles, as Rosenblum and Post [2002, 13] put it, “all the way down.”\footnote{See also Rosenblum 1998b, 59. A hypothetical example of achieving congruence by means of legal rights would be requiring churches to admit women or homosexuals into the clergy as a condition of maintaining tax-free status. An historical example, cited by Tomasi [1995, 598], is the U.S. Federal policy which, since 1883, has required Native American groups to treat their members as holders of an ever-widening range of individual rights “even when doing so would contradict – and erode – the Indians’ own traditions.”} The congruence remedy does not, therefore, necessarily produce the enlightened and critical citizens needed for political participation and
debate, citizens for whom the common good is more compelling than their own, particular goods; nor does it ensure the respect for the moral equality of others that public debate in a pluralist society requires [Rosenblum 1994b, 94]. The remedy cannot, for instance, succeed in amending communities to accommodate culturally distinct ways of being by legislating respect for minorities within them. Congruence with liberal rights and procedures regulates certain types of conduct, but not illiberal opinions or attitudes, or behaviour which stops short of the threat of violence or public disorder.  

The problem with the congruence remedy, in short, is that civic virtues are not subject to legal enforcement. Rational-critical thinking, public-mindedness and mutual respect cannot be derived from a bald statement of rights and due process, but are rather presupposed by them.

A common criticism of liberal democracy is that it is more successful in its negative role of denouncing traditional orders than in offering a fully articulated account of the good society. As a positive doctrine, liberalism is typically confined to arranging social and political structures and procedures so as to achieve inclusive deliberation and decision-making.  

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321 What lies behind campaigns by minorities is often largely a desire for social acceptance and respect, but legislatures and courts cannot decree opinions and attitudes towards these minorities to be illegal. As Martin Luther King Jr. pointed out, the state can stop us lynching our neighbours, but it cannot require us to start loving them [cited Perry 2003, 84]. See also Habermas 2008a, 268: “[s]tructurally entrenched mechanisms of exclusion are hard to pin down… [for] discrimination has retreated into more inconspicuous zones of informal interactions, and even into the domain of body language.” See also Chaplin 2004: “[w]hereas the state can and must take responsibility for ensuring the minimum requirements of social justice in the public realm, the limits of its own competence and capacities need to be clearly circumscribed. Much of what goes under the name of… ‘moral community’ or ‘civic virtue’…simply cannot be brought about by the state.”

322 See, for example, Walsh 2003, 173: “[i]n part the success of the liberal analysis is derived from its greater strength as a mode of critique than as a comprehensive account of the moral life…. Walsh specifies that he means a mode of critique especially of Christian and traditional moralities. In Plant’s distinction, the politics of liberalism are “nomocratic, concerned with rules and rights, rather than telocratic, which would be concerned with a set of common goods and purposes” [Plant 2001, 5-6].

323 See Davis 1980, 153: “[t]he expulsion of religion from politics…allowed politics to be invaded by a technological consciousness, which saw justice as nothing but efficient reorganization of the State and a rational,
questions whether a solution to our social and political problems can lie in efficient organization: a purely procedural approach will not succeed, he argues, since a certain spirit is required in order to bring formal structures to fruition. For Connolly [1999, 11], likewise, “the cultivation of an ethical sensibility appropriate to the complexity… of cultural life” is as important to public life as is “commitment to the practice of justice.” The classical theorists of liberalism have long been criticized for paying too little attention to the ways in which that necessary spirit or ethical sensibility is secured. As Skillen [1994, 29] points out in regard to Locke, he seems to take for granted a moral order broader and deeper than his political philosophy can account for. Habermas is one contemporary theorist who addresses the issue of the moral sources of the liberal order. As he states the problem,

[b]ecause a democratic order cannot simply be imposed on its authors, the constitutional state confronts its citizens with the demanding expectations of an ethics of citizenship that reaches beyond mere obedience to the law [Habermas 2008b, 27].

The congruence remedy cannot, therefore, be confined to strictly legal measures in its project of forming liberal citizens; it must pursue a conscious and systematic promotion of civic norms and values as well as of legal rights and obligations. It must thicken liberal norms to the point where they are prescriptive rather than neutral and procedural and promulgate them throughout society in an attempt to secure the consistency or congruence of groups and individuals with the ethos as

impersonally impartial administration.” Mathewes [2007, 153] also criticizes this approach to politics as “a deeply technological model of ‘political’ thinking.”

324 See also Mooney 1986, 8.

325 For a development of the point, see Habermas 2008a, 105.
well as with the legal principles of liberal democracy.\textsuperscript{326} For example, the legal component of the congruence remedy protects the right of individuals to leave a community, but it does not guarantee their capacity to do so. The moral component of the remedy teaches them to liberate themselves through reason from externally-imposed principles; to be sufficiently knowledgeable about alternative communities autonomously to select or reject the conditions of membership in them, and to possess the requisite skills to participate in these communities [Kymlicka 1992, 143].\textsuperscript{327}

Examples of the congruence remedy are plentiful in contemporary political theory, especially in schools of “transformative” or “perfectionist” liberalism, which are oriented to the intentional formation of liberal citizens.\textsuperscript{328} We have already noted some of the conditions of Habermas’s

\textsuperscript{326} See Rosenblum 1998b, 37: congruence is a way “to bring the experience of liberal democracy home to us.” See also Habermas 2006a, 13: “[t]he normative expectations associated with democratic citizenship remain ineffectual unless a corresponding change in mentality has taken place….” Again in Habermas 2008a, 105: to be oriented to the common good “demands a…costly form of motivation effort that cannot be legally exacted…. The willingness…to make sacrifices in the common interest can only be requested of the citizens of a liberal polity. Hence, political virtues are essential for the survival of a democracy…They are a matter of socialization and habituation into the practices and attitudes of a liberal political culture.” (Original emphasis.) As Rosenblum and Post point out, the idea of congruence with the liberal ethos is not entirely new, for the state has long used the law to educate citizens and to maintain standards of civility: the right to sue for defamation, for instance, protects community values. What is new, they suggest, is that while the congruence remedy was governed until recently by the principle of equality of opportunity, it now tends to be inspired also by the ideal of moral education. Governments take on the teaching of egalitarian values because private discrimination cultivates disparities antagonistic to public egalitarian commitments [Rosenblum and Post 2002, 13].

\textsuperscript{327} Galston [1995, 533-4] recognizes that “the protection of meaningful exit” constitutes one of the hardest problem facing group-pluralists (and hence, we can add, one of the strongest points in favour of the congruence remedy). The assumption underlying the moral component of the congruence remedy is well stated by Tully [1995, 60]: it is that we are sovereign and free as long as we are not tied to custom but impose new forms of association on ourselves by means of will, reason, and agreement.

\textsuperscript{328} Chaplin [2006, 151-2] contrasts “transformative liberalism,” or the intentional formation of liberal citizens, to “classical-liberal boundary-setting.” “Perfectionist” liberalism is a term used by Rawls to describe the view that the purpose of a liberal regime is to accomplish some specific form of human excellence. As we have noted on several occasions, the most common form of excellence for liberal theorists is individual autonomy. In the view of Joseph Raz (to take a prominent example), individual autonomy is “a constitutive element of the good life,” and liberal states should therefore be committed to helping citizens to achieve it [cited Dostert 2006, 3].
project of creating a universal communicative ethos.\textsuperscript{329} Stephen Macedo’s “transformative constitutionalism” [1998] likewise seeks to cultivate the habits and attitudes needed for citizenship in a liberal democracy. Amy Gutmann [1987, 31] looks to the state to teach “rational deliberation among ways of life” and “mutual respect among persons.” Madhavi Sunder’s “New Enlightenment” recognizes multiple claims to found communities while countering patriarchy and other forms of elitism within these communities as well as in the wider society [Sunder 2003, 3]. Michael Walzer’s “critical associationalism” and Benjamin Barber’s “strong democracy” refer to the extension of liberal norms into existing communities, mainly by way of public education, in order to ensure moral and ethical as well as legal congruence between liberal democracy and civil society [Walzer 1995, 25; Barber 1984].\textsuperscript{330}

The congruence remedy is attractive to Christian social thinkers because it enables a public role for the churches. The function of the churches has traditionally been to provide society with vision, for “where there is no vision the people perish” [Proverbs 29:18]. More especially, one social function of the churches has been to encourage a self-sacrificing concern for the higher ideals of the public good and to motivate individuals and groups to overcome the tendency to be governed by their own narrow interests.\textsuperscript{331} For the early Habermas, a commitment to liberal

\textsuperscript{329} See Habermas 2008a, 270 for one such condition: communities should “establish cognitive links between their internal ethos and the morality of human rights that prevails in their social and political environments.”

\textsuperscript{330} One more concept which can be aligned with these, and so with congruence theory, is Tully’s “New Constitution,” which denotes “a centralized and uniform system of legal and political authority… to which all citizens are subject in the same way, and from which all authority derives.” Like congruence remedies, the New Constitution is “brought into being by the will of the homogeneous people in accord with abstract principles” [Tully 1995, 83, 86]. (We should note, however, that unlike the other theorists cited here, Tully is critical of the developments he describes.)

\textsuperscript{331} For Augustine [1950, 445 (XIV, 4)], man sins when he “lives according to himself – that is, according to man, not according to God…..” See also Cady 1993, 71, 93; Coleman 1997, 286, and Lovin 1986, 10-11, who argues that “[o]nce [social] order is no longer seen as the dependable outcome of rational self-interest, a public role for religion is…assured…[for] religion is…the most comprehensive framework of shared meanings in the culture…and without
principles and discourse ethics would ensure the mutual respect that a liberal democracy requires; the post-secular Habermas returns to this point, recognizing now that the translation of Christian social ethics into their secular equivalents has not always proven to be saving or conserving, and that modern liberal societies can benefit from the leadership and vision that religion provides when it is permitted to take on a public role. This role of religion has become more important with the decline of state sovereignty – the decline, for instance, of communism and, in the West, of the doctrine of non-interference in sovereign states – for religion typically opposes the limitation of morality to the territorial boundaries of the state. This role has become more important as well with the increasing pragmatism of secular political ideologies and the political apathy and individualism of civil society. When political preferences are determined by private economic interests, religiously-grounded preferences can prove to be a useful counterweight. Because of the universality of Christianity, the churches are well placed to adopt a role in limiting or capping privatism and individualism with a collective consciousness of social ethics.

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332 See note 116 above.
334 As Weithman [2002, 90] and Hollenbach [2003, 157] point out. See also Wolterstorff 1997, 178: “in all the great religions….there are strands of conviction which tell us that pocketbook, privacy, and nation are not of first importance….Silence religion, and the debasement represented by private and group egoism will follow.” See also Davis 1994, 62: “Christians…are called upon to mediate a healing grace that will purify, guide and restrain the working of self-interest in human affairs, and then further to transform those affairs by relating them to a transcendent order of values.”
The congruence remedy accords a role to the churches in fortifying liberal principles with Christian social ethics and in helping public and semi-public organizations to promote these fortified principles throughout society. For Casanova [1994, 39, 230-1], the function of the churches in civil society is to bring the universal principles of liberal democracy to bear on normative traditions with their “internal functional autonomy” so that they can be “reconstructed – that is, rationalized” and “made responsible to a publicly defined ‘common good.’”

Moltmann similarly describes the task of political theology as being to adapt Christian doctrines to the modern world by showing how they can transform particularistic social structures into a new, more universal political reality. With such a function or task, the churches can take their place among organizations contributing to the congruence remedy, and more broadly, as Cavanaugh [2002, 62n] puts it, “to the history of freedom unfolding since the Enlightenment.”

The churches can also partake of the congruence remedy from below, so to speak, by ensuring that their own satellite institutions, church-related colleges, social services agencies and so forth, increasingly appear and act like their secular equivalents [Benne 1995, 196].

The congruence remedy results ultimately in a type of pluralism that has been called hybridity, the condition whereby individuals typically belong to multiple social groups and pursue a variety of lifestyles. A hybrid liberal society is one of shifting group memberships, each of which seems to be less a matter of fate or inheritance than of autonomous choice; it is a society in which voluntary associations have largely replaced traditional, normative communities. The capacity to

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335 Casanova [1994, 228] expresses the hope that the return of religion to public debate will “open the way for the institutionalization of processes of practical rationalization of the lifeworld.”

336 Moltmann 1984, Chapter Two, and 99: political theology seeks to awaken a political consciousness which “criticizes the past and the traditions regarding origins because it is oriented toward the future and wants to organize human life for the project of history.”
move fluidly among subcultures is well-suited to modern democracies with their mass migration, social mobility and fast-changing technology.³³⁷ Hybridity can assist in securing an ideal speech situation, for when membership in groups is partial, without ultimately binding attachments, and individuals can change and multiply those partial affiliations at will, their sense of autonomy will likely be preserved and authority figures will be less able to keep them from knowledge of alternative ways of life. “Pluralism disperses power,” Rosenblum [1987, 179] observes, and it “limits the capacity of unforgiving communities to… inhibit their members….”³³⁸

The next chapter will argue, however, that there are several problems both with the congruence remedy as a means of addressing the problems of civil society and with the type of pluralism that results from it. We will see, for example, that this pluralism is not dissimilar to the individualism which is commonly agreed to be one of the major causes and symptoms of uncivil society. An individualistic pluralism cannot guarantee the conditions of Habermas’s ideal-speech situation or Arendt’s political action because the civic virtues and capacities that these presuppose are formed to a large extent in normative communities. The next chapter develops this argument and proposes an alternative, group-pluralist remedy for the decline of civil society, one that recognizes and preserves the autonomy of communities as well as that of individuals. Just as the remedy for the isolation of system lies in civil society, the solution to the problems of civil society can be found in the private sphere of society and in the communities that comprise it.

³³⁷ Joseph Raz cited Gray 2000a, 97. See Gray 2000a, 119 for more comments on hybridity.
³³⁸ And see Rosenblum 1987, 146, 159.
Chapter Six

Post-Secularism and Public Debate: a Pluralist Approach

In the last chapter, we considered a remedy for the decline of civil society and for the reinvigoration of the open, inclusive debate that is essential to post-secularism. We saw that this remedy of rendering social groups congruent or consistent with the principles of liberalism appeals to post-secularists because it allows for a public role of the churches in strengthening liberal principles with religious social ethics and promoting those principles throughout society. This chapter considers the congruence remedy from a pluralist perspective, arguing that it does not enable the autonomous and critical judgement that public debate requires, and suggesting an alternative approach to the regeneration of civil society and public debate.

Liberal society and colonization by system

An alternative to the congruence remedy could begin by focusing, not on the isolation of system, but on another cause of the decline of civil society identified by Habermas, that of “colonization by system,” or the penetration of society by spheres in which the steering mechanisms are the non-linguistic media of money and power; that is, by the market and politics.\(^{339}\) For Habermas, not only are the administrative systems of modern liberal democracies uncoupled from everyday life, but the market and politics have assumed regulatory functions in domains of life once held together by pre-political forms of communication, with the result that the autonomy and integrity of those domains have been eroded. Rawls seems to approve that outcome when he permits

\(^{339}\) See note 51 above.
communities to support principles such as justice as fairness for a variety of their own, particular reasons, yet recognizes no reasons by which they might reject these principles, a position which effectively denies the legitimate existence of what we can call non-congruent communities. Rawls [1996, 197] defends that implication, pointing out that there will be winners and losers under any political system. The strongest advocate of the erosion or elimination of communities which dissent from liberal norms is perhaps Stephen Macedo, who calls his approach “liberalism with a spine”\(^{340}\) – that is, with the spine to act against its enemies.

Colonization by system and the isolation of system might appear to be mutually exclusive, since the first subsists in the expansion of the public sphere while the second has been explained, as we noted, by a hypertrophy of the private sphere in the form of individualism and privatism or cocooning. However, Habermas’s two disorders are compatible, and in fact the difficulties of overcoming the isolation of system owe much to the effects of colonizing system.\(^{341}\) Proponents of the congruence remedy address the problem of the isolation of system by promoting freedom from normative communities, assuming that it is possible for reasonable individuals to maintain a critical distance from the traditions of such communities.\(^{342}\) For communitarians and many group-pluralists, however, normative communities are the source of their members’ identities, and so of their capacity for critical thought and autonomous action. We overcome isolation from system principally by formulating alternatives to existing political and economic structures, and the communities of our upbringing provide the possibility of reflection through which we gain

\(^{340}\) Cited Dostert 2006, 42.

\(^{341}\) Habermas gives no indication that he sees any tension between the two pathologies; in fact he describes the uncoupling of system and society at one point [1983, 183] as a “technicizing of the lifeworld,” which suggests that, for him, the pathologies are two sides of the same coin.

\(^{342}\) As Dostert [2006, 22] points out in regards to Rawls’ concept of the overlapping consensus.
clarity in regard both to ourselves and to the systems that threaten to colonize society [Kymlicka 1989, 164-5]. With the extension of universal norms and practices throughout society, however, those communities lose their individual uniqueness, and a common, monistic understanding of the origin, nature and ends of humanity fills the vacuum left by their decline. From a pluralist perspective, colonization by system furthers the isolation of system by dismantling the normative and symbolic structures of the communities in which original perspectives on politics and economics are developed and passed down, and in which individual critical judgement is formed.

One reason for the persistence of colonization by system is that “system” in Habermas’s sense has two components, state and market, and efforts to counteract the one may well end by strengthening the other. As Insole [2004, 173] points out, for instance, Thatcherism was largely a reaction to the bureaucratic rationalization of the welfare state, but it required both central planning and intrusion into the everyday life of society to introduce free-market competitive values where they had no traditional, and arguably no rational place. Conversely, critics of the market economy often promote measures which promise to tame it by political means. Habermas [2008a, 107], for instance, has confessed to a greater concern with colonization as the penetration of the market economy than as politicization on the grounds that markets, unlike state administrations, cannot be democratized. For him, the market system is the greater threat to liberal democracy because it shrinks the domain open to public legitimation, resulting in “a discouraging loss of function of a mode of democratic opinion.” This argument legitimizes

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343 Coleman [1997, 273] provides a justification for this position when he argues that the problem with the private sphere is that it depoliticizes individuals, leaving them defenseless against the eroding forces of the market economy. However, Coleman would need to argue the point that politicization counters our subjection to economic forces; it is not self-evident.
statist solutions for the penetration of market systems into society and so encourages, or at least fails to counter, colonization by political system.

The congruence remedy does not help to resist colonization by system in either of its forms, political or economic. Congruence with liberal principles generally takes the form of consistency with that of individual autonomy, which is a common way to strengthen voluntary at the expense of traditional communities, and it typically entails statist measures since only the state has the power to uphold the rights of the individual against those of the community.\textsuperscript{344} The principle of individual autonomy embraces rather than challenges statism inasmuch as state power and individual rights are not alternatives, but grow in tandem: Chaplin [2008, 68] calls liberal individualism the “mirror image” of collectivism and statism.\textsuperscript{345} Individual autonomy may sometimes require the empowerment of a community, as proponents of the politics of identity or recognition point out, in which case state intervention will be required to ensure the arrangements necessary to the protection and validation of that community. In both cases, congruence with the principle of personal autonomy will be accompanied by a growth in the coercive attributes of the state. Individual autonomy likewise embraces the logic of the market,

\textsuperscript{344} See Rosenblum 1994b, 96, with reference to James Morone: “the unintended consequence of mobilization to create and expand democratic institutions in the name of community has been to enhance state power....” As Carter [1998, 55] points out, just about every conclusion in contemporary political debate results in calls on the state to enforce legislation on as many communities as possible: “Left and Right in America nowadays divide principally over the question of which conclusions to enforce, not over whether the national sovereign should be doing it.” We should note that the relationship between statism and congruence remedies goes both ways: that is, if proponents of congruence remedies are well-disposed to statist solutions, so too do states show a preference for congruence remedies, for as Tocqueville [1966, 649] puts it, the uniformity of norms “saves [the state] the trouble of inquiring into infinite details.”

\textsuperscript{345} See also Cady 1993, 14: trends towards radical individualism and collectivism are not radically opposed, but intensify each other “in an upward spiral,” and Walzer 1990, 17: “the more dissociated individuals are, the stronger the state is likely to be, since it will be the only or the most important social union.”
as Elshtain puts it, “by endorsing the relentless translation of wants into rights.” Proponents of the congruence remedy may be reluctant to come to terms with the contribution of autonomous choice to colonization by the market since restrictions on individual lifestyles appear to be inconsistent with the right of self expression. However, enabling autonomous lifestyles does not necessarily enhance the capacity to express alternatives to system since it does not prepare individuals to withstand the pressures of public opinion, advertising and the media.

The motive behind the congruence remedy, we have noted, is to counter excessive privatism or cocooning in society and so to help citizens to engage in public debate and action. However, to the extent that the remedy eradicates the original traditions and viewpoints of communities, it may well have a contrary outcome. An illustration of this point was provided by the communist states, which were in a sense an extreme example of the congruence remedy, aiming at the submergence of the private by the constant mobilization of particular conceptions of civic virtue. As Jeff Weintraub observes, one consequence of this project was an unprecedented privatization of society:

(i)n general, the attempt by [communist] regimes to ‘politicize’ everything in society…led… to massive depoliticization and a retreat to the privacy of personal relations…[Weintraub 1997, 16 n31].

Tocqueville made a similar point about the ancien regime. As the centralized, bureaucratic French state reached its apotheosis, he records, political life was suppressed and citizens took refuge in their private lives [Cited Weintraub 1997, 16]. The increased regulation by public agencies that the congruence remedy entails undermines the particularistic communities that

346 Elshtain 1993, 16 (original emphasis). Conversely, of course, (as Mathewes 2007, 193 points out), market society rewards ease of attachment and detachment. See also George Grant, cited Song 1997, 86: “liberalism can appeal to no justification of its values which does not also validate the technological mind-set which is overturning them.”
constitute the private sphere of society, which can result in a renewed, more individualistic
privatism, and hence in the decline of public debate and participation.

A pluralist alternative to the congruence remedy would not reject the liberal principles of
autonomy and self-expression, but would recognize that autonomous choice is of little value
without the capacity for critical judgement. The importance of critical judgement to personal
autonomy is recognized on all sides, but the nature of their relationship is disputed. In the
enlightened tradition, to choose autonomously is to be led, as Will Kymlicka puts it, “from the
inside” (that is, independently of the dominant values of society and social groups), and to be
free to question and revise options initially selected [Kymlicka 1989, 12-13; 1995, 156].
However, for Kymlicka and many theorists in the group-pluralist tradition, membership in
cultural communities is crucial to autonomous choice and critical reflection because it provides
the context that gives meaning to choice. In this account, we do not select our life-path in a
vacuum, but rather from the range of options made available to us by the language, history and
customs of the communities in which we were raised. Our cultural patrimony provides the ideas
and principles which, by giving substance to self-identity, enable individual judgement and
choice. “[I]t’s only through having a rich and secure cultural structure,” Kymlicka [1989, 165]
concludes, “that people can become aware, in a vivid way, of the options available to them, and
intelligently examine their value.” In any case, the communities of our upbringing are so
constitutive of our identity that we could not simply detach ourselves from them and make
judgements on the basis of competing norms and values. The congruence remedy undermines

347 For a useful statement of this position, see also Tomasi 1995, e.g. 584-5.
348 As Kymlicka [1995, 159] points out in the course of a critique of Rawls’s “Justice as Fairness.”
the autonomy of these constitutive communities by subjecting them to a set of universal
principles, thus helping to ensure that we cannot develop the judgement that is necessary to
overcome the isolation of system. A pluralist alternative to the congruence remedy should
therefore insist that autonomy and self-expression have a corporate as well as an individual
dimension.

In the name of free choice, the congruence remedy contributes to colonization by system by
ruling out of bounds choices for ways of life which do not have autonomy at their core.\footnote{349} The
remedy contributes as well to the isolation of system insofar as communities that form critical
judgement may include some which are illiberal in their internal structures, and/or which do not
teach their members that they are autonomous. The capacity for autonomous choice is not the
only defining characteristic of critical judgement, which may include virtues or traits which do
not necessarily presuppose or entail autonomy but which may instead be the products of habit,
tradition, authority or faith. A pluralist alternative to the congruence remedy would recognize
that we may quite autonomously and reflectively opt to live by the norms and values of an
incongruent or illiberal community. In joining or electing to remain in such a community we
may feel that, as Michael McDonald [1992, 118] argues, making (what we believe to be) the
right choice is at least as valuable as exercising the capacity to revise and replace our inherited or
initially chosen ends. McDonald points out that to decline to revise our norms, or even to
examine them critically, is a valid autonomous choice, a choice, in effect, to embrace them: as he
puts it, “the deliberately unexamined life is perforce an examined one.”\footnote{350} The development of

\footnote{349} See, for example, Knippenberg 2004, 115, and Galston 2002, 23 and 1995, 523.

\footnote{350} As McDonald further points out [1992, 121], we can waive critical examination of our normative traditions
without necessarily feeling trapped, or “somehow ethically defective.” Weithman [2002, 202] allows the strong
critical judgement should therefore include “expressive” liberty, or the liberty to live in ways which others consider unfree but which express our deepest beliefs about what gives meaning and value to life.  

Expressive liberty, along with individual autonomy and critical judgement, is undermined if it is stipulated that all communities must be congruent with liberal-democratic principles. In the next section, we will consider one essential requirement of critical judgement that is formed in normative communities.

The private sphere and public debate

The congruence remedy and the pluralist alternative to that remedy both address the problem described by Habermas as the isolation of system, but they approach that problem in different ways. For proponents of the congruence remedy, the persistence and strength of normative communities impede citizens of liberal democracies from attaining the critical judgement required to overcome the distance between political and economic systems and everyday values. Group-pluralists, in contrast, consider that critical judgement is formed in normative communities, and that the isolation of system is caused in part by intruding or colonizing state or market systems which undermine such communities along with the capacity of their members to formulate positive and creative alternatives to political and economic realities. In the last section this point was made in a general way. This section considers in detail one of the conditions of

secularist point that individual autonomy requires that we are not subject to an alien comprehensive doctrine, but argues that this ideal is quite consistent with being subject to our own comprehensive doctrine, or to what is shared between comprehensive doctrines in a society, to the extent that this consensus is acceptable to us.

Galston 2002, 28 and passim. See also Chaplin 2006, 156: “respecting…expressive associational freedom is vital if the inescapable ‘colonization effects’ of a state on its sub-communities are to be mitigated.”
critical judgement, that of subjectivity, and shows how it is formed and developed in the normative communities of the private sphere.

One way to portray the pluralist alternative to the congruence remedy is by means of Charles Davis’s distinction between bourgeois individualism and the acknowledgement of the unconditional worth of the individual [Davis 1980, 178-9]. The first is a consequence of the market economy and interest-group politics, both of which weaken respect for the uniqueness of persons by reducing them to their economic relations and ignoring all differences between them save for quantitative variations of material goods and interests. For Davis [1980, 179], “paradoxically…individualism means conformity not individuality.” Davis argues that true individuality requires a developed interior self, the possession of a secure sense of individuated being. Individuality in this sense is a condition of a pluralist society because it allows resistance to the homogenizing forces of colonization and respect for variety and difference: “[t]he self-conscious subject in possession of his or her individuated being…[is] capable of entering into the communication process among free participants…” [Davis 1980, 178].

The conception of subjectivity as interiority has been criticized for serving ideological purposes, specifically in valorizing private life at the expense of collective action and communality. As Malesic [2009, 165] puts the point, “the description of the self as inward ignores the individual’s rootedness in…public life….” Some Christian accounts certainly focus on the genesis of individuality in private life. Augustine, for instance, maintains that the individual subject is first

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352 As Malesic [2009, 165] explains, those who subscribe to this criticism are seen as having “redescribed the self in largely exterior terms, in order to give greater pride of place to collective action and communal life, to correct long-standing intellectual biases in favour of heroic individualism and the esoteric, and to enable greater moral wholeness for those marginalized by the inner/outer distinction.”
constituted by entering into a personal relationship with God in solitude, at which point the “I” discovers a new realm of the “innermost self” [Rom 7:22] or “the hidden person of the heart” [1 Peter 3:4] and becomes an individuated being in possession of an unconditional and infinite worth not contingent on any particular social position and role.\footnote{Cited by Davis 1980, 158, and see 174 for more on this point. See also Kraynak 2001, 64.} Tinder [1989, 222] likewise considers that the person is constituted as an interior self by being present to God in inward solitude and meditative prayer: for him, “Christianity is joined indissolubly with subjectivity.”

The early Habermas [1974, 93-4] recognizes the origin of the individuated subject in the monotheistic religions, especially Christianity, but he seeks a saving secular translation of the Christian account, one that requires not withdrawal from the world but a specifically public basis for the formation of individuated subjectivity. Hegel identifies that basis as the modern constitutional state which, though it is particular, is for him the embodiment of universal morality. Habermas [1974, 97-8] rejects this idea on the grounds that the modern state cannot embody the universalistic interests of the whole people because of its class structure and because it has been rendered anachronistic by developments such as the nuclear arms race, multinational corporations and global communications. Habermas maintains that individuated subjectivity is formed not by membership of a particular state or society, but rather by means of rational-critical discourse on the social formation of norms and values in a universal communicative process. The full realization of subjectivity comes only in building a truly human society by means of free and equal communication amongst citizens. We become individuals in the course of freeing ourselves from “collective identity as a traditional authority” and attaining
the consciousness of universal and equal chances to participate in the kind of communication processes by which identity formation becomes a continuous learning process [Habermas 1974, 99].

Hannah Arendt resembles Habermas to the extent that she identifies communication and action in public life as the means of attaining individual subjectivity. Arendt subscribes to the classical Greek understanding of private life as the domain of material necessity, and of the public sphere as the area in which humans can grow and find fulfillment. It is in the nature of the private sphere, she points out, that personal identities are largely hidden, for the sphere is circumscribed by the requirements of production and reproduction and it is largely devoid of the plurality and creativity which would enable us to develop and reveal our identities from diverse positions [Arendt 1958, 57, 52-3]. Habermas and Arendt associate the formation of subjectivity with discourse and action in public life, but their accounts do not adequately explain how we arrive at the capacity for public discourse and action. This capacity is, in fact, a defining characteristic rather than a cause of the developed, autonomous subject; it does not create but pre-supposes true individuality.

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354 See, for example, Arendt 1958, 24ff. and 1977, 59.
355 See Davis 1980, 174: “I find nothing in Habermas’s account of the new social identity to replace the function of monotheism in grounding a singular ego-structure.” The problem for Davis [ibid.], more specifically, is that “a universalistic ego-structure does not of itself imply the unconditional worth of the individual” See Mouw and Griffioen [1993, 71], for whom a public self is not a given, but must be developed. They cite James M. Glass to the effect that psychological patients lack a public selfhood, an existence-in-common In regards to Habermas, Wuthnow [1992, 217] argues that “a theory that claims to salvage the lifeworld from the onslaught of monetarization and bureaucratization…must also do a better job of relating rational communication to the lived experience of the lifeworld itself.” Fiorenza [1992, 79, 85-6] finds that “Habermas has, in severing his discourse ethics from any religious foundations and institutions, failed to provide an institutional locus… for the discussion of moral-practical issues.” Fiorenza goes on to suggest churches for this locus (an idea which is central to this study).
356 Neuhaus [1984, 141] makes a similar point about modern liberal thought: “[t]he constitutional polity was not intended to bear the burden of cultivating virtue…The polity presupposed a culture of virtue.…”
Habermas’s secular account of the origin of individuated subjectivity is not ‘saving’ in that it does not emphasize the importance of a private space in which individuality can be formed. If Augustine’s position is to be translated in a way that resonates in a secular setting, one requirement that should be retained is that of a realm of private self-expression and intimacy; in Rosenblum’s phrase, “a minimum zone of inviolable personal freedom,” a zone buffered from the larger world of state, economy and society [Rosenblum 1987, 70]. Even if we do not insist that subjectivity presupposes a relationship to God, we can allow that it requires an area free from political, economic and scientific manipulation, one in which we can become, as Mathewes [2007, 12] puts it, “vulnerable to presence” – vulnerable, if not to the presence of God, then to that of others – “in a new and self-altering way.” In his The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere [1989b], Habermas considers and then rejects the idea of the bourgeois family as a necessary condition of subjectivity. His analysis does not, however, take into account the possibility that what is important about the family is less its property or wealth than its provision of a private place in the world, one that constitutes a basis for action in public [Arendt 1958, 61, 256]. This provision would, of course, be consistent with or saving of Augustine’s account of the genesis of subjectivity.

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357 See also Davis 1980, 180.

358 As Habermas recognizes, the early bourgeois public sphere was composed principally of educated, propertied men – heads of families. His explanation for the decline of the public sphere has to do with its expansion to include ever more participants, an inclusivity which, for him, brought about degeneration in the quality of discourse. This explanation appears to identify the bourgeois family as a sine qua non of a vibrant and successful public sphere, and Habermas has been widely criticized for that implication. However, Habermas is clear that progress today does not entail a return to an elitist public sphere and the patriarchal family; for him, the conditions of the subjectivity necessary for participation in the public sphere must be found outside the family. In the view of Calhoun, the problem with Habermas’s account is not so much its elitism or sexism as its failure to explain how, absent the bourgeois, property-owning family, identity-formation is to be achieved prior to entry into public life [Calhoun 1992, Introduction]. Sympowich [2000, 103, 100, with reference to Galston], argues that the patriarchal concept of the private as a domain of natural autonomy, immune to political scrutiny, can be abandoned while retaining a concept of the private as a sphere of freedom important to all individuals, men and women. As she points out, the personal domain essential for privacy need not be actually owned.
It should be stressed that Davis’s concept of true individuality bears no necessary connection to that of the private self, which refers simply to the person acting in private life whether or not he or she has attained true individuality [Davis 1980, 176]. In fact, true individuality is a requirement for moving beyond private life to participation in civil and political society, for there can be no relationship of mutual respect between individuals organized merely in terms of competition for material goods and interests. A developed, interior self is a precondition of Habermas’s ideal speech situation and of Arendt’s public action in that interiority opens the self to respect for the reality of the other. The growth of interiority and respect for others are two sides of the same coin, for we encounter others through our discovery of the self, and the self through relationships with others. Likewise, interiority is a condition of political participation in the sense of contributing to a collective shaping of public norms and values, for the inner self functions as a forum of debate on the various goods presented to it in public life. Individuals who have achieved interiority possess the capacity to venture out of the island of the self to encounter others in sympathy and public issues in an attitude of responsible and creative change.

Conversely, the pathologies of political apathy and extremism, which are central to the crisis of civil society, result not from true individuality but from individualism in Davis’s sense of depersonalization. When cocooning is preferred to an active associational life, or fanatical to moderate civic organizations, it is often because of an undeveloped interior life, without which we lack the strength of purpose accruing from a specific teleology and fall prey to such forces

359 See Davis 1980, 178: “there is no politics without individuated persons or interior selves….”
360 The point is made, for example, by Fiorenza [1992, 74]: “[p]ersonal identity develops intersubjectively. A reciprocity exists between one’s identification with other subjects and one’s self-identity.”
361 See Fiorenza [ibid.]: “A correlation exists between the formation of self-identity and the formation of moral judgments about justice.”
around them as racism, tribalism, sexism, class warfare and so forth. To paraphrase Carlo Levi, it is incomplete consciousness of self that spills over into apathy and fanaticism.\(^{362}\) The formation of true individuality does, however, benefit by the private sphere, which facilitates the growth of whole and independent individuals, strong and assured enough to face the uncertainties and difficulties of freedom and to navigate between the extremes of apathy and fanaticism.\(^{363}\)

Arendt’s depiction of the private sphere was outdated already at the time of her writing, for economic production had largely been taken out of the home to locations that we now conceive as public.\(^{364}\) Her depiction is further outdated today in the light of a widespread turn to private life and traditional communities as sites of meaning and freedom. It is the private sphere, in the sense not just of the home and religion but of informal communication and entertainment, including the arts, reading, and so forth, to which individuals have increasingly retreated as a refuge from the impersonal relations of the state and market, as well as from what Davis [1980, 176] calls “the relentless rational routines and compulsions of their working lives.”\(^{365}\) In Tinder’s concise phrase, liberty is seen as “life unregulated by society” [Tinder 1989, 56].

\(^{362}\) Cited Fair 1969, 121n. Harvey 1999, 127 makes a similar point.

\(^{363}\) See Boyd 2004, 320 on navigating between the Scylla of individual privatism and the Charybdis of militant groups, and Walzer 1998, 72.

\(^{364}\) See Calhoun 1992, 10: “[i]n the new conjugal family [of the modern age], ‘private’ meant not merely the burden of necessity, as in classical Greece…. Rather, the family was understood as at least partially differentiated from material reproduction.” As Kymlicka and Norman [1994, 362] point out, there are many reasons to think that classical Greek ideas on public and private have long been outdated, including “the rise of romantic love and the nuclear family (and its emphasis on intimacy and privacy), increased prosperity (and hence richer forms of leisure and consumption), the Christian commitment to the dignity of labor (which the Greeks despised), and the growing dislike of war (which the Greeks esteemed).”

\(^{365}\) See also Wuthnow 1992, 208; Cady 1993, 7, 13; Forrester 1989, 7, and Skillen 1994, 27: “[m]uch, if not most, of the meaning of life, Americans have thought, is to be found in nonpolitical arenas of experience.” See also Kumar 1997, 206: public life is seen as alienating; what is private as “the principal source of identity and personal fulfillment.”
Arendt [1958, 41] associates the public sphere with the discovery and recognition of personal identity, but today’s public sphere has more to do with claims based on an identity settled in advance, in the private sphere of society, where we develop our sense of individuality by giving full expression to our innermost feelings. For Arendt, the public sphere is a humanly created construct, unlike the private sphere, which appears to us as a natural or given order in that behaviour in it is generally determined by the need to secure the necessities of life. But to many today, public life seems cold and impersonal, absorbed by sterile ideologies which discourage inward development, while private life holds out some promise of responding to human planning and construction. 366

Habermas’s and Arendt’s civic republican hopes for the recovery of the dialogical and participatory dimensions of public life can best be fulfilled by maintaining a clear distinction between civil society and the private sphere of society, and by strengthening the latter. An area of meaning and freedom beyond the public sphere of the state apparatus will not be adequate to that recovery, for the interpenetration of state, society, and economy means that a space for the development of true individuality must lie beyond civil society as well. As Bernstein [1986, 47] puts the point, “if there is to be a renewal of public life, a communal basis for individuals coming together, it is to be found outside those great impersonal abstractions of society and state.” 367

366 See Calhoun 1997, 237: “[w]e commonly think of politics as impersonal and of private life as the realm in which at least potentially we can be true to ourselves as individual persons.” Calhoun emphasizes, however, that Arendt “is concerned to show us that this is not so.”

367 Bernstein continues: “[t]here is a longing for a genuine sense of community – not a Great Community in which our individuality is lost and submerged, but those local communities in which our individuality can be realized” [Berstein 1986, 49. Original emphasis]. See also Cavanaugh 2002, 71, 78-9, with reference to Michael Hardt and Harry Boyte: “there is no longer any significant difference between civil society and the state, for the economic, political, social and cultural spheres have merged to such an extent that culture obeys the logic of the market and the political apparatus creates spaces for capital to operate. Government regulation reaches into every facet of society and every type of activity and the state-society complex comes to disempower other forms of discourse, such as that
For Arendt [1963, 174], the public sphere, is an area of “binding and promising, combining and covenanting,” but binding and covenanting in any personal sense are not normally associated with the public sphere, or even with civil society, which is subject, as we noted in the last chapter, to hybridity or constantly changing commitments. In civil society the individual tends to be, as Cavanaugh [2002, 111] puts it, “radically decentered, cast adrift in a sea of disjointed and unrelated images.” The development of subjectivity requires a certain consistency in its environment, which can be secured only at a distance from the noise and distractions of modern society. The communities and activities of the private sphere offer some possibility of resisting the ephemerality and constant change of society by unifying past, present and future into a coherent narrative sequence [Cavanaugh, ibid.].

In order to produce citizens with true individuality, able to form relationships beyond their primary communities and to engage in public action, the private sphere must constitute a social setting stable enough to ward off the pressures of the wider society. This setting has traditionally been provided, of course, by the family. Jeff Kumar [1997, 228, 210] argues that the breakdown of the modern family has resulted from attempts to make it do too much as the sole undisputed and defining institution of the private sphere, including satisfying the social and emotional needs of its members and forming their individual identity and civic virtues. For Kumar, the problems of the church. Given the interpenetration of state, society and the economy, the idea of free space outside the state is not sufficient for the creation of truly alternative spaces.” See also Weintraub 1997, 15 n28: the usual state/civil society division in which civil society serves as an undifferentiated residual category is “theoretically inadequate.”

368 See also Bellah et al. 1985, 130: a “purely contractual ethic leaves every commitment unstable.”

369 See also Mathewes 2007, 169 on religious faith: many believe that “deep and persistent conviction [is] incompatible with the fluidity and radical voluntariness of contemporary society.”
of uncivil society cannot be resolved simply by strengthening the family, which could not possibly fulfill all the functions with which it has been invested.\textsuperscript{370} The family therefore requires the support of other communities to ensure the protection against colonization by system that the development of true individuality requires. The churches, in particular, can provide that support by extending the community of persons that exists in the family to the wider society [Cavanaugh 2002, 93]. The next section explores ways in which the churches can serve as an institutional locus for the development of a self adequate to public communication and action, a locus that the theories of Habermas and Arendt lack.

The public role of the churches

In the last chapter we noted that, while the churches cannot maintain their former position in the public sphere of the state apparatus, they can fulfill a semi-public role in civil society. This section suggests that, just as the churches can assist in resolving the problem of the isolation of system by their role in civil society, they can help to remedy the problem of colonization by system by their activities in the private sphere of society. We will see, in fact, that their public role in the private sphere helps to counter both the modern social disorders identified by Habermas, the isolation of system as well as colonization by system.

Post-secular theories of the public role of the churches have been developed largely in reaction to the traditional liberal idea that religion should be confined to the private sphere of society. In Chapter One we surveyed some of the arguments that have been summoned to refute that idea

\textsuperscript{370} See also Weintraub 1997, 25, and 23: “it is as if the modern family has sought to take the place of the old social relationships (as these gradually defaulted) in order to preserve mankind from an unbearable moral solitude.”
and in subsequent chapters we suggested that there are reasons to re-examine its merits. Liberals have placed religion in the private sphere partly on the grounds that external forces, such as governments, are unable to compel subjective dispositions. Religious beliefs in particular, as Locke [1991, 19] pointed out, have an irreducibly solitary nature. A modern argument for Locke’s conclusion from that premise is that governments, along with other public institutions, the market, the media, schools and so forth, can and do shape the minds of citizens all too effectively.\footnote{371} If a strong civil society is the best remedy against the isolation of system, a fortified private sphere is the best defense against the shaping of minds by political and economic systems.

The role of the churches in countering colonization by system is not private in quite the same sense as that meant by the classical liberals. For the latter, that role is neither political nor public; it is simply to assist individuals in professing and practicing their faith. The role of the churches in the private sphere suggested by this study is public in that the churches are oriented not just inwardly, towards their own members, but also outwardly, towards other normative communities. It is not helpful, however, to consider this role political, except perhaps in the special sense of Havel’s “anti-political politics,” which he defines as “living in truth without pursuing power” [Havel 1988]. Political action suggests a unified vision of the common good, to be pursued by means of attaining power, but the churches are most effective when their prophetic stance does not include set plans requiring political power for their fulfillment.\footnote{372} Colonization by system is best resisted by means of cultural activities which have been neither politicized nor

\footnote{371} See Tinder 1989, 107-8 and Rosenblum 1987, 72-3. Rosenblum comments that “[c]lassical liberalism is not attuned to the need for personal detachment, in part because it does not recognize the emotional intrusiveness of public life.”

\footnote{372} Tinder [1989, 9] makes the point in regards to Christian individuals.
commercialized, but which are pursued for their own sake with no particular thought for the whole. As George Lindbeck [1984, 128] puts the point, "[r]eligious communities are likely to be practically relevant in the long run to the degree that they do not first ask what is either practical or relevant, but instead concentrate on their own intratextual outlooks and forms of life.” By engaging in and encouraging such outlooks and forms of life, the churches can, in Thomas Molnar’s words, “open, in the teeth of the [social] apparatus, avenues of transcendence, and deepen them in proportion as the apparatus becomes more extended and more nearly perfected” [Molnar 1957, 38].

The cultural activities of the private sphere can take many forms, social, familial, educational and economic, but (as Chaplin [2005, 599] points out) to insist that they are political is to forfeit a potential, if token, measure of resistance to colonization by system, which entails the politicization (as well as the commercialization) of society. 373 The best response to the threat of the final sovereignty of politics (as well as of the market economy) over every field of human endeavour is to recognize the limits of political citizenship, or as Tinder [1989, 106] puts it, to shield individuals from “compulsory social requirements so that [they] can live social values in [their] own way.” 374 By forbearing from joining unreservedly in the collectivized activities that make up the visible public life of society, we can affirm that our identities are not exhausted by political ascriptions, and that many important areas of our lives flourish when left outside what

373 To call such activities political, Chaplin continues, is “to risk playing into the hands of modern statism.” See also Cochran 1990, 52.
374 See also Mathewes 2007, 159-60: “we properly participate in public life by resisting the ‘closure’ of what passes for politics today, that is, by resisting the inevitable gravitational tug of any political order towards claiming final sovereignty over every other possible locus of human attachment….” See also Cady 1993, 88-9.
Johnson [2007, 223] calls “the direct purview of an all-embracing public (as in political) imperative.”

The role of the churches in countering colonization by system is negative or defensive in that it subsists in developing the niches or unstructured areas of society into shock-absorbers against what Wuthnow [1992, 224] calls “the increasing penetration of system rationality into the lifeworld.” The churches are well suited to this negative role of protecting private spaces if only because their buildings constitute unique spaces of encounter; they are, as Mathewes [2002, 556] points out, one of the few kinds of place in which people can still gather to engage in moral conversation without a central focus on political interests or consumption. A particular problem arising from colonization by system, we noted, is the homogenization of ideas and values that results when all of society is made over in the image of administrative and market systems. The churches can counter cultural homogenization by providing an arena in which real differences can interact; in which, as Mathewes [2007, 209] puts it “we may occasionally run into people who are not clones of ourselves.”

By creating or protecting niches or unstructured areas of society, the churches and other normative communities help to develop a sense of the specificity of place which allows for some measure of reflection on the public philosophy, or at least critical distance from it, and so for vibrant public debate. Space is one condition of the formation of individual and critical thinking; another is time and memory. Memory contributes to personal autonomy because we

375 See also Tinder 1989, 10, and Mathewes 2007, 208. As Chaplin [2008, 70] points out, this position departs from that of Aristotelians, republicans and others in denying that “membership in the polis is either morally prior to or more ennobling than membership in other communities or associations.”

attain individuality by developing our consciousness of the past. As the past comes into awareness, purposes and life-plans arise from it, and these in turn help to deliver us from dominant external influences. Memory contributes as well to civic virtue because the capacity to see the identity and needs of others depends on imagination, which is not boundless but receives its content from the past; it depends largely on what we know already. As Nedelsky [2000, 274] puts it, imagination is the capacity, not to make things up, but to call forth perspectives of which one has some knowledge. Besides the churches, many social groups are, as we noted, communities of memory, repositories of collective traditions and narratives. The ideas and values that such communities store and pass down give substance to our individuality and our critical thinking.

While negative in regards to system, the role of the churches in the private sphere is positive in preserving particularistic forms of life, and hence the spirit of a free, non-colonized society. The churches are also well suited to this positive role, for activities such as prayer and meditation, liturgical rites and sacraments strengthen what Wuthnow [1992, 223] calls “multidimensionality over against the one-dimensionality of technical reason.” As we have noted, colonization by system compounds the tendency of liberal societies to dismantle all traditional communities, leaving a society that is simply an aggregate of individuals acting in their own interests. The practices of the churches counter this tendency by means of their communal dimension. As Cavanaugh points out, the liturgy does more than provide motivation for self-improvement; it generates a social body, the Body of Christ. The Eucharist, in particular, is a group

377 Cavanaugh cited Johnson 2007, 221, and see Cavanaugh 2002, 54, 83. See also Tinder 1989, 91 and 227: while meditation is carried out in solitude, it is fundamentally communal as it takes the form of a search for truths which are universally human and which thus belong “between and among us.”
celebration, one by which a collection of discrete individuals becomes a community, a body. Colonization by system also compounds the tendency of liberal societies to break up the continuity of time. The Eucharist brings together past and future as a collective memory which “recollects” the church and, as Mathewes [2007, 295] puts it, provides a foretaste of something to come as “a fugitive fragment from another age.”

If the primary role of the churches is to maintain the space and the memories that resist colonization by system, a subsidiary role is to support and coordinate other communities that do likewise. The churches can cultivate links with such intentional communities, religious or secular, as provide space for non-rationalized activities, especially those that have emerged in response to intruding system. These would include, for instance, environmental groups, human potential and encounter groups, and those experimenting in alternative forms of economics, such as community-supported agriculture [Wuthnow 1992, 223; Cavanaugh 2002, 94-5]. An obvious example of such communities is the family. The success of the evangelical churches has been due in part to the range of services that they provide for families, for instance in the form of daycares and marriage and divorce support groups [Mathewes 2002, 561].

The mainline churches have generally preferred to engage in more direct political action, for example by supporting groups concerned with wages and other material interests, but such activities may actually facilitate rather than resist intrusions by system.

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378 As Mathewes [2002, 563] points out, there are probably ideological reasons for this difference in approach, namely that the mainline churches prefer not to offer any sort of normative model for familial structures, much less to suggest that single-parent homes are operating at a disadvantage to two-parent households, or that the former are in some sense not “equivalent” to the latter.
It is commonly agreed, as we saw in Chapter Five, that the public sphere of a liberal democracy benefits from a vibrant civil society. The associational or structural pluralism of civil society facilitates popular participation and counters the tendency of system to become isolated from the norms and activities of everyday life. Associational groups maintain and develop a variety of positions on public issues and they provide resources for these to be presented and promoted in public debate. In a comparable way, civil society benefits from the normative communities of the private sphere, which maintain and make available the systems of shared meanings that make public moral choices possible [Lovin 1986, 9]. Associational or structural pluralism finds support in a kind of pluralism which has been called “directional.” One problem with contemporary civil society is its monistic directional vision, specifically that of utilitarian materialism, which strengthens system in Habermas’s sense by encouraging the conformity of mass society. The churches and other normative communities of the private sphere contribute to directional pluralism in that their activities include thought and dialogue about transcendent or at least moral principles. They provide the traditions, beliefs and ideals which are, as Tinder [1989, 56] puts it, the “raw material from which communal bonds are constructed.”

Protecting the directional pluralism of the private sphere of society is a valid alternative to the congruence remedy for the ills of civil society and public debate. While it is primarily a remedy for colonization by system, it is also a useful measure against the isolation of system, for it allows creative and radical reflection on the excesses of statism and capitalism, as well as the personal, inner exploration that is a necessary prelude to public discussion and debate. The role of the churches in protecting directional pluralism finds support in the argument that groups can

379 This is a common criticism of modern society. See, for example, Mouw and Griffioen 1993, 117ff.
contribute to liberal democracy without necessarily being themselves congruent with liberal-democratic norms. For Fukuyama [1995, 351], in fact, the roots of social capital lie in traditional, normative communities, and liberal democracy works best when it is “leavened with cultural traditions that arise from nonliberal sources.” The churches can fulfill a public role in the private sphere by standing as examples of normative communities and by forming bonds with other such communities.

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380 See also Elshtain 2001, 12: “modern liberalism must go outside liberalism itself in order to sustain its most cherished ideals.” Weithman [2002, 90] argues similarly. Rosenblum [1998b, e.g. 326-7] points out that incongruent groups, i.e. those that do not conform to liberal democratic norms, may cultivate virtues which are not necessarily appreciated in liberal democracy but which have to do with human flourishing generally.
Conclusion

This study has sought to develop a pluralist conception of post-secularism and to spell out the implications of that conception for the public role of the churches in liberal societies. We began by distinguishing between two common approaches to post-secularism, known here as civil religion and contrast church theory, and we concluded that both fall short from a pluralist perspective. The first sacrifices a unique Christian perspective on social and political issues in an attempt to achieve relevance to existing political debate. The second recognizes the importance of the churches in preserving and passing down such perspectives, but ignores resources beyond the churches which can be useful in bringing those perspectives to bear on public debate. Our focus on these approaches to post-secularism led us to the conundrum whereby, as Mathewes [2007, 116] puts it, some post-secularists express a...desire for universality, but...only at the cost of sacrificing their distinctness in order to enter the ‘public’ realm; [while] others express concern with affirming the distinctness of the Christian message, but assume that such affirmations entail the systematic rejection of engagement with non-Christians and a turn inward into the church.  

We are now in a position to consider a different distinction between types of post-secularism, one that will allow us to see the limits of both civil religion and contrast church theory and to develop an alternative to both. We will begin by distinguishing between pluralist and monist approaches to post-secularism and by identifying the monistic tendencies in both civil society and contrast church theory. We will then relate this distinction to two central themes of this

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381 Cavanaugh 2002, 90 and Thiemann 1996, 161 identify this conundrum in similar terms.
study: the traditional role of the churches in promoting social ethics, and their role in
demarcating and strengthening a private sphere of society.

Chapter Four introduced the pluralist approach to post-secularism by way of the Two Cities
tradition of Christian political thought. The Two Cities doctrine originates in scripture and in the
realization of the early Christians that the inauguration of the Kingdom of God had not
immediately materialized on earth. The doctrine was developed most notably by Augustine, who
distinguished between the city of God, governed by the eternal truths of the gospel, and the
earthly city, which is best left to prudence and common sense.\(^{382}\) As we noted, the Two Cities
doctrine contains few substantive political principles, for it maintains that we lack the correct fit
between the ultimate reality of God’s self-realization in Christ and the penultimate ideal ordering
of political life, the details of which are known to God alone and are not disclosed in scripture.\(^{383}\)
The Two Cities doctrine has largely fallen out of favour because of the widespread consensus
that Christianity does contain specific social and political principles,\(^{384}\) but the doctrine is not
without social and political implications. While it is mostly silent on positive prescriptions for

\(^{382}\) The tradition has scriptural backing, for instance in Paul’s distinction between the two aeons [Rom 5:12-21] and
in the “Render unto Caesar” parable [Matt 12: 15-22; Mark 12:13-17]. For an outline of the tradition, see Benne
1995, e.g. 80ff. and 155ff., and Kraynak 2001, 149, 228, 231.

\(^{383}\) Markham 1994, 182, following Neuhaus. Fergusson [1998, 158] likewise distinguishes between an ultimate
eschatological reality and a penultimate political order. One reason for the political quietism of this tradition is the
view that a precise distinction between the two cities is not possible prior to the eschaton: for Augustine [1950, 346
(XI§)], “the two cities… are in this present world commingled, and as it were entangled together.” As Insole [2004,
92-3] comments, “we cannot tell to which city anyone belongs…. [t]he saved and the damned are irreducibly mixed
together, which makes a group identification with any one city impossible. Neither good nor evil can be located
straightforwardly in any time or space.”

\(^{384}\) The doctrine began its decline as early as the seventeenth century because of its incompatibility with the concept
of the divine right of kings and with the more activist strains of Calvinist social thought. An important twentieth-
century development was *The Theological Declaration of Barmen* [1934], which explicitly opposed the doctrine on
the grounds that its recognition of the autonomy of the secular sphere had encouraged or permitted collusion
between the German churches and the Nazi regime. See Kraynak 2001, 73 and Forrester 1989, 90 for other
highlights of the history of Two Cities or Kingdoms thought.
political society, it is clear on certain negative prohibitions, specifically of religious or secular ideologies which would employ political power in instituting perfectionist programs. Theorists in the Two Cities tradition oppose all forms of political totalization or absolutism, religious and secular, or what Gerard Loughlin calls “theologico-philosophical metanarratives seeking mastery.”

This negative prohibition is the most important element of a pluralist approach to post-secularism. We have noted that strong secularism is based largely on the argument that liberal society can be pluralist only to the extent that it is secular. That argument can point to a long tradition of Christian political thought which has sought to embody the Kingdom of God in social reality and so to install a Christian polity, a theocracy. This theocratic tradition did not end with the passing of the Constantinian age of established and national churches, but persists in a number of Christian movements today, including the conservative evangelical groups in the USA known as the New Christian Right. The success of the NCR has bolstered the strong secularist argument from social diversity and presented a challenge to all varieties of post-secular thought, which cannot simply assume the consistency of a religious resurgence with the principles of pluralism. What does post-secularism say about movements, such as the NCR, which are tainted by the theocratic tradition? Habermas’s retention of strong secularist principles in an inner public sphere of the state apparatus helps to guard against the return of

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385 Cited Insole 2004, 128n. See also Kraynak 2001, 185-6, and Markham 1994, 182: “The two-kingsdoms doctrine excludes all monisms because it concedes right at the outset that anything in this world will always be as best an approximation of the kingdom that will be fully realized only at the eschaton.”

386 This theocratic tradition is sometimes portrayed as Hellenic (in contrast to Hebraic) or as Calvinist (as against Lutheran). In the Hellenic approach, the ideal worldly order can be known by reason and instituted universally, while in the Calvinist approach the inner certainty of salvation resulting from the doctrine of predestination can result in a confident activism as opposed to a withdrawal from practical politics. See Tinder 1989, 74 and Benne 1995, 26-7 for more on these distinctions.
theocracy, but it does not resolve the question of how public debate outside that sphere can be inclusive or open, civil and respectful, resistant to theocratic strains which would shut discussion down.

As we saw in the early chapters of this study, proponents of the civil religion approach appeal to pluralism in their case against strong secularism. They argue that strong secularist strictures on public debate are monistic in excluding the contributions of religious believers, especially of those who feel called to lead an integrated faith-based life. Civil religion theorists point out that the disestablished mainline churches at least have generally strengthened pluralism, for instance by leading or supporting movements for the inclusion of marginalized minorities and by helping to form the civic virtues necessary to participation in public life. The civil religion approach does, however, depart from the Two Cities tradition in that it denies or ignores a dissonance between religion and politics. It attributes a positive political content to Christianity, one that affirms the particular regime of liberal democracy, and it assumes that the two cities can be harmonized and regulated in uniform fashion.387

An example of this harmonious regulation was seen in Chapters Five and Six, which discussed the support of Christian social theorists for what we called, following Rosenblum, the congruence remedy for the revival of civil society and public debate. As we saw, the congruence remedy identifies the obstacle to open debate as being the persistence of traditional communities which limit autonomous, rational-critical discussion by individuals, and it seeks to promote the

387 For Tocqueville, it is a natural human desire to “regulate political society and the City of God in uniform fashion” or “to harmonize earth with heaven.” He maintains, however, that a healthy democracy makes room for both the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom; that it does not reduce either principle to the other [Tocqueville 1966, 265, 40].
universal principles of liberal democracy within these communities in order to render them congruent with the wider society. The congruence remedy aims to usher in a single, national community with shared values and a common understanding of how local and particularistic communities should be organized.\textsuperscript{388} The remedy is therefore at odds with recent group-pluralist trends in liberal democracy, including the politics of identity and recognition, for communities internally at odds with liberal-democratic principles are deemed illegitimate even if they are willing and able to abide by those principles in public debate and other dealings with political society. As McGraw [2010, 173] comments, the remedy “needlessly alienates citizens whose only fault is taking their faith more seriously than many liberal theorists think reasonable.”\textsuperscript{389} This study has affirmed Rosenblum’s conclusion on the congruence remedy, that “containing the most egregious incongruities” in society is sufficient and that the remedy is otherwise “unnecessary and unjustifiable” [Rosenblum 1994b, 97].

Chapters Three and Four showed that there is some consistency between the Two Cities doctrine and the second approach to post-secularism that we considered. For example, the dualism posited by contrast church theory between fallen society and the church as a manifestation of the Kingdom of God can be helpful in setting limits to religious and secular totalization. However, we also saw that contrast church theory fails to support a diversity of integral communities; that it is committed to the integrity only of its own, ecclesial community and to institutional pluralism less as an intrinsic good than as a response to the perceived danger of diluting Christian with other, notably secular values. Further, contrast church theory tends to renounce political

\textsuperscript{388} See Carter 1998, 19, who ascribes this aim to “liberal constitutionalism,” and Elshtain 1997, 174-5, who attributes it to a communitarian ideal in which “the social space for difference, indifference, dissent, and refusal is squeezed out.”

\textsuperscript{389} For a similar point, see Rosenblum 1998b, 110.
engagement in liberal society, and so provides no measures for the reinvigoration of public debate that post-secularism requires. In the Two Cites doctrine, as we noted, religion should have no overriding political purpose or goal (since any such purpose would be idolatrous), but limited forms of accommodation with political regimes are legitimate and political engagement under the conditions of certain regimes can be necessary and desirable.

The distinction between monist and pluralist types of post-secularism allows us to identify a further problem with contrast church theory: its tendency to social inactivism can flip over into the tradition of theological totalization. This danger could be seen, for instance, in some strains of the Puritan movement in which the project of separating a spiritual aristocracy of saints from the damned was a means of purifying the visible, historical church so that it could ultimately govern both heaven and earth [Insole 2004, 6; Kraynak 2001, 102]. We noted that many contrast church theorists place the churches in an alternative or parallel public sphere, where they live out and exemplify the Kingdom of God. A possible implication of this idea is that the governing principles of the alternative public sphere would supplant those of the actual public sphere in an ideal society, for instance in the kind of Christian communitarian society which contrast church theorists seem to favour. The alternative public sphere can be taken as an interim measure, to be dispensed with once the Kingdom has expanded to encompass all society. At that point, of course, the churches would no longer remain contrast communities, standing for pluralism and diversity against the natural monistic tendency of the state. Hauerwas [1981, 78-9, 2003, 9]

390 We have used the concept of the congruence remedy to refer to the project of importing the universal principles of liberalism into society and social groups, but there is no reason why it should not include attempts to render society congruent with the moral order of a universal religion. In regards to Hauerwas, Rasmusson suggests that anti-Constantinianism is so fundamental to his ecclesiology that his church would likely remain a contrast one in any kind of society [Rasmusson 1995, 295 and 226-7].
complains that the procedures and principles of liberal society, being confined to ensuring that desires are pursued fairly, without impinging on others, must fall short of transforming either ourselves or society. Like proponents of the congruence remedy, he misses the point of at least one liberal tradition, known here (following John Gray) as *modus vivendi*, that public norms and procedures are designed not so much for personal or social transformation as to provide individuals and groups with the space, and perhaps the material resources, that they need to live with autonomy and integrity.

The two extremes of social inactivism and theocratic totalization are in one respect alike: the hopelessness of the one mirrors the messianic hope of the other. Both see the earthly city as inescapably morally compromised, so that the only viable stance of the churches is one of total critique, fundamental negativity, which can take the form either of indifference or judgementalism [Mathewes 2007, 228, 216-7]. A traditional role of the churches, however, has been to preserve and promote hope, a role which has usually been conceived as fostering faith in an after-life, but which has a socio-political component as well. This socio-political component is to an extent negative, for it focuses on protecting society from all kinds of political totalization, theological and philosophical; from all urges to establish unity and coherence by ending the world’s complexities. A more positive side of promoting hope takes the form of supporting, not so much certainty in the future as openness to it, a sense of standing at a beginning and participating in a new thing that God is doing [Mathewes 2007, 199, 247-8; Tinder 1989, 164].

Hopelessness and messianic hope are alike sins of pride: they arise from the fear that new developments are not under our control since we lack clear knowledge of their

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391 This conception of hope is close to what Tinder [1989, e.g. 9-10 and *passim*] calls the “prophetic stance.”
nature and direction. They reflect an unwillingness to accommodate difference, or to acknowledge the reality of plurality and diversity. The choice facing post-secularism is not between action and inaction, debate and isolation, but between participation under the delusion of perfect human knowledge and participation that is divested of pride and resistant to the temptation to sum up and pass judgement [Tinder 1989, 218-9; Mathewes 2007, 245-6; 256-8].

And yet hope does require an element of permanence and durability to enable us to overcome the transitoriness and instability of life. That requirement has traditionally been met by religions, which live and grow by projecting themselves over time, connecting the past and the future in order to allow for remembrance and anticipation, for memory and a measure of trust in the future [d’Entrèves 2000, 71]. We have seen that religious groups can fulfill this function by countering tendencies towards the monistic uniformity of what Habermas calls “colonization by system,” or the penetration of society and social groups by political and market systems. We suggested that this role of the churches has two components: the first is to stand as examples of visible and vibrant contrast communities, while the second is to find common ground with other communities of memory and to affirm the value of their narratives and ways of life. This role of the churches resists hopelessness by ensuring that we have memories of our common life, yet recognizes that the human condition is one of suspension and uncertainty; that time is not ours to control, and that any attempt to promote a system or set of political norms which purports to manifest our ultimate end is premature. The public role of the churches in conjunction with

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392 For Tinder [1989, 36], our human fallenness takes the form primarily of an inclination to exalt ourselves and to control everything around us. For Reinhold Niebuhr [1944, 135] similarly, “pride, which seeks to hide the conditioned and finite character of all human endeavour, is the very quintessence of sin....” See also Insole 2004, 122: “[s]elf-righteousness can take the form of extreme activism or pacifism.”

393 Tinder 1989, 71-2; Mathewes 2007, 246, 236; Thiemann 1996, 172, following Walzer.
other communities helps to guarantee that liberal societies remain pluralist, and it fosters hope by freeing us from the illusion that the world is complete and closed.

II

The role of the churches in resisting colonization by system can go some way towards ensuring the conditions of reinvigorated public debate. As we saw in Chapter Six, civic skills and virtues such as respect for otherness and critical judgement originate largely in the communities that are undermined or dismantled by colonizing system. However, the growth and development of these skills and virtues in communities is not inexorable, even when they are nurtured by the conditions of time and space outlined in that chapter. We cannot assume, as Macedo [1998, 59] puts it, that “liberal citizens – self-restrained, moderate, and reasonable – spring full-blown from the soil of private freedom.” A common criticism of liberalism, in fact, is that the social niches of private life may simply bolster the pursuit of narrow, sectional interests: citizens may conceive the negative freedom of liberalism as an end in itself, or as a mere means to personal security. Alternatively, the burdens of negative freedom may result in our falling prey to extremist political ideologies. The post-secular role of the churches should therefore include their traditional and still vital function of actively promoting Christian social ethics.

Corresponding to the monistic and pluralist types of post-secularism, there are two broad approaches to the promotion of social ethics. The ‘dialectical’ approach, which is favoured in the totalizing traditions of religious and secular political thought, purports to understand society

394 See also Rosenblum 1998b, 45.
and humanity objectively and comprehensively, and so to be able to discern an ideal set of social ethics.\footnote{For a discussion of these concepts, see Weaver 1964, 63-4. A similar distinction is made by Galston [2004, 47] between the politics of recognition (i.e. of social bonds that are constitutive if not always acknowledged) and the politics of construction (i.e. of new bonds and new supporting ethics.) See also Tully’s distinction between the ancient and modern constitution (cited in note 330 above), the first being an existing form of association brought to awareness and the second a novel form brought into being in society by imposition, and Tinder’s [1989, 161-2] distinctions between persuasion and manipulation, legislation and violence.} Proponents of the dialectical approach are rightly concerned that, in the terms we used in Chapter Two, the private virtues of love and care for immediate others do not consistently issue in the properly civic virtue of respect for more distant others. These theorists therefore seek to circumvent the chain of love and concern by freeing social ethics from worldly contradictions, including the unpredictable qualities of human nature. They pursue what Thieumann [1996, 172] calls “the dream that we can discover a moral life applicable to humanity itself, a form of moral reasoning detached from all particular communities.” Like the congruence remedy, the dialectical approach is distinguished by its use of the institutions of the public sphere to promulgate social ethics, and like the congruence remedy it tends to reflect the majoritarian culture of society, and so to be destructive of minority cultures.\footnote{Public institutions take easily to the dialectical approach because, as Tocqueville [1966, 649] points out, the uniformity of the method of that approach spares authorities from examining an infinity of details.}

A pluralist post-secularism must therefore adopt the second, ‘rhetorical’ approach to social ethics. This approach falls between the inactivism of laissez-faire liberalism and the activism of political totalization, neither ratifying existing social norms uncritically nor abandoning them for new ones. In the prescription of David Nicholls and other theorists, noted in Chapter Four, it starts with a recognition of what is being thought and done in a society rather than with a conception of what ought to be thought and done.\footnote{Note 236 above.} The rhetorical approach appeals to the
ideas and practices it encounters to render them more consistent, to foster more general
adherence to them, and to develop them to meet the requirements of civil political debate.\footnote{398}{See Passmore 1974, 187: “[w]hat [the West] needs, for the most part, is not so much a ‘new ethic,’ as a more
general adherence to a perfectly familiar ethic.” See also Weaver 1964, 63.}
The rhetorical approach favours what Walzer calls “situated, particular” norms (or “the view
from somewhere”) over “disembodied universalism” (or “the view from nowhere”).\footnote{399}{Cited Galston 1991, 49.}
Thus, Neuhaus rejects the dialectical approach for its appeal to “anonymous, deracinated,
dehistoricized rational beings,” as do Mouw and Griffioen for its “deliberate indifference to the
ideals and values that people actually profess.”\footnote{400}{Mouw and Griffioen 1993, 50.}
The rhetorical approach considers social
ethics to be strongest when they are based on existing norms, or the view from somewhere, if
only because we are more likely to act on these than on abstractions derived from public reason
or religious doctrine.\footnote{401}{See Chiaramonte 1969, 144: collectivist approaches to social change do not take into account the \textit{conditio humana}. Because of the inertia of mental habits, he points out, appeals to universal social ethics may not succeed in stimulating great effort.}
As Richard Weaver comments, “the dialectician…knows in a vacuum,” for “dialectic…permits him to use the name of a species as a term without ever attending to
whether the species exists and therefore is a force in being” [Weaver 1964, 65, 64].

For proponents of the rhetorical approach, we cannot simply design and implement new social
ethics because the social environment, like the natural one, is fragile and cannot be reshaped at
will. When promoting social ethics by way of public institutions, we encounter the resistance of
society and its inhabitants to our expectations; we find that they are not endlessly correctible.\footnote{402}{See Passmore 1974, 40, 100, 183n; Mathewes 2007, 257, and Kymlicka 1995, 167.}
Attempts to reshape the social environment may have effects contrary to those anticipated: for
example, undermining the integrity and autonomy of communities may rigidify dominant ways of life and distort free evaluation of those ways of life, especially by the marginalized. The rhetorical approach proceeds, therefore, by way of the norms and activities of private life rather than by those of public institutions. The churches are well suited to this approach because they are no longer public bodies with ties to the state, but themselves local, particularistic communities. While the dialectical approach to social ethics takes citizens as means to an ideal society, the churches are called upon to minister, not to an abstract or generalized humanity, but to men and women as they find them, in all their diversity, sin and suffering [Jackson 1997, 201]. What we called, following Forrester, the “collection of indicatives” of Christianity, its stories and descriptions of the material world, cannot (as David Martin puts it) “be assimilated upward…to some higher-order synthesis which claims to have extracted the relativities of time and place in favour of its own eternal and absolute revelation” [Martin 2005, 176, and see Forrester 1989, 27-30]. These stories and descriptions give guidance for everyday life and call for a personal response in ways that abstract universals do not.

The prior existence of settled norms and convictions presupposed by the rhetorical approach need not be explicit, for they may abide as it were unknowingly in the habits and customs of a society. Some proponents of the rhetorical approach claim that, despite the advances of secularism, a religious moral outlook remains central to the habits and customs of Western societies; that we are still (as Maurice Reckitt put it) “in some real, if shadowy sense theistic in...

403 See Kymlicka, cited Williams 1994, 52, and Tinder 1989, 51. See also Coleman 1982, 194: “I am…strongly convinced that the Enlightenment desire for an unmediated universal fraternity and language…was destructive of the lesser, real ‘fraternities’…in American life.”

404 See also Weaver 1964, 63: “Rhetoric is… concerned not with abstract individuals, but with men in being.”

405 Rosenblum 1987, 169-72, following Walzer.
This claim finds support among those theorists, cited in Chapter Three, for whom secularization has more to do with falling church-membership than with a decline of belief in the existence of God and the transcendent nature of humanity. The claim is perhaps stronger when stated negatively; when it points to the weakness of popular commitment to strong secularist principles, or to a low level of confidence in the capacity of secular public reason to explain the world about us and to resolve contentious moral issues. While dissatisfaction with public reason does not necessarily signal a renewal of religious adherence, it does present an opportunity for the churches to pursue an alternative to their role of fortifying public reason with Christian social ethics. Coleman [1982, 193] claims in regards to the American religious ethic and rhetoric that they contain rich, polyvalent symbolic power to command commitments of emotional depth, when compared to ‘secular’ language… [which] remains exceedingly “thin” as a symbol system.

Christianity’s collection of indicatives retains a stronger existential impact than the abstract universals of the dialectical approach because it finds an echo in the norms and values of everyday life. An important part of promoting social ethics should therefore be to protect the forms of everyday life in societies which, despite their multiculturalism, are in many ways increasingly uniform and homogenous.

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407 See Martin 1969, 107: “we are not a secular society, particularly if by that omnibus adjective we mean an increasing approximation of average thinking to the norms of natural and social science.” (Original emphasis.)
We noted that the Two Cities doctrine and the practices of the visible church contributed historically to the modern constitutional principle that state and society are separate entities and that the state is limited in its rights over society. We also noted that today the distinction between state and society tends to take the form of one between the state and individuals, so that the power of the state is curtailed by the rights of individuals and the rights of individuals by state sovereignty. One consequence of this form of the state/society distinction, we suggested, is that the integrity of communities is not secure, for they are subject both to state sovereignty and to the sovereign rights of their individual members. For proponents of group-pluralism, the modern state has over-reached itself, and needs to be refashioned in a way that recognizes and respects diverse social groups [Chaplin 1994, 82 and 2008, 70-1].

Habermas’s post-secularism helps to provide recognition for social groups and the valuable contributions that they bring to public debate. If we conceive of the public sphere as the site of a type of action, one in which collective as well as individual ends are pursued, and as a mode of establishing relationships between groups engaged in that pursuit, we must allow that it can be instituted in a variety of social settings, many of which cannot be conceived as political by their relationship to the state [Calhoun 1997, 237]. Habermas’s outer public sphere, or the intermediate sphere known as civil society, encompasses diverse spaces which are public in as much as they are sites of such action and relationships. We considered an accommodationist critique of Habermas’s model – a critique which rejects limits on religious public arguments in his inner as well as his outer public sphere – but concluded that a state apparatus free of comprehensive doctrines is better able to create and maintain the conditions for a plurality of
social groups, including religious ones, to thrive. We suggested further that, if only on pragmatic grounds, religious believers should attempt to contribute to the decision-making processes of the state in terms that are common to all. As we noted, Habermas’s model does not and could not exclude the indirect influence of religious public arguments on the deliberations and decisions of the state. However, this influence will be adequate to post-secularism only to the extent that the churches can communicate their moral and religious vision to their members. Discipleship must precede public witness, we argued, and discipleship should take place at a remove from political debate, in the private sphere of society.

What makes action and debate public is not just their site or locale but also their characteristics: that they are undertaken in a thoughtful and responsible way, and that others are addressed as fellow citizens by means of rational persuasion [Weithman 1997, 96-7]. As we saw, Habermas focuses on the formation of civic skills and virtues in the course of public participation; in contrast, we stressed the importance of communities outside the public sphere in generating a citizenry capable of free agency and respect for rights and duties. We suggested that both Habermas and his post-secular critics have paid insufficient attention to the third component of a tripartite model of social spheres, the private sphere. Typically, they conceive of that sphere as being composed of pre-political, unorganized individuals, as well as of families, a conception which suggests that the sphere will be prone to cocooning and political apathy, and hence resistant to social transformation. This study has argued that, as Habermas reformulates the liberal public sphere to allow religious groups and individuals to take part in debate on public issues, so the liberal private sphere should be reformulated to acknowledge the role of religious groups in cultivating and nurturing a common life from which citizens can emerge capable of contributing to public debate.
The distinction between pluralist and monist approaches to post-secularism helps us to recall the primary reason for Habermas’s reformulation of the liberal public sphere: his model denies religious believers in the theocratic tradition access to the institutions of the state. When the public sphere of society is equated to the state apparatus, citizens must choose between opting out of political life and attempting to refashion state institutions in accordance with their religious ideals. Until the 1970s, conservative evangelical groups in the U.S. were generally content with the first alternative: they understood their end or purpose as being to save souls in the private sphere rather than to engage secular trends in public life. Since then, they have opted for the second alternative, seeking to capture and reform public institutions to embody fundamentalist Christian doctrines. Habermas’s outer public sphere allows such groups to raise and defend their perspectives on public issues without necessarily adopting the theocratic aim of re-organizing the social and political order in line with those perspectives [McGraw 2010, 45].

Habermas’s approach to post-secularism recognizes that a multicultural society can hope only for a constitutional and not a substantive consensus, or for a *modus vivendi* based on common political procedures rather than for society-wide agreement on moral principles.408 However, we saw that Habermas does demand or encourage a consensus on liberal values in his outer public sphere as a means of reinvigorating inclusive public debate. One problem with this position is that it does not permit members of groups which are not governed by liberal principles freely to organize their lives.409 As McGraw points out, if civil society is designed to favour liberal citizens, other citizens may conclude that political campaigns are the proper vehicle for

408 See McGraw 2010, 266: “[I]t is simply implausible, given the shape and extent of modern pluralism, to expect anything more than… a constitutional consensus.”

409 See McGraw 2010, 271: “[r]eligious believers… are much less likely to impose their particular ways of life on others if afforded the opportunity to freely organize their own lives.”
expressing their beliefs. Conversely, he argues, if all citizens are accorded the space to live an integrated life, they will be more likely to recognize a distinction between politics and other areas of life; they will learn to reason politically in ways that are not reducible to totalizing dogma and to look on politics as a means of securing limited temporal goods. Habermas’s distinction between an inner and an outer public sphere should therefore be accompanied by one between the outer public sphere, or the intermediate sphere of civil society, and a private sphere of non-political activities. This study has shared the widespread concern for the eclipse of a common public world, and particularly for the decline of general public debate, but it has argued that these begin with the loss of a privately owned share in the world and that they can best be reclaimed by strengthening the private sphere of society [Calhoun 1997, 244, following Arendt].

This study has argued, more specifically, for a constitutional space in which religious groups consistent with a just and stable political regime can be accommodated without interference from the institutions of that regime. Much remains to be said about the details of that accommodation. We began with the distinction between weak and strong principles of secularism, but we have concentrated mainly on the strong principle and its shortcomings. The weak principle, as we portrayed it, reflects an equality of intent; that is, its aim is a non-sectarian society in which all licit comprehensive doctrines enjoy an equal opportunity to flourish. We have raised the question of whether this equality of intent is adequate to post-secularism given that liberal societies seem, advertently or otherwise, to place religious groups and traditions at a disadvantage. In Tomasi’s phrase, liberalism exacts an “unequal psychological tax” on religious

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410 McGraw 2010, 216, 252, 270-3. And see 158-9, 176 for examples of both types of civil society from Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and France.
citizens who choose an integrated faith-based way of life.\footnote{Tomasi 2001, 35-6. As Tomasi continues his metaphor, political liberals should seek out and advocate all constitutional means to flatten that tax.} We argued that post-secularism may therefore require special recognition and protection for such ways of life, for example in the form of material support and exemption from generally applicable laws. In the introduction we noted Charles Mathewes’ verdict that accommodationists have won their debate with separationists. Perhaps we could say that accommodationists have prevailed only in the debate over strong secularism, and that they must continue to engage on the question of weak secularism. In this stage of the debate post-secularists should concentrate on exploring ways in which liberalism can become more equitable in facilitating and embracing diverse religious traditions.
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