Liberalism, Pluralism and Christianity[1]

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There are two major, current, Christian approaches to the phenomenon of social pluralism. One is to strive for an accommodation along liberal lines, the other is to try to achieve a Christian society. I believe that both of these responses are inadequate and so would like to suggest what a proper response should be.

As a means to this I will discuss the nature and problems of *liberalism*; this is because the relation between liberalism and pluralism lies close to the heart of many contemporary problems with pluralism. Currently liberalism is asserted as a form of pluralism; indeed liberals often assume that theirs is the *only* genuine form of pluralism. Many Christians have, in turn, accepted this assertion of a close association between liberalism and pluralism as accurate and so have either rejected pluralism because they feel they must reject liberalism, or else have embraced liberalism because they believe they must embrace pluralism. Contrary to this, I will argue that that liberalism is *not* an adequate form of pluralism but leads instead to a large measure of the homogenization in society. Consequently, if Christians reject liberalism, as I believe we should, this does not imply a rejection of pluralism. Instead it means that we need to investigate the possibility of an authentically Christian form of pluralism. However before proceeding further, I need to clarify what I mean by liberalism and pluralism.

It is not an easy thing to say what they are. This is because both are *historical* things. They change through time and, in particular, change due to the formative activity of human beings. Consequently their shape is convoluted and variable, and they have a contingent character which probably includes a future in which new things will appear. If a definition is intended in a brief set of words to say what a thing is and is not, then it is very difficult, if not impossible, to define something that appears in history. Whereas an abstract thing, such as a concept,

may have sharp boundaries (a clear "definition," as in photography), historical things do not. Given this situation, I will not define either pluralism or liberalism. Instead I will try in general terms to depict what I mean when I use these words. The depictions are not tight, for their subjects are not tight and we do need to portray reality.[2]

The meanings ascribed to pluralism vary within disciplines, and also between disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, political science or history. Within political science there are four chief claimants to the term. These are (a) federalism, which concerns the division and distribution of political power according to geographical areas within a state; (b) separation of powers, which concerns the allocation of particular political functions to discrete institutions within a state structure; (c) diverse centres of power within a society – that is, that the power to initiate and shape social change is distributed amongst different types of institutions – political, economic, confessional and educational; (d) the co-existence within one political jurisdiction of people with publicly important different beliefs and ways of life.

The meaning with which we are most concerned at present is the last of these, which is also the meaning most similar to that common amongst sociologists. This meaning also dovetails with ideas current among philosophers. The current philosophical sense of pluralism is that there exist different philosophical views which cannot be reconciled with one another. Some refer in this context to "incommensurate ideological communities," a typification that can serve us politically and sociologically as well. These senses taken together suggest that a situation of social pluralism is one in which there is the co-existence of peoples having importantly different beliefs and ways of life whose differences are for practical purposes incommensurate. As I am concerned with politics, I will not address the question of whether on epistemological or other grounds the current differences can in principle be overcome or resolved. I will focus on situations where such differences do exist, where no ready resolution is in sight and state policies must somehow deal with the actual historical fact of differences. In this

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[2] These depictions also suffer from defects due to my incompetence, but my point is that, even were I less incompetent, fundamental problems would still remain.

respect we need to distinguish between the *fact* of pluralism and *policies* of pluralism. Different people may agree that our societies are pluralistic but may react to that fact quite differently. We may by political means try either to restrict, to accommodate or to promote pluralism. I will proceed on the basis that in most Western societies we have the factual circumstances of pluralism and focus on how we and others have responded and should respond to this circumstance.

Liberalism has elements of a political theory and the patterns of a political movement. These two features do not cohere well and so we need to mention both if we are to get some sense of what liberalism is. Occasionally liberalism is defined very broadly. One collection of supposedly liberal writings has as its first two exponents Socrates and Peter Abelard.[3] This is probably stretching the point. More commonly, and accurately, the roots of liberalism are traced to certain developments in the early modern era, notably (a) the appearance of independent men (or families) due to urbanization, the growth of a market economy, and industrialization, and the consequent growth of individualism and the theories of autonomy and freedom; (b) the attempt to found the state on a non-religious basis due to the problem of the sixteenth and seventeenth century religious wars. This has led to a stress on separating religion and politics; (c) the growth of rationalism and enlightenment philosophies leading to an anti-dogmatism, a rationalism, and a belief in the autonomy of and progress through reason. These impulses took a specific organized form in responses to the French Revolution. In the decade 1810-1820 there arose (alongside the new "revolutionary" or "radical" mode of political thought) the ideas of *restoration, conservatism,* and *liberalism.* The first example of an explicitly self-conscious liberal party seems to have been the *Liberales* in the Spanish *Cortes* in 1812. This was a liberal constitutional party which formed a front against attempts at restoration.[4]

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[3] J.S. Schapiro, ed., *Liberalism: Its Meaning and History* (New York: Von Nostrand, 1958). See also A. Arblaster, *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), p. 12.

[4] *Cf.* The discussion by Eric Voegelin, "Liberalism and Its History," *Review of Politics* vol. 37 (1974), pp. 504-520, esp. p. 506.

Since then liberalism and liberal parties have had a convoluted history. Liberalism is a set of political opinions and attitudes whose character has been shaped in powerful ways by the forces with which it has contended. Originally it was a European and American movement which did not wish to be conservative in that it wanted to move ahead, though not as fast as the radicals. Depending on the power of these other movements, liberalism has appeared in different guises. In Europe, liberal means a conservative individualist, one who resists more revolutionary socialist or social democratic pressures. Raymond Aron and Freidrich von Hayek were such liberals, that is, free market conservatives. In America the *word* liberal means "progressive," vaguely "pink," as there is no socialism against which it can be arrayed and defined. Liberalism, in its nineteenth century heyday, was anti-clerical, but, in modern Europe, it fuses with Christian Democracy. In the United States, nearly all politics and parties are in some sense liberal. Even though the *word* liberal means "progressive," liberalism as a political orientation covers nearly the whole political spectrum; politics is a conflict of left, right and centre liberals.

The political creed of liberalism has also varied over time. However, one peculiar feature of modern liberalism is that it often claims that it has no, or is no, creed. This feature is certainly not universal. It was certainly not readily apparent in Latin American Liberal-Conservative wars. Indeed where liberalism has a strong opponent, then its position *as position* becomes much clearer. But in the latter twentieth century where liberalism is ascendant or dominant, then its claim to be no claim comes to the fore. This claim is made because, according to most political theorists, the principal feature of liberalism is something like "a set of beliefs which proceed from the central assumption that man's essence is his freedom and therefore that what chiefly concerns us in this life is to shape the world as we want it."[5] This stress on freedom leads liberals such as Rawls, Ackerman, Nozick and Dworkin to emphasize that they do not wish to impose their way of life on anyone else, but that their desire is rather that all should be free to live out their own ways of life with the least hindrance. Hence liberalism claims to be a *neutral* philosophy. So for Ronald Dworkin, the liberal state "must

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[5] George Grant, *Technology and Empire,* (Toronto: Anansi, 1969), p. 114.

be neutral on … the question of the good life … political decisions must be so far as possible, independent of any particular conception of the good life, or of what gives values to life."[6] Bruce Ackerman has advanced the "Neutrality Principle:" "No reason (that purports to justify a social arrangement) is a good reason if it requires the power holder to assert (a) that his conception of the good is better than that asserted by any of his fellows, or (b) that, regardless of his conception of the good, he is intrinsically superior to one or more of his fellow citizens."[7] Similar sentiments may be gathered from Rawls or Nozick. This view also manifests itself in the common liberal piety that "you can't impose your beliefs on others."

Taken together these various facets of liberalism reveal a variable political attitude that stresses individuality, freedom, autonomy, rights, the separation of religion and politics, reason, tolerance, the non-imposition of belief, and decent progressiveness. As Voegelin says, this is not a tight picture. Indeed it is doubtful that much of a coherent view can be welded from these disparate elements. But a movement does not have to be coherent, it only has to move, and so this is how the movement currently appears.

The fact of pluralism – especially pluralism of religion – poses many challenges to Christianity. It is probably fair to say the Christian Churches still do not know politically how to respond to it. One common response has been to try to limit plurality by political means – perhaps by imposing some variety of *pax Christianum* or, to be more North-American about it, *pax Judaeo-Christianum*. Such a view is present among American fundamentalists, amongst certain Catholics, and among adherents of a more organic, traditional view of society. It is a response shared by C.S. Lewis as well as Jerry Falwell. I will not try to explore this view but merely point out that it has left-wing as well as right-wing variants. If traditional Catholics are not too open to diversity, neither are liberation theologians. Another Christian response has been to accept a type of pluralism via an accommodation with liberalism. This approach is taken on the right by Michael

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[6] Ronald Dworkin, "Liberalism" in Stuart Hampshire, ed., *Private and Public Morality,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 127, quoted in W. Galston, "Defending Liberalism," pp. 621-629 of *American Political Science Review*, vol. 76 (1982), p.621.
[7] Bruce Ackerman, *Social Justice in the Liberal State* (New Yale University Press, 1980), p. 11. *Cf.* Galston, *loc. cit.*

Novak, and perhaps, Richard Neuhaus.[8] It also has left-wing variants among some more "progressive" evangelicals. While I believe that neither of these responses is a good one I will focus in this paper only on the second one – the accommodation with liberalism. The problems of this response stem from treating liberalism as the only pluralist option and so I will try to show that liberalism can be damaging to many important features of pluralism.

Given liberalism's stress on neutrality and openness, liberals see themselves as exponents of pluralism *par excellence.*[9] They wish to provide the setting in which each individual can pursue his or her own freely chosen life, in which each tolerates the other, each view is held in equal respect, where no view is imposed upon another, and where the state is neutral between all competing particular value claims. However, such a view can lead not to an open society but to the imposition of individualism upon all, replacing a plural society with a homogeneous liberal one. In order to illustrate how this can happen, I will consider some examples taken from liberal theory in order to show its inner logic and then I will try to illustrate the movement's actual effects through some examples.

To illustrate the closure of society induced by liberalism, it is useful to consider Robert Nozick's *Anarchy State and Utopia.* This book is the most libertarian of contemporary liberal works in political theory and has been credited with single-handedly making libertarianism intellectually respectable. What other liberal theorists like Rawls or Dworkin might forbid, Nozick allows. Consequently if we can show that even Nozick's ideas lead to closure in society, then our criticism is likely to apply *a fortiori* to other liberal writers. Nozick emphasizes the wide diversity of people in the world. He provides a partial list:

> Wittgenstein, Elizabeth Taylor, Bertrand Russell, Thomas Merton, Yogi
> Berra, Allen Ginsberg, Harry Wolfson, Thoreau, Casey Stengel, the

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[8] Though Neuhaus himself criticizes liberalism on this point, see P.L. Berger and R.J. Neuhaus, *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy* (Washington, D.C.,: American Enterprise Institute, 1977); R.J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

[9] *Cf.* R.M. Seltzer, "Judaism and Liberal Causes: A Severed Covenant," pp. 21-33 of N. Biggar, J.S. Scott, and W. Schweiker, eds., *Cities of Gods* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 21.

Lubavitcher Rebbe, Picasso, Moses, Einstein, Hugh Heffner, Socrates, Henry Ford … Peter Kropotkin, you and your parents. Is there really one kind of life which is best for each of these people?[10]

Given this rich diversity he exhorts us to develop a society whose hallmark is not what is supposedly best for everyone but rather one which respects the right of each person to live in their own way. Nozick's utopia is primarily one which allows each person to pursue their own utopia. Unlike many liberals Nozick is aware that a way of life is a communal thing and that a healthy society is composed of communities, not individuals. So he wants and thinks he has the framework for a society that allows for the growth of many diverse communities. This society does not try to be a community itself but seeks only to be a framework in which many utopias, many communities can exist and co-exist. These communities can themselves be quite illiberal. They can exclude, they can discriminate, they can be authoritarian. They can be anything their members choose. But the key is the matter of *choice*. Each member chooses to be in a particular community, and must be able to choose to leave. They can join another community or just hang out for a while. The illiberality of certain communities is not an affront to liberalism because the only people in them are ones who have chosen to be so, who want to follow a particular way of life, and who are under no compulsion to stay. The overall society has a liberal character because it is composed of voluntary communities.

However this central stress on voluntariness is not as benign as it might appear. This is because, for Nozick, in order for free will to be real, it must be an *informed* will. Each person must be continually aware of their right to leave. As each person is in a community, then each community must respect the liberal priority of individual choice by reminding and advising its members that they can go at any time. Clifford Orwin refers to this as a kind of "Miranda rule for enthusiasts."[11] In the end the right to choose overrides the right of any community to claim (and,

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[10] Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), p. 312. See the discussion by Clifford Orwin, "Robert Nozick's Liberal Utopia," paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Guelph, Ontario, 1984.

[11] Orwin, *op.cit.*, p.8. I am indebted to Orwin's insightful discussion of Nozick's "utopias."

hence, honestly believe) that it holds to the truth. The priority of choice undercuts the ability of a community to shape its members and succeeding generations so that they will uphold the truth at all costs. Consider, for example, an Amish community where each member is advised (and educated and informed enough so that the advice means something) that they are and should be free to leave at any time, that the community respects this right and will not insist that communal solidarity comes before individual will. Whatever such a community will become, it is no longer an Amish community in its heart, and it will soon cease to be an Amish community in its practices. The Amish themselves realized this fact and fought diligently and successfully to limit the education of their children. A similar strain affects any community that believes that what it holds to is true. If it must inform its members that they can quit at any time, then it must inform them that its beliefs are not the most fundamental thing of all. Communities thus become half-minded and thus half-hearted. As Orwin points out, they become communities founded on prior respect for individual choice and thus become mirror images of the larger liberal society. In this liberal society, communities are not left free, but are constrained to become liberal associations.

The situation is comparable to some current practices in state schools. In many of these schools the ideal is pedagogically to replicate the liberal society. This is done by, in theory, exposing each child in a full, fair and balanced way to the options that exist, exhorting them to give serious consideration to these options, and then perhaps to make a serious commitment to one of them. This approach is applied only in certain parts of the curriculum; it is not done in physics or math, or in matters of creation and evolution. But it is applied in politics, ethics and religion. What a child learns from this approach is not that one religion supposedly set before her is true, but that no religion has a compelling claim to be treated as true. Hence 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. In so far as this education works, the pupil becomes trained in the dogmatics of liberalism.

Nozick is laudably genuine in his desire that people should be legally free to live in different ways. He wants a society in which different commitments can live

alongside one another. But this is only done by pushing each community towards "half measures for the half-hearted, dilettantism on a grand scale."[12] The result is similar to George Grant's depiction of liberal society:

> As for pluralism, differences … are able to exist only in private activities: how we eat, how we mate, how we practice ceremonies. Some like pizza, some like steaks; some like girls, some like boys; some like synagogue, some like the mass. But we all do it in churches, motels, restaurants indistinguishable from the Atlantic to the Pacific.[13]

Recently Alasdair MacIntyre has highlighted a similar phenomenon in the development of the modern university.[14] He points out that the

> Foundation of the liberal university was the abolition of religious tests for university teachers. What the enforcement of religious tests had ensured was a certain degree of uniformity of belief in the way in which the curriculum was organized, presented, and developed through enquiry. Each such pre-liberal university was therefore to some degree an institution embodying either one particular tradition of rational enquiry or a limited set of such traditions. The Scottish universities articulated one kind of Protestant tradition of enquiry … the University of Paris in the thirteenth century was the milieu for conflict between contending Aristotelian and Augustinian thinkers.[15]

Later either religious tests were gradually abolished or else universities were founded that did not have such tests. The result was not, however, that universities became places where alternative points of view were elaborated and debated. Instead, questions about points of view and their influence in shaping the university tended to be ignored or even excluded:

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[12] Orwin, *op. cit.,* p. 7. It may also be noted that certain individual choices are foreclosed. For example, if an Amish community is not possible, then no one can make a real choice to be Amish.

[13] Grant, *op. cit.,* p.26.

[14] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

[15] *Op. cit.,* p. 399.

In the appointment of university teachers, considerations of belief and allegiance were excluded from view altogether. A conception of scholarly competence, independent of standpoint, was enforced in the making of appointments … appointed teachers present what they taught as if there were indeed shared standards of rationality, accepted by all teachers and accessible to all students. Universities became institutions committed to upholding a fictitious objectivity.[16]

Consequently the student usually meets "an apparent inconclusiveness in all arguments outside the natural sciences, an inconclusiveness which seems to abandon him or her to his or her pre-rational preferences. So the student characteristically emerges from a liberal education with a set of skills, a set of preferences, and little else …."[17] MacIntyre notes that in such settings education is "abstracted from and deprived of the particularities of our histories" though he also adds: "Happily, of course, not all education in our culture is in this sense liberal." But, insofar as liberalism does shape the pattern of commitment in the modern university, the result is not contending views of rationality but the assertion of neutral rationality in some areas (notably the natural sciences) combined with a pastiche in the humanities which trivializes choice, and, more particularly, the object of that choice.

Canada is a country that has proudly, if somewhat hypocritically, contrasted the United States "melting pot" with its own ideal of co-existing communities.[18] Canadians were inclined to think of the country as founded by "peoples" rather than "the people." While it is overstated, there is truth in this self-image. Canadian conservatism has seen its task less as developing a social ideal than allowing the relatively just co-existence of the communities that happen to be within its boundaries. I am not suggesting that Canada has been a superlatively just country – for there are many forms of injustice, and worse forms of injustice, than the liberal one. But Canada has often allowed for genuine pluralism and

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[16] l*oc. cit.*

[17] o*p. cit.,* p. 400.

[18] Indeed the former Prime Minister, now Minister of External Affairs, Joe Clark, referred to Canada as a "community of communities." I am not sure whether he, or his speechwriter, was aware that this is a quotation from Althusius ("*communitas communitorum").*

communal diversity.[19] This is shown in constitutional documents. Although the Constitution was modified considerably in 1982 by the incorporation of a series of rights since interpreted largely along liberal lines, it still retains distinct group rights and status. These include the rights of dissentient schools, which are given in Section 93 of the *British North America Act.* There are also language rights (Section 16-23 of the Charter of Rights and freedoms) and the Rights of Aboriginal Peoples (Sections 25, 35, 37), both of which have been recently reaffirmed. Other pluralist provisions have been newly introduced, such as the provision for interpretations consistent with "multiculturalism" (Section 27) and the "affirmative action" provisions of Section 15(2) on equality rights. Finally, depending upon modes of interpretation, the "reasonable … limits … demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society" mentioned in Section 1 and the "Fundamental freedoms" of religion, thought, assembly and association contained in Section 2 may also enhance pluralism. [20]

However, despite this stress on more than individual rights, a liberal constitutional interpretation has become dominant. The sections of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that have received most publicity and litigation, that have attracted (and been the occasion of creating) special interest groups, and that are rapidly reshaping Canadian political culture are those which are individualist in character. The multiple stresses on *individual* freedoms, *individual* rights, and the equality of *individuals*, together with the proscription of discrimination between individuals, generate the most concern, and even devotion. These individualist dynamics have the momentum to reshape jurisprudence and, with that, the country. Society is treated as an association of individuals wherein the chief political problem is securing one individual's right against all other individuals.

This stress undercuts certain distinctive features of Canada. For example, many language rights should properly be understood as *group rights*. Guaranteeing a person the right speak their language is one thing, a good thing, but it will not

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[19] See my "Anglo-Canadian Perspectives on the United States Constitution," pp. 87-110 of R. Wells and T. Askew, eds., *Law and Liberty* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

[20] See my "Individualism, Groups and the Charter," paper presented at the Conference on the "Charter of Rights and Freedoms," sponsored by Canada – U.S. Law Institute, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, 1987.

maintain a language. Languages require someone else to hear, and someone else to talk back; they require a culture, a community. As the Canadian Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism pointed out: "… although an Anglophone isolated among French-speaking Canadians may possess all the theoretical rights imaginable, each is able to exercise these rights to a very limited extent. A milieu is not transformed for one individual, a university is not built for a single family."[21] The matter of language and individual rights has become a matter of grave concern, particularly in the Province of Quebec. Successive governments in Quebec have believed that since it is a relatively small, predominantly French-speaking province amidst a North American ocean of English speakers, then the French language needed and needs special protection. With the flood of English language T.V., radio, magazines, newspapers, books and packagings, French may persistently be eroded and marginalized. Many have believed that this erosion of French is well underway. One response to this situation was the introduction of the "Charter of the French Language," popularly known as Bill 101. This complex Bill restricted the use of English by, for example, requiring that all signs, posters, and commercial advertising, be exclusively in French. The Bill prompted a storm of protest, not only from English speakers in Quebec who were personally affected but also from liberals religiously threatened by an assault on their deepest commitment, individual choice and freedom. Hence Bill 101 was denounced as a violation of fundamental human rights, and challenged on the grounds that it violated the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.[22] In this instance, as in all real political situations, there are many complicating factors. There is dispute whether French *is* in danger and whether Bills 101 and 178 could help it. However, if the facts are correct, the case for these Bills is at least plausible. Hence a challenge to this legislation in the name of individual rights may undercut a culture and way of life, thus illustrating the very real tension between plural ways of life and the liberal stress on individual rights.[23]

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[21] Quoted in C. Michael MacMillan, "The Character of Language Rights: Individual, Group or Collective Rights?" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Assoc., Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1986, p. 5.
[22] The Canadian Supreme Court ruled on December 15, 1988 that Bill 101 was unconstitutional. The government of Quebec responded by passing Bill 178 which allowed the use of English (as well as French) on signs *inside* stores, but otherwise follows Bill 101.
[23] On this, see MacMillan, *op.cit.*

Similar dynamics are present in the view of religion manifested in discussions of items such as Sunday observance. Perhaps the clearest illustration is the report of the recent Sub-Committee on "Equality Rights" of the Canadian Parliament. This committee examined Canadian laws to determine what changes needed to be made in order to bring the laws into conformity with section 15 of the 1982 Constitution. Section 15 demands equal treatment for each and all before and under the law.[24] The committee's report, *Equality for All*, depicts Canada largely as a collection of individuals with only incidental ties.[25] Such individuals have their own particular characteristics -- some are Jewish, some not; some are homosexual, some not; some are men, some not; some are over sixty-five, some not; some are handicapped, some not. These characteristics were portrayed merely as personal idiosyncrasies, private matters which should be left at home when people enter the social, political and economic world. The writers of the report see them as irrelevant to social interaction. But this is not an accurate image of Canada (nor of anywhere else). Several of these characteristics *are* of public importance. They are major factors shaping social interaction. Countries are comprised of cultures, commitments, groups, associations and institutions. Over two-thirds of Canadians are members of voluntary associations. There are tens of thousands of such associations, and churches, political parties, trade unions, cultural groups, cooperatives, academic associations and public interest organizations. There is cultural and ethnic diversity, a plurality brought about by French, English and many other languages, varied subcultures, many native bands and nations, diverse schools and educational systems, a wide spectrum of religious belief systems and church denominations, and several competing political parties and ideologies. None of these is purely an individual matter, and many are of the utmost public significance.

The report's lack of attention to communities and institutions in the treatment of religion is striking. The only two recommendations in *Equality for All* that directly

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[24] See my "Individualism, Groups and the Charter," and the briefs of Citizens for Public Justice, "Submission on Equality Rights and Employment Equity in a Pluralistic Society," to the Parliamentary Committee on Equality Rights, June 28, 1985; "Submission on the Canadian Human Rights Act" to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, June 27, 1986.

[25] *Equality for All: Report of the Parliamentary Committee on Equality Rights (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1985).*

concern religion are recommendations (39 and 40) that deal with providing people a choice about holidays and days of rest. These are good provisions, but they are the *only* provisions concerning religion. The report regards religion as a matter only of holding certain religious ceremonies. The religious "observances and practices" singled out are "religious days of rest, other days of religious observance, prayer breaks and dress requirements."[26] The religious matters over which an employer may have to make accommodation are: observing a Sabbath or religious holidays, taking prayer breaks during the workday, adhering to certain dietary rules, refraining from work during a mourning period for a deceased relative, declining to undergo medical examinations, and following certain dress requirements and grooming habits. Apart from these, the report asserts quite openly that religion is irrelevant to the affairs of social and public life. Religion is not "relevant to a person's fitness to compete for a given job or reside in particular accommodations …"[27] When the Committee noted some group *contexts* of Section 15 it recognized, "the separate protection afforded to aboriginal rights" (Section 25) and "the general extension of the rights and freedoms to both male and female persons." [28] (Section 28) But, curiously, Section 29, safeguarding the rights of religiously oriented schools, was not cited as an example of separate protection. Indeed, religious practice was traced to an "ethnic" heritage.[29]

These sections of *Equality for All* seem to deny that peoples' religious beliefs have shaped and do shape their life patterns – social as well as individual, communal as well as personal, public as well as private. They ignore the fact that not only must employers make provision for their employees' beliefs, but that many employers and institutions are, as *collective bodies, themselves religiously oriented* – and themselves employ hundreds of thousands of people. Apart from churches, synagogues, mosques and temples there are relief organizations, missionary associations, group homes, schools, children's aid societies, colleges, family services, hospitals, publishers, universities, magazines, public interest groups,

[26] o*p. cit.,* p. 70.
[27] op. cit., p. 29.
[28] *op. cit.,* pp. 5,6.
[29] *op. cit.,* p. 70.

newspapers, TV and radio producers, political organizations, counseling services, seminaries, senior citizen's homes, cooperatives and artistic groups all seeking to live and work in the context of specific religious commitment. The teaching of religious beliefs is not only a matter of church, but of school as well: there are hundreds of thousands of children who attend religiously oriented schools. Religious guidance and instruction is given not just for an individual portion of life called "religious" but for the whole of life, public as well as private. Religion is not a private matter, but is of the utmost relevance to all of human life and so needs protection in corporate as well as individual expression.

The effects of liberal individualism can also be traced through the history of Canadian native peoples and in the history of confessional schools.[30] In each case particular communities have found themselves under attack by those who assert the priority of individual freedoms. Similar patterns exist throughout the world and affect minorities, national groups, language groups and aboriginal peoples.[31] The picture that emerges is that liberalism is not neutral with respect to different ways of life. Rather, it undermines distinctive and traditional communities and replaces them with a uniform regime of individual choices. Liberalism results in the preservation of liberals, discrimination against non-liberals, and the erection of a liberal social order. It also uses the coercive power of the state to achieve these ends. Under the sincerely held belief in diversity through individual freedom, liberals recreate a society in their own image. The great liberal philosopher, John Rawls, takes a relatively sanguine view of the ways of life that are destroyed in this process:

> a well-ordered society [i.e., a society that follows Rawls-P.M.] defines a fair background within which ways of life have a reasonable opportunity to establish themselves. If a conception of the good is unable to endure and

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[30] See my "Religion, State and Education in Canada," paper presented to Christian Legal Society, Washington D.C., 1983; Sally Weaver, "Federal Difficulties with Aboriginal Rights Demands," pp. 139-147 of M. Boldt and D. Long (eds.), *The Quest for Justice: Aboriginal Peoples and Aboriginal Rights* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); Michael Asch, *Home and Native Land: Aboriginal Rights and the Canadian Constitution* (Toronto: Methuen, 1984), esp. pp. 74-88; Tim Schouls, *Liberal Democracy and Canada's Aboriginal Peoples: Negotiating Basic Group Rights within the Framework of Political Individualism, 1969-1988,* M. Phil., thesis, Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto (1989).

[31] See note 35.

gain adherents under conditions of equal freedom and mutual toleration, one must question whether it is a viable conception of the good and whether its passing is to be regretted.[32]

The dynamic is described by MacIntyre:

> Liberalism thus provides a distinctive conception of a just order which is closely integrated with the terms set by a liberal polity. The principles are not neutral with respect to rival conflicting theories of the human good. Where they are in force they impose a particular conception of the good life, of practical reasoning, and of justice upon those who willingly or unwillingly accept the liberal procedures and the liberal terms of debate. The overriding good of liberalism is no more and no less than the continued sustenance of the liberal social and political order.[33]

This brief survey of the relation of liberalism and diversity leads me to suggest that many Christians' fears of pluralism are really fears of liberalism. We may have sensed that liberalism does not give much freedom for communal diversity, especially religious diversity, and so, may have rejected the whole package. If this is the case then we may ask whether there are approaches to pluralism which are more amenable to Christian, and other, concerns. Candidates could be found in instances such as the development of Dutch Calvinism from Althusius to the present, contemporary European Christian democracy, the English pluralist tradition associated with names such as J.N. Figgis and F.W. Maitland, or the French pluralist tradition associated with Lamennais.[34] Even Burkean conservatism has a tendency to preserving different ways of life, as in, for example the Canadian co-existence of French Catholicism and English Anglicanism.[35] These positions accept the *fact* of pluralism while not necessarily

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[32] John Rawls, "Fairness to Goodness," pp. 536-554 of *Philosophical Review,* vol. 84 (1975), p. 549.

[33] MacIntyre, *op.cit.,* pp. 344-345.

[34] See J.W. Skillen and R.M. McCarthy, eds., *Political Order and the Plural Structure of Society* (Emory University Studies in Law and Religion) (Alpharetta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992); R.M. McCarthy, "Liberal Democracy and the Right of Institutions," *Pro Rege*, vol. 8, No. 4 (1980), pp. 4-11; Kenneth Macrae, "The Plural Society and the Western Political Tradition, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 12, (1979), pp. 675-688.

[35] See my "Individualism, Groups and the Charter, *op. cit.;* V. Van Dyke, "Justice as Fairness: for Groups?" pp. 607-614 of *American Political Science Review*, vol. 69, (1975), pp. 611 *ff*. On the notion of group rights see also Michael McDonald, "Collective Rights and Tyranny," *University of Ottawa Review*, vol. 56 (1986), pp. 115-123; V. Van Dyke,

rejoicing in that fact. But they forswear the use of state compulsion to eradicate differences. Similarly I suspect that many Christians do not want policies that *promote* religious pluralism, but want to deal with existing pluralism in a just way. Even so, a Christian pluralism that demands the political acceptance of different ways of life, may receive wide support from those who are not Christians. Insofar as Christians promote an *institutional and communal diversity*, they can provide room for others and, since communities are politically efficacious while individuals are not, they will provide for a stronger political pluralism. They could provide more room for liberals and Christians than liberalism would for Christians and liberals.

However, it is unlikely that liberals would see things quite this way. They are liable to respond that the limitations on individual choice that this approach implies are a violation of liberal tenets, and they would be correct in doing so. Liberalism offers others individual choices within homogenous institutions. Christians could offer others communal diversity with relative limits on individuals. Each wants to provide freedom for the other, but each sees the other's proposed freedom as a partial violation of themselves. Between these two frameworks there can be no simple reconciliation, for each is a claim about what just reconciliation actually is. They are not claims for particular freedoms but are frameworks *for judging* particular claims to freedom. Both positions call for diversity and freedom, but they cannot both at the same time be the paradigm of society. One or the other must win out: one version of freedom will succeed. Each allows a type of freedom to different ways of life, but the freedoms cannot co-exist with one another. We might hope that pluralism is possible in society, but the state itself cannot be plural. Alternatively, we might say that pluralism is certainly possible, but one cannot have a plurality of pluralisms.

"Collective Entities and Moral Rights: Problems in Liberal Democratic Thought, "*Journal of Politics*, vol. 44 (1982), pp. 21-40.