Between a Rock and a Hard Place

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Public Theology in a Post-Secular Age

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One of the most exciting developments within academic public theology over the past few years has been the growth of the Global Network for Public Theology and the founding of the *International Journal of Public Theology*. I would like to dedicate this book to all my international colleagues in that network in anticipation of further collaboration to come. In particular, I would like to pay tribute to Professor Will Storrar, whose vision, energy and generosity was seminal in creating the Network, and who continues to be a fantastic advocate and practitioner of public theology.

Introduction:

A Rock and a Hard Place

Is the world we inhabit more, or less religious than it used to be? Do we witness a *decline, redeployment or renaissance* of religiosity? (Bauman 1988, p. 56)

Four Reflections on Public Theology Today

1 In November 2012, German Chancellor Angela Merkel surprised many commentators when she disclosed that she was a practising Christian. She used an address to the synod of the *Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands* (EKD) to commend the contribution of the churches to national life, and went on to claim that Christianity was the world's 'most persecuted religion', and promising that the protection of religious freedoms would become German federal foreign policy (Merkel 2012).[1]

This followed earlier revelations in a podcast session, when in response to a question from a theological student, she said:

I am a member of the Evangelical [Lutheran] Church. I believe in God, and religion is also my constant companion, and has been for

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1 'Dennoch sind wir weltweit unendlich weit von einer wirklichen Anerkennung und Beachtung dieses global gültigen Menschenrechts entfernt.Fanatismus, Einschränkung von Glaubensfreiheit, Geringschätzung von Glauben – das alles ist Teil unserer Lebenswirklichkeit in der Welt. Man darfes, glaube ich, auch einmal sagen: Das Christentum ist die verfolgteste Religion auf der Welt. Deshalb haben wir uns in der Bundesregierung ganz bewusst entschieden, zu sagen, dass der Kampf gegen die Verfolgung von Menschen, die eine Religion ausüben – und dami tauch von Christen –, Teil unserer Außenpolitik ist.'

the whole of my life . . . I find it very liberating that as a Christian, one can make mistakes, that one knows there is something higher than just human beings, and that we are also called on to shape the world in responsibility for others. This is a framework for my life, which I consider very important. (Warner 2012)

2 In February 2008, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, delivered a speech at the Royal Courts of Justice in London, entitled 'Civil and Religious Law in England: a Religious Perspective'. He used the lecture to address the status of shari'a or Islamic law within the British legal system, arguing that the growth of religious pluralism made the case for greater recognition of religious considerations within an overarching system of statutory law. He suggested that for the State to have a legal monopoly flew in the face of modern democratic principles of human dignity, and that parallel jurisdictions might go some way towards acknowledging religiously founded codes of conduct.

The text of the lecture was released in advance to the press, and even before the lecture had been given, Williams found himself at the centre of a media furore. He was accused of calling for the introduction of shari'a law in the UK and sanctioning legal immunity for Muslims from the universal rule of law. Even those who conceded that he was attempting to negotiate his way through a complex and nuanced set of questions about multiculturalism, religious freedom and the challenges of pluralism accused him of obscurantism and lack of clarity, amounting to a 'disingenuous' (Parris 2008) failure to anticipate that his speculations would, inevitably, be misunderstood.

3 The Brotherhood of St Laurence is an Australian faith-based organization engaged in research, advocacy and front-line welfare delivery. Founded as a religious order during the Great Depression in 1930, its stated aims are the prevention of poverty and social exclusion and political advocacy around these issues, as well as the development of new policies and programmes through research and innovative practice. 'The Brotherhood, inspired by our Christian origins, seeks the common good through compassion, with a generosity of spirit and reliance on evidence.' (Brotherhood of St Laurence 2013a) The

Brotherhood is one of a number of Christian charities in Australia involved in delivery of publicly-funded schemes and works with a range of collaborative partners across the commercial, public and third sectors (2013b).

4 The Anglican Church in Kenya has a long history of social welfare provision, most of it independent of government funding and management. Its independence from the State, its ethnic diversity and its presence at all levels of society has granted it widespread credibility. While its leadership and people are committed to addressing issues such as lack of participation in public policy making, poverty, HIV and AIDS, corruption and ethnic tension, it faces resistance from the policy-making elite in government which assumes that ordinary people cannot be involved in decision-making for themselves. The Church is thus working at grass-roots to facilitate greater capacity-building, such as workshops with women and young people living with HIV/AIDS (Ayallo 2012). It follows the pattern of churches in many other parts of Africa, which play decisive roles in democratic engagement and education of its membership in order to become better mobilized in policy-making and local civil society (de Villiers 2011). Indeed, the focus on congregational and neighbourhood-based activism may be a distinguishing feature of faith-based organizations the world over (Day 2012; Jacobsen 2012).

Four vignettes, all of which reveal various aspects of the role played by religious faith and practice in the contemporary world; yet all of them invite further inspection. Angela Merkel's statements were not just a matter of personal profession, since no politician ever speaks purely as a private citizen. I have already noted in previous work that political leaders, especially in Europe and Oceania, often face difficulties in negotiating questions of personal religious belief in relation to their public images. The relationship between private conviction and public office can be fraught with difficulty, especially when opinion among the electorate at large is at all sceptical or suspicious of those who claim to 'do God' in relation to political policy (Graham 2009a; 2009b).

Certainly, Merkel's personal beliefs had been something of an open secret in Germany. Although she leads the country's Christian Democratic Union (CDU), which historically has strong links with the Roman

Catholic Church, she had always maintained a public discretion, to the point in 2009 when she barred the media from a visit she made with Barack Obama to the *Frauenkirche* in Dresden, during which they prayed together. What makes her recent profession of faith all the more extraordinary, however, is that Merkel was born and brought up in the German Democratic Republic, which as part of the Soviet bloc until 1989 was officially an atheist state, although her father was a Lutheran pastor. Even now, some estimates gauge that only 13.2 per cent of citizens of the former GDR believe in God, with 59.4 per cent reporting themselves as convinced atheists, compared with 54.2 per cent and 9.2 per cent respectively of their Western compatriots in the former Federal Republic (Smith 2012; *Spiegel* 2012).

Merkel's case is an example of the delicate position of religion in much of Western public life, and it touches on a number of themes that I will hope to develop in further detail. These include how explicitly religious voices and interventions are 'pitched' in political debate, and secular or non-religious reactions to that; the benefits or otherwise of the public mobilization of religious social capital; the diversity across global, national and local contexts in religious observance and affiliation; and debates about religious freedom, tolerance and discrimination.

Rowan Williams's speech on shari'a has already received much attention (Kim, 2011; Higton 2008; Chaplin 2008). Through the issues he raised, and the public reaction, are refracted other, vital but unresolved questions: the right of a faith leader to comment on matters of common concern; the increasing role of the media in managing 'public' opinion and debate; and how a nation forged from a particular religious tradition (with, in this case, the legacy of an Established Church) might accommodate greater religious pluralism into its legal, political and cultural institutions.

The work of the Brotherhood of St Laurence reminds us that faith-based care on the part of all major traditions for the poor and needy has always taken place. The organization itself is named after Lawrence of Rome (c. 225–58 CE), who was charged by the Church with special responsibility for the administration of alms to the poor. Yet this dedicated Christian organization, named after a third-century saint allegedly martyred during the persecution of the Roman Emperor Valerian, now competes in a secular arena of government welfare policy, seeking to reconcile Christian values of justice and compassion with statutory requirements. Throughout its history, however, in the changing circumstances of poverty, unemployment

and family support, it has combined a tradition of practical care with campaigning for social justice.

The Anglican Church in Kenya is using its dispersed presence in local communities to develop participatory methods of grass-roots organizing in a continent where the HIV/AIDS pandemic is more than a mere medical matter, but inextricably linked with questions of poverty, patriarchy, power and morality. It is committed to 'bottom-to-top' (Ayallo 2012) methods which set out to enhance the expertise of marginalized groups in order to facilitate greater public policy dialogue and genuine citizen participation. However, the threads of local, national and global manifestations of public theology are drawn tightly. The Christian tradition that sustains such activism is itself complicit in a complicated history of colonialism; and the tragedy of HIV/AIDS in Africa caught up in wider patterns of migration, trafficking and global health care (Bongmba 2007).

These cases are all about the interaction of religion and politics, but more specifically about the relationship between Christian theology and public life. They serve as case studies in the ways in which the public witness of Christians reflects (and embodies) understandings about God, human destiny and the societies in which they live: how faith translates into social action; how the sacred co-exists with the secular; how traditional beliefs respond to new challenges. What these case studies also reveal, too, is the way in which religion is increasingly practised in a world that is both inescapably underscored by, yet often resistant to, the demands of religious belief and practice. It is upon the future of public theology, in theory and practice, in such a contested and pluralistic context that I want to focus in this book.

Post-Secular Society

My interest in the future of public theology is prompted by consideration of the changing position of religion in the contemporary West, and in particular the way in which our everyday experience may no longer fit comfortably into existing conceptual frameworks. Chief among these paradigms, of course, since the 1960s, has been that of the secularization thesis, which argues that as Western society becomes more modern, more complex, it also becomes more 'secular'. Conventional secularization theories hold that as

societies modernize, so they become less 'religious' according to a number of criteria: in terms of personal affiliation and belief; in terms of institutional strength of religious organizations; and in terms of the political and cultural prominence of religion in society. But now, the world appears to be turning on its axis in a new way and entering an unprecedented political and cultural era, in which many of these assumptions are being overturned.

Associated with this, and originating in the religious wars of early modernity, the Enlightenment and democratic revolutions of Europe and North America in the eighteenth century, is the conviction that the modern democratic state must effect a separation between religion and government, between 'faith' and 'reason'. This is associated with liberal thinkers such as John Rawls, whose *Theory of Justice* (1971) argued that equality of participation among citizens in the public domain was dependent on the 'bracketing out' of matters of personal or subjective conviction (such as religious faith) on the grounds that these represented partial and partisan forms of reasoning, not universally accessible and therefore inadmissible as acceptable forms of political or moral reasoning. Hence, the separation of religion and politics, and the assumption that the modern democratic state should be functionally secular or at least neutral towards the manifestations of religion in public. Since the 1990s, and accelerating into the early twenty-first century, however, new perspectives have been emerging. They argue that we are witnessing an unprecedented convergence of two supposedly incompatible trends: secularization and a new visibility of religion in politics and public affairs.

While many of the features of the trajectory of religious decline, typical of Western modernity, are still apparent, there are compelling and vibrant signs of religious activism, not least in public life and politics: local, national and global. For example, in Western democracies such as the UK, faith-based organizations are experiencing a heightened public prominence as partners with government in the delivery of welfare and other public services (Dinham, Furbey and Lowndes 2009). Religion continues to be a potent force in many aspects of global civil society and is increasingly cited by governments as a significant source of social capital and political mobilization. Interest in personal spirituality beyond creedal and institutional expressions of religion continues to be strong, not least in the way concepts of spiritual health and spiritual care are increasingly part of institutional provision and professional practice (White 2001; Cobb, Puchalski and Rumbold 2012; Erricker, Ota and Erricker, 2001). Global migration has fostered religious diversity and

heightened awareness of the links between religious profession and cultural or ethnic identity. Within human rights legislation, the inclusion of categories of 'religion and belief' alongside markers of identity such as 'race' and ethnicity, gender, sexuality and dis/ability has given rise to a number of high-profile cases across Europe in which persons of faith have challenged the neutrality of the public square by insisting on special treatment, such as the wearing of particular religious clothing or symbols, or demands for particular dispensations of practice and conscience. These have proved quite contentious, however, since such cases represent a potential conflict between respect for freedom of belief (around religion) and recognition of universal human rights and liberties (around gender, disability, sexuality or race and ethnicity).

Nevertheless, while the inevitability of secularization may now be open to question, this must not be thought of as a religious revival. Levels of formal institutional affiliation and membership in mainstream Christian and Jewish denominations continue to diminish across the Western world. In the UK, the national population censuses of 2001 and 2011 included a voluntary question which asked, 'What is your religion?' The shifts within that decade are instructive: those identifying as 'Christian' fell from nearly three-quarters (72 per cent) in 2001 to less than two-thirds (59 per cent) in 2011. Those claiming 'no religion' rose to 25 per cent in 2011 from 15 per cent ten years earlier. Whatever people think they mean by 'no religion', it suggests that identification with institutional, creedal religion is diminishing. Other evidence would appear to confirm that public scepticism towards religion is on the increase (Voas and Ling 2010). Religious observance is increasingly disaffiliated and individualized; religious institutions are viewed with distrust at worst, indifference at best. The greater prominence of those who profess no religious faith, or declare themselves secular humanists or atheists may have been given particular impetus through the popularity of works by the 'New Atheist' writers, who include the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, philosophers such as Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris, and the journalists Polly Toynbee and the late Christopher Hitchens. As Charles Taylor has noted, 'We no longer live in societies in which the widespread sense can be maintained that faith in God is central to the ordered life we (partially) enjoy' (2007, p. 531).

Clearly, then, the secularization process is neither uniform, inevitable nor irreversible, since religion continues to exercise a global influence and has

demonstrated a new public resurgence. There are many signs of religious vitality, but this does not amount to a restoration of pre-modern faith, at least not in the sense of the return to Western Christendom. A persistence of personal spirituality, for example, according to some theorists of secularization, is entirely consistent with modernization, since it is a symptom of the continued separation, or differentiation, between religion and politics, public and private. If religion persists, then, it has, as Grace Davie has argued, 'mutated' into something more pluralist, heterodox and privatized (1994).

This seemingly paradoxical co-existence of the religious and the secular takes us into uncharted territory, sociologically and theologically, and is giving rise to talk of the emergence of a 'post-secular' society (Habermas 2008b; Keenan 2002; Bretherton 2010, pp. 10–16). This has been acknowledged in the work of some leading social theorists, most notably Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, Judith Butler and Jose Casanova. The latter speaks of 'public religions in a post-secular world' (1994). Jürgen Habermas's recent work has spearheaded this new turn in social theory and political philosophy, with his talk of the 'post-secular' as an expression of the newly prominent (yet problematic) role of religion in the public square, which represents a new departure from the classic assumptions of modern liberal thought towards the role of religion in the body politic (2008b; 2011). Increasingly, political theorists of many kinds are asking questions about the self-sufficiency of the secular to furnish the public domain with sufficiently robust values for consensus. To that end, therefore, post-secular culture heralds a greater latitude towards religion, not only as a system of private beliefs but also a source of public discourse.

In many ways, then, the kind of religious faith that is emerging at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and which dominates the public imagination, is very different from what went before. It represents much less of a religious revival and much more a quest for a new voice in the midst of public debate that is more fragmented, more global, more disparate. It is a public domain in which the contribution of religion to the well-being of communities is welcomed by some, with new agendas and increasing enthusiasm; but at the same time, the very legitimacy of faith to speak or contribute at all is contested as vigorously as ever.

But if modernity was characterized by a particular understanding of the public, rational sphere, one that insisted on its own neutrality and impartiality – and thus its own secularist agenda – what happens to our understandings of public life within the post-secular context? According to the

logic of secularism and secularization, such resurgence of religion (global, national and local) should not be happening. Yet in its renewed sense of public prominence, for better and for worse, religion provokes wider discussion about the neutrality of the public square and the secular nature of liberal democracy, as well as the 'public' and 'private' demeanour of its citizens. The new prominence of religion within a continuing trajectory of pluralism means that public discourse and public space becomes more differentiated but potentially more polarized, with a small but increasingly well-mobilized religious minority operating alongside a majority of disaffiliated non-believers who may have little or no first-hand understanding of religious belief or practice. This has particular impact on the discourses and practices concerning citizenship and values within the public sphere.

Local, National and Global

In my discussion, I will occasionally indicate how the local, national and global dimensions of the changing fortunes of religion, as well as the corresponding responses of public theology, are inevitably intertwined. This makes the task of remaining rooted in a specific context while attempting to address a variety of audiences a tricky one. I shall be writing primarily from my own national context, within the United Kingdom and from inherited traditions of public theology that reflect a mainstream, Anglican perspective. I hope this will afford a depth and detail to my discussion without narrowing my focus. While my particular corner of northern Europe is probably the most secular region in the world, and the exception rather than the rule when it comes to considering religion in the public sphere, the contradictions of resurgent religion in the form of multiculturalism, new legislative recognitions and the significance of religious activism for welfare reform, all provide vivid illustrations of the multi-faceted challenges of post-secular society. More generally, the aim of my discussion will be to use specific cases and contexts to illustrate a more general argument about the overall trajectory of contemporary society and the task of reformulating public theology in the light of that analysis.[2]

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2   For a general overview of global public theology, see Kim 2011.

In Chapter 1, I trace some of the contours of the new public visibility of religion, and through debates about the future of welfare and the controversies engendered by the inclusion of religion and belief in human rights legislation, point to ways in which the situation is unprecedented and problematic. What has raised the stakes about the post-secular in particular, and highlights the need for greater communication, is the growing gulf between people of faith and wider society in terms of a widespread deficit of religious literacy and in the objections of reasoned sceptics who question the very legitimacy of religious voices and the benevolence of faith-based interventions in equal measure. In Chapter 2, I focus on making the argument that the true significance of post-secular society is found not in the resurgence of religion per se, but in the changing consciousness of its public significance and complexity. 'A society is "post-secular" if it reckons with the diminishing but enduring – and hence, perhaps, ever more resistant and recalcitrant – existence of the religious' (de Vries 2006b, p. 3). This takes us to the heart of the matter. The post-secular represents the emergence of a new kind of public square in which religion is newly resurgent, and yet its legitimacy as a form of public reason continues to be hotly contested. The political tension at the heart of the post-secular, therefore, is this: while the resurgence of religion is regarded by many as prompting a much-needed moral rejuvenation of secular society, for others this new eruption of faith continues to represent a dangerous breach of the neutrality of the public sphere. We are moving in uncharted waters: how does a liberal, pluralist democracy square that particular circle? How does this new dispensation of the sacred and the secular set up new conventions of identity, citizenship, governance and public discourse about the common good?

> Neither the hope of further secularization or secularism – whether as a bulwark against or an enabler of religious diversity – nor, to be sure, a simple return to forgotten religious values can fill this void. If any post-secular thought and political theology of Europe and the West there may be, we do not yet know what it is. (p. 67)

This new dispensation of 'post-secularity' also presents novel challenges to the public witness of the Christian churches, and for the discipline known as public theology. This is the study of the public relevance of religious thought and practice, normally within Christian tradition. It is both academic discipline and ecclesial discourse, in that it seeks to comment and

critically reflect from a theological perspective on aspects of public life such as economics, politics, culture and media. Traditionally, public theology sees itself as rooted in religious traditions, but strongly in conversation with secular discourse and public institutions.

> Public theologians thus seek to communicate, by means that are intelligible and assayable to all, how Christian beliefs and practices bear, both descriptively and prescriptively, on public life and the common good, and in so doing possibly persuade and move to action both Christians and non-Christians. (Breitenberg 2003, p. 66)

In Chapter 3, I consider further the legacy of contemporary public theology and begin to chart some of its core characteristics in relation to a pluralist public domain. Some public theologians examine actual examples of interventions into public debate or political procedures by churches or other faith-based organizations. Others undertake a critique of the ways in which theological language, concepts and values, such as the common good, salvation, covenant, Trinity, are mediated into public debate. Occasionally, public theologians contribute to the normative and formative reconstruction of communities of faith as they seek to exercise a public ministry in relation to questions of ecology, global finance, poverty or urban life and faith. Contemporary public theologians are also diversifying increasingly beyond a focus on churches and political processes, to consider the wider cultural significance of religious motifs, values and practice – such as the media and popular culture. Following the work of Dirkie Smit on constructions of the public (2007a; 2007b) work has emerged to reconfigure dominant definitions from feminist, postmodern and post-colonial perspectives (McIntosh 2007; Beaumont and Baker 2011; Budden 2008; Sebastian 2007).

Similarly, while public theology has mainly been concerned with a consideration of the terms and conditions under which religious traditions might engage in public debate and political programmes, and also with evaluations of specific examples of engagement in moral and political matters on the part of religious institutions and leaders, there has been a growing interest in the public theological and moral voices of politicians and public intellectuals as another genre of theological reasoning mediated into public discourse (Storrar 2009; Graham 2009a). In a field that often intersects with ethnographic or anthropological methodologies, public theology also studies the mobilization of ecclesial activism with emphasis

on grass-roots and community organizing, especially in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Kim 2008; Haire 2007; Akper 2008; von Sinner 2009).

The work of the Roman Catholic theologian David Tracy has been foundational for mainstream public theology, both in its insistence that theology may be 'personal' but never 'private' (1981, p. 6) and in its conviction that 'a commitment to authentic publicness' (p. 5) on the part of theology is a necessary precondition for Christian values to exercise any kind of public influence. It owes much to his characterization of the 'three publics' of the Christian theologian, and theology's accountability to academy, Church and society (1981). Public theology is also mindful of the work of Jürgen Habermas, who defines the public sphere as a discrete, modern dimension of social and political life characterized by communicative action through participatory, rational and transformational discourse (2008a).

Conventionally, therefore, the notion of 'public' has encompassed two meanings for public theologians. First, it privileges the corporate, political and societal meanings of faith, in contrast to forms of religious belief and practice that confine faith to private and pietist intentions (Breitenberg 2003; Stackhouse 2007a). Second, it reflects a commitment on the part of public theologians to conduct debates about the public trajectories of faith and practice in ways that are transparent and publicly accessible and defensible (Breitenberg 2003). Public theology is less concerned with defending the interests of specific faith communities than generating informed understandings of the theological and religious dimensions of public issues and developing analysis and critique in language that is accessible across disciplines and faith traditions.

However, the particular challenges of the post-secular condition suggest that if the Christian churches are committed to any kind of significant public role, the nature of public theological discourse must change. No longer is it speaking into a common frame of reference, in which its theological and moral allusions fall comfortably on waiting ears. The post-secular describes a public square that is both more sensitive to and suspicious of religious discourse. Indeed, in a context where people's familiarity with any kind of organized religion is ever more tenuous, it places greater onus than ever on the importance of significant communication across the post-secular divide. It is therefore my contention that this new dispensation of 'post-secularity' presents novel challenges for public theology and the public witness of the Christian churches. Public theology must learn

to negotiate between the 'rock' of religious revival and the 'hard place' of secularism.

Two challenges occasioned by the post-secular condition conspire to pose significant challenges to this received wisdom, however. On the one hand, 'talk of God' in public is resisted by secular liberals, who challenge the right of explicitly religious beliefs and faith-based organizations to intervene in public debate or policy-making, least of all actual service delivery. On the other, a challenge comes from within the Christian community itself, since many theologians would argue that – especially given the demise of Christendom – no universal or trans-confessional dialogue of this kind is possible. In contrast to the dialogical tradition of public theology, there has emerged a different style of Christian politics, drawing inspiration from statements such as that from Karl Barth who argues that the primary task of the church is to be the church, in order that the world knows itself as the world: '[T]he church cannot simply derive an understanding of its political vision from outside of Christian belief and practice . . .' (Bretherton 2010, p. 17).

One further response, then, to the challenges of post-secular society has been the articulation of new kinds of theological 'identity politics' rooted more in the specifics of ecclesial practice than in the dialogical processes of public intelligibility. For such a perspective, to be yoked to a secular regeneration programme, or the agenda of welfare provision, is a distraction from the essential and primary task of the Church, which is simply to 'be' church on its own terms. It challenges the modernist neutrality of the public domain, as a space in which the sacred is inevitably 'bracketed out', and argues that it is not a question of the Church getting *involved* in politics but of *being* its own *polis*. The Church must not conform to the parameters of acceptable speech and action based on the compromises of secular reason; there is no such commensurate common wisdom, and the Church must have the courage to model itself on the exemplary narratives of Christ's passion, death and resurrection.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I survey and evaluate the emergence of forms of ecclesial and confessional public theology, exemplified both in academic discourse (such as post-liberalism and Radical Orthodoxy) and more popular movements (such as those emanating from conservative evangelical pressure groups and campaigns). I will examine their claims and conclude that they represent inadequate responses to contemporary challenges. In their attempts to return to a pristine ecclesial identity and their suspicion

towards a theologically grounded concern for the 'common good', they fatally undervalue the necessity of a public theology rooted not only in the traditions of ecclesial practice but in a dialogical and inclusive understanding of common grace and natural law.

The theologian should indicate the place from which they speak, but they need also to pay attention to those to whom they speak: in what terms, by what authority? And, more crucially perhaps, is it incumbent upon them also to *listen*? It would be strange not to consider how and in what language, such 'public speaking' might take place, and especially whether theology acknowledges 'secular' or non-theological sources of wisdom as objects of its address, or even as a legitimate part of God's own way of 'addressing' the world. While critics of liberalism are right to demand that theology consider how its integrity may have been compromised by secular modernity and to locate itself more firmly in specifically Christian sources and practices, rumours of the demise of dialogical, public and apologetic dimensions of theological discourse are premature.

Among many conservative evangelicals, opposition to the liberalization of laws on homosexuality, abortion and divorce has tended to be articulated in moral and biblical terms, but with the advent of new equality and diversity legislation in the early twenty-first century, there has been shift of rhetoric towards the language of rights. Yet the paradox is that in invoking the rights of traditional religious conscience, conservative religious groups have been required to adopt similar political and legal strategies to those whose rights they seek to limit or reverse. In that respect, the incursion of such evangelical identity politics reflects another dimension of the post-secular dilemma: the recognition of the legitimacy of religious conscience to oppose the secular liberal extension of citizenship and equality beyond the boundaries of 'traditional' lifestyles.

In contrast, traditions of public theology have always been mindful that coherent and convincing Christian speech in public must always be prepared to put itself to the test of public scrutiny. Such transparency and accountability implies a respect for, but not necessarily a capitulation to, the insights of secular reason. This is intimately connected to the question of the relationship between the language of faith and wider public discourse:

Public theologians must then find a way to avoid the horns of the following dilemma: if we speak our distinctly religious perspective, our voice is too particular to be comprehensible beyond our religious community,

whereas when we adopt commonly accepted terms, we seem no longer to have anything distinct to contribute. (Doak 2004, p. 14)

What is needed, arguably, is a form of public theology capable of building and sustaining such a dialogical sensibility. The voices of public theology may still need to intervene in public debate on specific issues or policies, but they should also cultivate a clearer rationale for their very right to speak at all. Public theologians face the challenge not only of articulating theologically grounded interventions in the public square, but of justifying and defending the very relevance of the Christian faith in a culture that no longer grants automatic access or credence. In other words, the proponents of public theology – ranging from Church authorities, public intellectuals to local activists and campaigners – should contribute critically and constructively to public debate, but must be more attentive than ever to the tasks of justifying and articulating the theological well-springs of these commitments.

Hence my interest in the function of public theology as a form of Christian apologetics. Here, I have drawn on the work of the North American public theologian Max Stackhouse. In common with other public theologians, Stackhouse's vision of public theology rests on three particular convictions. First, religion is never simply a matter of personal or private devotion, but carries over into the believer's life in all aspects of the public domain, such as economics, civil society, the State and culture. (Note, then, among other things, that 'public' is wider than merely 'political'.) Second, if 'public' for Stackhouse is anathema to notions of a spiritualized, privatized faith for the individual, the corollary is an emphasis on the public significance of religion's impact:

> . . . theology, while related to intensely personal commitments and to a particular community of worship, is, at its most profound level, neither merely private nor a matter of distinctive communal identity. Rather, it is an argument regarding the way things are and ought to be, one decisive for public discourse and necessary to the guidance of individual souls, societies, and, indeed, the community of nations. (2006, p. 165)

Third, in the face of alternative forms of theological fideism or confessionalism, Stackhouse insists that theology must be a fully public, dialogical discourse, in terms of being prepared to defend its core principles *in*

public. The apologetic dimension of public theology for Stackhouse, then, appears to be one of defending the right of religious discourse in general, and Christian theology in particular, to be a legitimate voice in the public square:

> if a theology is to be trusted to participate in public discourse it ought to be able to make a plausible case for what it advocates in terms that can be comprehended by those who are not believers . . . It should be able to articulate its core convictions in comprehensible terms across many modes of discourse, explaining its symbolic and mythical terms . . . in ways that expose their multiple levels of meaning. (2007a, p. 112)

In Chapter 6 therefore, I consider whether this may now be the time to recover a more *apologetic* dimension to public theology. Christian apologetics may be defined as 'the various ways in which thoughtful Christians, in different ages and cultures, have striven to "give a reason for the hope that is within them" (cf. 1 Peter 3.15)' (Dulles 1971, p. xix). Christianity has from its very origins been a missionary faith, centred around the proclamation of the life, death, resurrection and Lordship of Jesus Christ. From the very beginning, however, it has also been charged with an apologetic task. It has needed to defend and commend its claims against a variety of non-believers, detractors and persecutors: Jews, pagans, sceptics and emperors. It is clear that some of the most significant and foundational events and texts of early Christianity were apologetic in nature in so far as they defended the philosophical credence of the gospel. But they were often also quintessentially pieces of public theology, in that they were conducted in public assemblies, religious or civic, subjecting themselves to universal scrutiny and were also often petitions directed at the political authorities. They concerned the relationship of Christians to imperial and secular authority as well as matters of belief. However, I am less convinced that contemporary apologetics, which is often focused around the debating of propositional and abstract doctrines concerning the existence of God and the historicity of the resurrection, does complete justice either to the historical legacy or to contemporary demands.

In contemporary apologetics, the term has become somewhat attenuated, to denote a justification by appeal to rational, propositional argument with a view to leading another to their own profession of faith. Apologetics is understood as 'the scholarly reflection on Christian apologetic witness

and dialogue as the *intellectual justification* of the truth and relevance of the Christian faith' (van den Toren 2011, p. 27, my emphasis). It is often regarded as a branch of evangelism, a prelude to conversion in which the aim is to win the argument. Or as Avery Dulles puts it, 'the apologist is regarded as an aggressive, opportunistic person who tries, by fair means or foul, to argue people into joining the church' (1971, p. xv). But a problem with this kind of modernist propositional apologetics is that in attempting to argue for the distinctiveness of Christian faith it has capitulated to secular, positivist criteria of empirical verification.

> Abandonment of the Cartesian assumption that all inferential knowledge must be founded on self-evident, noninferential insights . . . is in fact a great boon, not only to apologetics, but to philosophy itself and to the whole human effort to get clear about what it means to know . . . But it is being abandoned not to suit the convenience of theologians but because it fails adequately to account *for the world* and our relation to it . . . (Oakes 1992, pp. 51–2)

Forms of 'imaginative apologetics', which embody alternatives to scientific rationalism as a mode of reasoning, may however offer fruitful ways forward for apologetics as a public undertaking. They consider how the creative arts, popular culture and media might constitute shared spaces of creative exchange in which questions of meaning can be explored. Such an epistemology of apologetics configures faith as a kind of 'practical wisdom' that gives shape to the world and orientates Christians in their actions and behaviours. So apologetics points not to propositional, but transformational truth; the invitation is not to 'believe' but to embrace a world-view which 'unless it is also shown in action it is not adequately shown at all' (Davison 2011, p. 26). To translate that into public theology might mean a demonstration of the difference faith makes to citizenship and public values, or offering an explanation to other citizens of the reasoning behind a particular public stance. This does not necessarily discount the significance of framing a defence of faith in theological terms or even arguing – as these contributors do – that the Christian world-view is a fulfilment of alternative understandings. But in contrast to contemporary evangelical apologists, who seem to regard apologetics primarily as being about the priority of belief in propositional truths, this model regards the object of apologetics as a paradigm shift of one's basic premises and assumptions,

what Andrew Davison calls 'axioms' (2011, p. 14). These form the basis of the 'reckoning' offered to the rest of the world, in terms of *the difference it makes* to inhabit such a world-view.

Such an 'apologetics of presence' (Murphy-O'Connor 2009) embodies a number of motifs. After Duncan Forrester, I locate public theology as concerned primarily with 'the welfare of the city' (Jer. 29.7), responding to the agenda of the world and contributing critically and constructively (in word and action) to a flourishing public square (Forrester 2004). This is consistent with the bilingual and dialogical nature of public theology, that it should seek to be accountable to a broader reality which transcends any single institutional self-interest. Second, post-secular public theology must maintain its vocation to 'speak truth to power', in continuity with the first Christian apologists who addressed political rulers in their defences of faith. Yet such an apologetic does not simply uphold the privileges of the Church, but challenges and prescribes in the interests of our common humanity. The calling of Christian apologetics to speak 'truth to power' invites consideration of the prophetic dimensions of public theology, and I will suggest that this requires the adoption of a stance of advocacy with the poor and marginalized, what Gustavo Gutiérrez terms the 'non-persons' of history (Gutiérrez 1983). He contrasts this with the Church's mission to the 'non-believer', which resonates with my insistence on reclaiming apologetics as more than a merely cognitive or propositional activity. Christian apologetics is in part a demonstration of its practical commitment to those who find themselves on the underside of history.

An apologetics of presence must also be capable of justifying itself in reasoned debate. Indeed, one of the ways in which public theology might promote the welfare of the city is to contribute towards a civil, inclusive space of public debate and action in which everyone is welcome to cultivate the skills of active citizenship. Nowhere is this more important than within the Church itself, in terms of fostering the secular vocation of the laity, as 'Ambassadors for Christ' (2 Cor. 5.20). Post-liberalism has been valuable in reminding public theology of the necessity of grounding Christian practice in a lucid narrative of faith. Public theology arguably remains most effective through the grass-roots witness of local communities, as bearers of transformative social capital, with a corresponding imperative to support the quotidian witness of the laity as 'the Church in the world'. Max Stackhouse's emphasis on the vocational dimension of public theology should encourage us to ask how well ordinary lay people are equipped

to 'give an account' of themselves within a post-secular society. This means that traditions of public theology that have concentrated on the statements of church leaders need to be augmented by a more sustained approach to building up the grass-roots practices of discipleship that spill over into active citizenship. This impinges on aspects of Christian formation and catechesis as well, since it also makes a priority of the cultivation of the skills of theological literacy among the laity, not least in order to maintain the reservoir of theological reflection on which continued faithful engagement depends.

The challenge for public theology is to find ways of negotiating a path between the 'rock' of religious resurgence and the 'hard place' of institutional decline and secularism. My analysis of post-secular society will serve, I hope, to accentuate the relevance of questions not only of actual procedures of engagement but the very theological, philosophical and metaphysical concepts that underpin and inform faith-based engagement in public issues. My aim in this book, then, is to sketch out the anatomy of something that might be termed 'post-secular' society as a major driver of the context with which public theology and the social witness of the Christian churches might be engaging. I will insist that this cannot be conceived merely as the return of Christendom or the simple 're-enchantment' of modernity. It requires us, rather, to rethink the terms on which religious voices might contribute to debates about values in public life and faith-based activism and how they might help rejuvenate the practices of citizenship. But for good reasons, these incursions need to be justified in the face of widespread scepticism. Will the new visibility of religion and religious values enrich our stock of social capital, re-orientate our moral compass, reinvigorate the networks and connections of civil society; or will it merely deepen social divisions and aggravate distrust? A climate of political debate that is both more sceptical and more pluralist, and yet in some respects is more receptive to the language of values, will require a more explicit level of self-justification on the part of religious actors.

PART 1

Post-Secular Society

1

The Turning of the Tide

How Religion 'Went Public'

Religion in the 1980s 'went public', in a dual sense. It entered the 'public sphere' and gained, thereby, 'publicity.' Various 'publics' – the mass media, social scientists, professional politicians, and the 'public at large' – suddenly began to pay attention to religion. The unexpected public interest derived from the fact that religion, leaving its assigned place in the private sphere, had thrust itself into the public arena of moral and political contestation. (Casanova 1994, p. 3)

Introduction

We are undoubtedly witnessing fluid and shifting boundaries between categories of belief and non-belief, and corresponding revisions in taken-for-granted understandings of the relationship between 'politics' and 'religion'. In this chapter, I will examine some of the key pressure points and begin to identify what is at stake. It seems that the current situation, particularly in the West, is one of simultaneous religious decline, mutation and resurgence. There are plenty of signs of what Jose Casanova (1994) terms the 'deprivatization' of religion and its renewed public significance, although this is further complicated by continuing de-institutionalization of religious and spiritual belief.

Mathew Guest has summarized the cultural condition of religion in the UK as follows:

a more uncertain, fragmented culture, in which Christianity appears as a minority pursuit, no longer at the heart of civic unity, instead a media curiosity, inspiring fierce defence among some, open mockery among others. This framework suggests neither inexorable decline on the one hand, nor naïve optimism about Christian vitality and influence on the other. (Guest, Olson and Wolffe 2012, p. 60)

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If this diagnosis is accurate, then it has particular implications when we focus on the public – and therefore institutionalized, organizational – dimensions of religious belief and practice. The mutation of traditional religious activity and belief into alternative, more privatized, expressions is further evidence that this cannot be conceived of as any kind of reversal of religious decline, but rather its re-orientation, albeit within newly modest and straitened circumstances. But the unprecedented co-existence of multiple forms of belief and non-belief (and all points in between) may require a re-orientation of the conventions by which Western democracies have demarcated religion and politics, as well as many of the legislative conventions governing the mediation of religion into the public square. Part of the contemporary condition appears to be an impending collision between the 'immovable object' of religious activism and the 'irresistible force' of secularism.

New Visibility

Is it possible to measure the fortunes of religious faith in the world? In reviewing a range of statistical data, I should remark that I am looking for trends and patterns of growth or decline, rather than static snapshots; and that while a global picture is valuable, regional and cultural variations matter also. While many surveys on religion record patterns of affiliation and institutional strength as well as individual belief, my main focus is on religion as a cultural and political force, and how personal faith is mediated into the public domain. This is because any analysis of the role of public theology needs to take into account both formal, institutional interventions (official statements, policies and provision) and individual conviction (as expressed in voting habits, patterns of volunteering, moral attitudes, and so on).

Research from the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life (conducted in 2010) offers a comprehensive overview of global religious observance, drawn from over 2,500 censuses and surveys worldwide. Globally speaking, over eight out of ten people identify with a religious group, with religious affiliation distributed as follows:

Christian	32 per cent
Muslim	23 per cent
No affiliation	16 per cent
Hindu	15 per cent
Buddhist	7 per cent
'Folk Religion'	6 per cent
Jewish	0.2 per cent

(Source: Pew Forum 2012, p. 9)

Summary by Region, 2010

Region	Population (millions)	Per cent of Population							
		Christian	Muslim	Unaff	Hindu	Budd	Folk	Other	Jewish
Asia-Pacific	4,054.99	7.1	24.3	21.2	25.3	11.9	9.0	1.3	<0.1
Europe	742.55	75.2	5.9	18.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2
Latin America/ Caribbean	590.08	90.0	0.1	7.7	0.1	<0.1	1.7	0.2	<0.1
Middle East/ North Africa	341.02	3.7	93.0	0.6	0.5	0.1	0.3	<0.1	1.6
N. America	344.53	77.4	1.0	17.1	0.7	1.1	0.3	0.6	1.8
Sub-Saharan/ Africa	822.72	62.9	30.2	3.2	0.2	<0.1	3.3	0.2	<0.1
World	**6,895.89**	**31.5**	**23.2**	**16.3**	**15.0**	**7.1**	**5.9**	**0.8**	**0.2**

(Source: Pew Forum 2012, p. 50)

Regional variations are significant, however. While there are signs of religious growth in China, for example, it remains the world's largest centre of religiously unaffiliated people (700 million, or 52.2 per cent of the population and 62 per cent of all religiously unaffiliated people in the world). Those who identify as religiously unaffiliated are significant, since one of my concerns is to consider how relationships between those of faith and none are worked out across different dimensions of public life. This group is not, of course, homogenous: it includes atheists, agnostics and people who simply do not choose to identify with any organized creed or institutional faith. This is not to say, however, that many of them would not hold religious or spiritual beliefs, or participate in forms of religious ritual. Pew records that:

. . . belief in God or a higher power is shared by 7% of unaffiliated Chinese adults, 30% of unaffiliated French adults and 68% of unaffiliated U.S. adults [and that] 7% of unaffiliated adults in France and 27% of those in the United States say they attend religious services at least once a year. And in China, 44% of unaffiliated adults say they have worshiped at a graveside or tomb in the past year. (Pew Forum 2012, p. 24)

Trends in some countries, especially in Western Europe, however, suggest both increasing religious diversity coupled with a growing divide between those who identify with a religious faith and those who do not. The results of the 2011 census in the United Kingdom indicate a continuing drift away from Christianity and an increase in religious disaffiliation. For the second time, the census asked people to choose a religious identity, although the question[1] was voluntary. Results showed that while Christianity was still the largest religion, with 33.2 million people, or 59.3 per cent of the population, this had fallen from 71.7 per cent in 2001. The second largest religious group was Muslims, whose numbers grew from 1.5 million to 2.7 million people (3.0 per cent to 4.8 per cent). Significantly, there was a marked increase in those reporting no religion (from 14.8 per cent to 25.1 per cent). The census question gives us no insight into religious attitudes or into opinions about the public role of religion, but other polls do offer further information in this respect. A poll conducted by *YouGov* in 2011 recorded that 40 per cent of adults interviewed professed no religion, 55 per cent were Christian and 5 per cent of other faiths. Age made a major difference, with only 38 per cent of the 18–34s being Christian and 53 per cent having no religion; whereas for the over-55s the figures were 70 per cent (Christian) and 26 per cent (no religion) respectively. 11 per cent of respondents claimed to attend a religious service once a month or more, 27 per cent less often, and 59 per cent never. Non-attendance was higher among the young (62 per cent for the 18–34s) than the old (54 per cent for the over-55s); higher among manual workers (62 per cent) than non-manuals (56 per cent) (*YouGov* 2011).

In November 2012, ComRes, on behalf of ITV News, conducted an online survey of 2,055 Britons aged 18 and over. 79 per cent agreed with the statement that religion is a cause of much misery and conflict in the world today; 11 per cent disagreed. 35 per cent agreed that religion is a

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1 'What is your religion?'

force for good in the world, but 45 per cent disagreed, dissentients being more numerous among men (50 per cent) than women (41 per cent).

> All in all, these data point to a society in which religion is increasingly in retreat and nominal. With the principal exception of the older age groups, many of those who claim some religious allegiance fail to underpin it by a belief in God or to translate it into regular prayer or attendance at a place of worship. People in general are more inclined to see the negative than the positive aspects of religion, and they certainly want to keep it well out of the political arena. (ComRes 2012)

'Generation SBNR'

Even among those who profess no religious affiliation, not surprisingly, there is pluralism. Census data and other surveys suggest it is not simply a matter of 'no faith' but a continuum of attitudes towards the possibility of 'God', the nature of spiritual or non-material existence, the credibility or otherwise of religious belief, and so on. Thus, there are atheists, agnostics, freethinkers, secularists, humanists, extending to non-realist theists who would deny the existence of a personal, objective God but maintain some form of religious affiliation. Some are active in Humanist or Secularist organizations; many more are opting for 'secular' funerals, marriages or civil partnerships and other rites of passage; still more are reading and debating the works of 'New Atheists' such as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Polly Toynbee and Christopher Hitchens. In many ways, they are the inheritors of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, arguing that human flourishing and advancement demands that we are liberated from any form of divinely or supernaturally invested authority, since that prevents us from being free to exercise our reason. Religion is by its very nature an outmoded, irrational force, which has no place in a modern, technological and rational society.

Of course, atheism itself has a history. The philosopher Socrates argued against the pantheon of divine figures within popular Greek religion, in the name of a higher, purer transcendent principle. Ancient thought was familiar with those who criticized forms of religion in which gods were simply a projection of human whims and characteristics, in favour of a

purer, more transcendent presence. The Reformation saw the emergence of a vocabulary of unbelief to describe those who appeared deficient in matters of piety and observance; 'atheism' denoted more a matter of outward practice than inward doubt. However, atheism as such was essentially a product of modernity, and begins to emerge as a systematic world-view from the middle of the seventeenth century (Hyman 2010, pp. 5–6). What may be unique to contemporary times, however, is the emergence of atheism as a popular belief, rather than a minority option among 'the educated intellect' of an elite (Buckley 1987, p. 28). In that case, then the greater prominence of new atheism and other forms of religious scepticism is not unrelated to other sociological and theological shifts associated with secularization and the decline of institutional religion, including the erosion of nominal observance and a corresponding embrace of informal and personalized spiritualities and world-views.

The rise in recorded statistics in the West of those who subscribe to 'no religion' is probably due to a number of factors. Many are indifferent to religion – the so-called 'apatheists' (Rauch 2003). Others follow the scientific and rational denial of a transcendent, personal God as espoused by Dawkins and others. Others, however, may feel more of a sense of alienation from organized, creedal religion out of a combination of moral ambivalence towards institutional religion's abuses of power and a wish to follow a more autonomous spiritual journey. What unites them would appear to be a dislike of religious organizations and dogma, and a commitment to the values of human dignity and autonomy. Many do so out of attachment to scientific principles and a strong positivism or empiricism towards the known world. It is often used to denote a life stance that rejects traditional organized religion as the best means of furthering spiritual growth. Others may reject creedal and institutional religion, but choose to embrace forms of spirituality or alternative therapies. Whilst eschewing involvement in traditional, corporate religious organizations, many participate in alternative rituals, associated perhaps with the passing of the seasons, such as Solstice; or in expressions of vernacular celebration and mourning, such as the establishment of roadside shrines for victims of motor accidents (Woodhead 2012).

Some census evidence suggests a high correlation between age and religiosity, with younger people less likely to identify themselves with an organized religion, and to describe themselves as spiritual. According to Robert Fuller, as many as 33 per cent of people in the US identify as 'Spiritual but not Religious' (Fuller 2001). Again, religious non-affiliation appears more

prevalent amongst younger generations. A Pew Research Center survey in the US in 2010 recorded 25 per cent of adults born after 1980 (so-called 'Generation Y', or under 30s) as unaffiliated, describing their religion as 'atheist,' 'agnostic' or 'nothing in particular'. This compares with less than one-fifth of people in their 30s (Generation X, at 19 per cent), 15 per cent of those in their 40s, 14 per cent of those in their 50s and 10 per cent or less among those 60 and older (Pew Forum 2010). The differences appear to be a feature of this particular generation, rather than explained by people becoming more religious as they grow older: so the under-30s were significantly more unaffiliated than members of Generation X were at a comparable point in their life cycle (20 per cent in the late 1990s) and twice as unaffiliated as Baby Boomers (born between 1945 and 1960) were as young adults (13 per cent in the late 1970s). Might we also designate Generation Y as 'Generation SBNR' with all that this may mean for the public fortunes of organized religion in the future?

'Spiritual' and 'religious' are interchangeable in some respects. Both connote belief in a Higher Power, a desire to connect with transcendent reality. But the differences seem to lie in the extent to which the latter is organized, institutional, formed around historic creeds, practices and rituals, and the former more loosely defined, less corporate or communal, and more 'eclectic' or diverse in its choice of influences. So *spiritual* has gradually come to be associated with a private realm of thought and experience, whereas *religious* tends to be connected with the public realm of membership in religious institutions, participation in formal rituals, and adherence to official denominational doctrines.

There are many good things about thinking in terms of a 'spiritual' capacity or aspiration that is present in all people, regardless of creed or formal status. However, it also serves to reinforce the sense that the relationship between 'believing' and 'belonging' is very blurred. What about those within the churches who would want to leave room for doubt in relation to orthodox belief, or express frustration at religious authorities? In terms of the role of religious faith in public life, this may simply perpetuate a dichotomy of public and private, and merely begs the question as to where we look for those who bear the continuity of religious teachings and ethics, and manifest and communicate them into the public domain.

As we shall see in Chapter 2, however, even secular philosophers like Jürgen Habermas are beginning to ask whether Western society in particular can really do 'believing' without 'belonging', or whether the gradual

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attrition of de-institutionalization will result, eventually, in public religion 'running on empty'. If we conceive of a relationship with God as simply about my personal spirituality and well-being, then what happens to corporate practices, to traditions of social justice, service in the community, not to mention the public voice and presence of faith? This alerts us to the fact that the public prominence of religion remains dependent on the viability of continuing institutional and corporate expressions of faith beyond the personal. For many persons of faith, the corporate – and therefore ethical and social – dimension is not an option but a necessity:

> Being privately spiritual but not religious just doesn't interest me. There is nothing challenging about having deep thoughts all by oneself. What is interesting is doing this work in community, where other people might call you on stuff, or heaven forbid, disagree with you. Where life with God gets rich and provocative is when you dig deeply into a tradition that you did not invent all for yourself. (Daniel 2011)

Religious Literacy

As a normative Christian, church-going culture waned through the middle of the twentieth century, a more heterodox and pluralist *post-Christian* culture emerged, 'involving the emergence of cultural forms of "non-religion", the consolidation of new religious sub-cultures and the circulation of new cultural constructions of "religion"' (Brown and Lynch 2012, p. 331). In other words, a society both more and less religious, but also less homogenous and far more differentiated between those groups of the very religious, the notionally religious and the anti-religious. Along with the growth of forms of public scepticism and non-belief, and the consolidation of religious identity as consciously counter-cultural, therefore, comes the de-institutionalization of religion, with its increasing mediation through popular culture and the practices of everyday life.

If the trends of religious decline in the West are accurate, it means that while religion is visible in some, often unexpected, respects it remains (or becomes increasingly) marginal to most people's everyday concerns and beyond their direct experience. In that case, then, who and what are the vehicles by which religious and theological concerns are brought to public

consciousness? I would contend that, as creedal and institutional religion declines, most people are likely to encounter religion vicariously, such as via media representations of religious issues and personnel. Is this a further example of the way in which non-religious stakeholders become vicariously responsible for the mediation of religious images, values and representations? Does this assist, or distort, attempts at greater 'religious literacy', which is also a feature of contemporary public deliberation?

The new mobilization of religion, its re-entry into social policy and equalities and human rights discourses, contrasts with its diminishing visibility as a part of daily life. Hence the emergence of the language of 'religious literacy' as a means of bridging the divide. The term originated in the US with the work of Stephen Prothero and the debate as to whether religion could be taught in public or state schools (2007). In the British context, 'religious literacy' is concerned more with how to foster greater understanding across the growing gulf between an increasingly secular political class and much of the grass-roots community activity that goes on in the name of faith. Talk of 'religious literacy' originates in state or public education, where it is considered one of the objectives of religious education in schools (Carr 2007). In the UK, a daily act of collective worship and some form of religious instruction have been required by law since 1944; but as British society has become more diverse religiously and culturally, such provision is less about the observance of a shared Christian heritage and more about negotiating the pluralism of religious beliefs and practices in a multi-cultural society.

More broadly, however, the new public visibility of religion has extended the use of the term 'religious' or 'faith' literacy to apply to the training of government and public services personnel. Recent changes to equal opportunities legislation in the United Kingdom have proved something of a catalyst. The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations of 2003 and the Equality Acts of 2006 and 2010 represent the extension of basic protection against discrimination to questions of 'religion and belief' (see later in this chapter). Since employers and service providers are now required to be more aware of religious factors affecting employees and clients, there has naturally been a greater sensitivity towards matters of faith in relation to everyday practice and the law.

But what is religious or 'faith' literacy? And how is it communicated, learned or taught? What are its essential features, and its potential benefits – and for whom? Stephen Prothero's discussion of the phenomenon ends

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with a call for programmes of religious literacy in public schools as a tool of 'empowered citizenship' (2007), and represents a commitment that 'some broad acquaintance with the great religious narratives of humankind . . . is an educational *sine qua non*' (Carr 2007, p. 668).

The 'Mediatization' of Religion

As a Report from the Equality and Human Rights Commission in the UK suggested, however, if the promotion of religious literacy is entering the consciousness of public institutions and service-providers, it may be that media and popular culture are as influential as more formal sectors such as education (Woodhead 2009). Such a suggestion is reinforced by trends in contemporary scholarship in religion, media and culture which argue that popular culture and media perform a correspondingly formative role in articulating and constructing people's perceptions and orientations to the sacred. The Norwegian sociologist of religion Stig Hjarvard argues that as formal religious affiliation declines, the media assume greater prominence as conduits of religious ideas (2008). This he terms the 'mediatization' of religion, meaning that media become increasingly more powerful sources of representations, understandings and experiences of faith for many consumers of media. This has its post-secular manifestations as well:

> Studying the ways religion interconnects with the media provides evidence of tendencies of *secularization and of re-sacralization*, and it may be possible that both tendencies are at work at the same time – although in different areas and aspects of the interface between religion and media. (p. 10, my emphasis)

According to this analysis, the production and consumption of different kinds of popular culture – films, news and other broadcasting, internet, new social media – serve not so much to report or depict religion as a priori but to construct our very understandings of the nature of 'religion' itself. This has serious consequences for religious bodies. As secularization detaches them from first-hand exposure to the general public, they are required to engage

with the media as surrogate or vicarious agent to ensure the maintenance of a public profile (Graham 2011). Yet the very same logic of secularization that makes them dependent on the media requires them to conform to the logic of the media:

> Presence in the sphere of public discourse is a socio-political currency now controlled by the contemporary guarantors of the public sphere: the media . . . Public religion finds itself desperately needing presence in the public sphere, yet it must surrender control over its own construction, its own subjectivity, in order to have access here. (Hoover and Venturelli 1996, p. 261)

If such analysis is correct, that popular culture and media perform an increasingly influential role in articulating and constructing people's perceptions and orientations to the sacred, then attention needs to be paid to the 'mediatization' of religion as a significant public reality. This reflects the way in which religious belief and practice has become displaced away from public, corporate institutions into other, diverse – and potentially more privatized – forms of ritualized and sacred spaces and environments, physical, imagined or virtual, as the everyday contexts for people's exploration of religious and spiritual dimensions of identity, meaning and action (Graham 2011).

The mediatization of religion illustrates perfectly how new forms of public engagement with religion are emerging in a context in which society is experiencing the co-existence of secularizing and sacralizing tendencies. It reflects the extent to which sources of religious information and involvement are relocated away from dedicated institutions into the realms of business and entertainment, and to the reorientation of religious practice into a form of consumption as much as meaning-making or voluntary activity. It indicates the way in which religion is not disappearing as a source of personal meaning or even, necessarily as a reservoir of cultural meanings and spiritual practices. Yet along with the growth of new forms of religion, it shows how the public face of religious belief and practice is becoming more differentiated, more 'liquid' (Bauman 2000) in its manifestations. But what does all this mean for the way in which, traditionally, religious values and actions have manifested themselves in public?

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Religion in Public Life: Secularism and the Liberal 'Firewall'

Western democracies have inherited a particular settlement by which religion and politics co-existed. Historically, such an understanding emerged from the European religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in which political power and legitimacy was tied up with theological and ecclesiastical orthodoxy. With the development of the modern state, and especially following the Democratic Revolutions of the late eighteenth century in France and the United States, political theory rested on the idea that the State, the nation and government were creations of popular will, and not divine right. This had as its starting point the plurality of value systems in a modern society, and the conviction that government ruled by popular consent. Political, moral and religious diversity is good, since it is the outworking of that essential freedom of self-determination independent of external constraint. Religion, on the other hand, is regarded as a potential source of contention and it is better for all of our welfare – and for the sake of a healthy democracy – if it is not the basis of political power or used to determine policies and principles by which a pluralist society is governed.

This is enshrined in the Jeffersonian separation of Church and State under the First Amendment of the US Constitution, which states that 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof' (First Amendment to US Constitution). Note, however, that this is not a question of the exclusion of religion from public life, but simply the intention to ensure that no expression of religion is given particular privilege, such as would occur with the establishment of a national Church, for example.

The paradox is, however, that despite this separation, the United States remains one of the most religious nations in the world; and culturally speaking, its citizens appear more receptive than most of their European counterparts to explicit religious language and sentiments on the part of their political leaders.

So 'secular' in this context essentially means the separation of Church and State, functionally, as signalling no privileged position for one particular confession of faith. An alternative model, however, would be that of France, with its tradition of *laïcité* and the prohibition on any public display of religion. Here, secularism denotes a more thorough-going evacuation of references to the sacred in public whatsoever. There are two

dimensions to the liberal secular state, therefore: no privileged affiliation to any single religious tradition; and the inadmissibility of any manifestation or confession of religion in public. Charles Taylor characterizes the commitment to a 'secular' state as shaped by the historic principles of the French Revolution of 'liberté, égalité et fraternité': liberty, as the freedom to believe or not to believe; equality, in refusing privilege for any one creed; and fraternity as the desire to see that all voices (including the religious) have a stake in the body politic (Taylor 2010, pp. 24–5).

The functional separation of religion and politics is often associated in contemporary debate with the political philosopher John Rawls. Rawls's classic position is that the limits of public reason must be honoured by all reasonable (reason being a great arbiter) citizens in their public discourse concerning fundamental political questions. As people committed to public consensus, yet knowing that they affirm a diversity of moral, religious and philosophical doctrines, they should be ready to explain the basis of their actions to one another in terms each could reasonably expect that others might endorse as consistent with their freedom and equality (Rawls 1971).

This presents a challenge for the State to balance competing world-views in order to prevent any one sectional group (religious or otherwise) from imposing restrictions on public discourse and the exercise of citizenship. One solution is to place the authority of the State above and beyond religious or any other partial conviction, so that political power could be equitably shared among citizens and that no-one should be afforded undue privilege or excluded from exercising citizenship. But this necessitates the 'bracketing out' of any form of religious or theological reasoning from public discourse, on the grounds that they cannot reasonably be shared universally across the population. In the name of universal access to political influence and power, then, historically religious speech was deemed inadmissible in democratic debate: on decisions about whether to go to war, to legalize abortion or homosexuality, how to maintain law and order, and so on.

A staple principle of modern political liberalism, therefore, is that political power is to be shared equitably among citizens and that no one should be afforded undue privilege or excluded from exercising citizenship. Whereas secular reasoning is available to all citizens by virtue of its being rooted in universal human reason, any theologically derived reasoning is understood to be partisan and divisive, since it silences those who

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do not hold to that faith or who are not conversant with its vocabulary. Essentially, therefore, the fault-line between public and private in a liberal polity also means the establishment of some kind of 'firewall' between the secular and the religious, since it presupposes cultural pluralism and the autonomy of the secular – or at least the non-confessional – public space. Rawls's critics argue, however, that this represents an unacceptable division between 'public reason' and 'private faith' – a privatization of religion, essentially – and offers an insufficiently 'thick' account of the moral roots of political debate:

> The standard view of religion in the modern world is that it is an add-on which, when peeled off, leaves us with a thick enough body of principles for living our lives together. (Wolterstorff 2008, p. 675)

Critics such as Nicholas Wolterstorff have replied that no one – particularly anyone of faith – who thinks about public issues from a basis of values and fundamental principles can be expected to put these beliefs to one side. To do so would be radically to attenuate and distort their contribution. It would be a breach of natural justice. Furthermore, it fails in its attempts to be inclusive since it represents a curtailment of religious reasoning and a restriction on the freedom not of secular, but of religiously minded, citizens. The liberal democratic public square is by its very nature pluralist and contentious and will be all the more robust and democratic for being so. In place of the public reason model, therefore, commentators have advanced a model based on 'dialogic pluralism', a place of rich exchange of views and justifications for matters of common concern (Williams 2012; Katwala 2006).

This suggests that the religious roots of political reasoning cannot be excluded from the democratic body politic, and that it is in the interests of secularists and pluralists to admit the legitimacy and benevolence of moderate religious citizens, since the quickest way of driving them into the arms of so-called extremists is to disavow any alternative to theocracy or secularism.

> What are you going to make of the claim that atheists make better citizens than theists, or the fantasy of strangling the last king with the entrails of the last priest, or the notion that believers are *essentially* irrational and intolerant, or the idea that the purpose of a liberal education

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is to produce as many democratic secularists as possible, or the dream of a day when faith has passed from the face of the earth, or the advice that you should, in all fairness, keep *your* religious convictions behind the church door while secularists pursue *their* long-term objectives? (Stout 2008, p. 540).

So a new phase of debate is emerging which challenges the notion of secularism as neutrality, of a 'firewall' between politics and religion. In later work, Rawls himself has conceded much of the argument, suggesting that citizens should be entitled to draw upon their own genuine convictions, in the interests of what he terms an 'overlapping consensus' (Rawls 1987). The functioning of a liberal democratic state depends on certain universally acknowledged social goods: human rights, equality, rule of law; but people may come to these from very different fundamental convictions, including humanist and theist. The State's role is to uphold the core ethic but it can still remain neutral towards any specific value-system. The contemporary and emergent challenge, then, is how to balance the functional neutrality and pluralism of the public realm with respect for cultural and religious diversity.

> The problem is that a really diverse democracy can't revert to a civil religion, or antireligion, however comforting this may be, without betraying its own principles. We are condemned to live in an overlapping consensus. (Taylor 2010, p. 33)

In reality, argues Stout, historical campaigns for social reform in Europe, South Africa and the United States have always been coalitions of secularists, religious liberals and often politically active evangelicals. This would suggest that the pluralist, contentious public arena of debate, such as proposed by Wolterstorff, is not such an unfamiliar or unprecedented reality as some might imagine. On the other hand, Wolterstorff concedes that many religious groups prefer to pursue special interest politics rather than indulge in forms of capacity-building of such a shared space of public interchange, and lack the will or the (theological and political) skills to serve as advocates for their own particular views on justice and the common good.

> For the dialogic pluralism model to work, we the people must be open to both religious and secular voices of various sorts presenting their views

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on issues of public policy and explaining why they hold these views. But conversely, for the model to be applicable, those who are religious must be *willing and able* to engage in the dialogue. They must be *willing and able* to present how they think about the issues, and *willing and able* to listen attentively and openly to alternative views. But of course they can present what they as religious persons think about the issues only if they do in fact have serious thoughts about the issues. If they don't, my model of dialogic pluralism is beside the point. (Wolterstorff 2008, p. 676, my emphasis)

Nevertheless, many commentators still argue against religion playing any role in public life, since for them it represents an undesirable intrusion or imposition of religion on the pluralist body politic. According to this view, religion is inherently inimical to democracy, since it will brook no degree of dissent or pluralism from its own view of divinely sanctioned authority. For Sam Harris, even religious moderates, and anyone prepared to accommodate modernist and pluralist world-views are invidious, since they deflect attention away from more extreme versions. Religious conservatives are more honest by refusing to acknowledge the legitimacy of values drawn from beyond their own tradition: tolerance, human rights and pluralism. Yet any kind of theistic belief, taken on its own terms, will result in repressive and intolerant behaviour, since such commitments can never countenance pluralism or dissent (Harris 2005). Moderates may appear acceptable but in reality cloak the true nature of their more devout (and more consistent) co-religionists. Non-believers and secularists should be wary of entering into alliances with moderate theists, since all will result in the victory of theocracy.

The question is, however, whether such a secular – as in evacuated of all references to the sacred – public domain is possible, let alone desirable. It is highly unlikely that people of religious conviction would tolerate such a circumscription of their beliefs; and as Jeffrey Stout notes, short of coercion, no democratic system would be able to dissuade religious groups from intervening, and any statutory attempt to restrict their involvement in public life as people of faith would in all likelihood prove counter-productive:

If, by some miracle, laws were passed to constrain the hateful preachers whom secularists love to hate, and judges were installed to uphold these

laws, what would become of those preachers? The most courageous of them would go proudly to jail as martyr-patriots, clutching a Bible in one hand and a copy of the Bill of Rights in the other. A day later, their churches would contain multitudes. (Stout 2008, p. 539)

Similarly, writing about the emergence of conservative religious pressure groups such as the overtly Christian Family First Party in Australia, Marion Maddox argues that secularism, where religious conviction is excluded from or overlooked in public debate, may serve as poor defence against religiously motivated politics. The danger is that by refusing to admit any kind of religious or metaphysical reasoning into the debate, protagonists in liberal democracies never give themselves the opportunity to subject it to critical interrogation. This she terms a 'subterranean dominionist' tendency of the government, and argues that it shows how neither a secular state nor secularist public rhetoric is necessarily any protection against religiously motivated politics. Quite the contrary, in fact, should a minority of conservative explicitly religious pressure groups take it upon themselves to influence the wider political culture according to their own convictions. As Maddox suggests, religion operates in a subterranean or coded fashion, never breaking the surface of public scrutiny, implying not only that the metaphysical dimensions of public values are unworthy of rational interrogation, but also that democratic debate devoid of reference to values or principles is sustainable (Maddox 2007),

> Instead, at least one possible outcome of public religion vacating the public square is that a residue remains of often less publicly visible, but nevertheless influential, religion with anti-democratic tendencies and even theocratic overtones. While Australia has a history of churches operating as independent voices in the public sphere, the space for such participation has been dramatically curtailed in recent years by a government determined to quarantine itself from church criticism. But, over the same period, government actions – from policy shifts such as school funding to more symbolic gestures like senior government figures appearing at conservative megachurch and parachurch events – conveyed the impression of endorsing an alternative, highly privatized model of Christianity in which individual economic aspiration replaces collective concern for social justice, while coded language of 'dominion' and Christian supremacy transforms Australia's traditionally tolerant public culture. (p. 91)

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The only condition of course, is that religious people have to be 'willing and able' – and secularists have to be prepared to trust them. How the terms of such an engagement might be framed will form the basis of later discussion.

Religion in Public: The Case of Religion and Welfare

Another feature of contemporary religion in the UK perfectly illustrates the contradictions of increased prominence (and heightened expectation) alongside continuing institutional fragility, and it is the debate about faith-based involvement in the restructuring of welfare. The ideal of the neutral secular state as a means of framing a public space free of ecclesiastical privilege and ensuring a process of free communication in which all citizens can participate, which is one of the hallmarks of Western liberal democracy, serves in many respects as the benchmark of our considerations, as the re-emergence of religious identity throws out new challenges to our construals of citizenship, freedom and belief. One expression of the paradox may be in the way in which the State is no longer the neutral arbiter of public space, but active in encouraging faith-based activism back into the realms of civil society through the ministrations of care and welfare at the margins of the State. If we have learned to regard the modern democratic State as one of the 'firewalls' between religious and secular, what happens, for example, when government actively champions faith-based organizations as the vanguard of a rejuvenated 'third sector' in the context of neoliberal welfare reforms?

Debates about faith-based welfare go back to George W. Bush hiring Marvin Olasky, advocate of what was termed 'compassionate conservatism' which represented a reduction of direct public funding for welfare and diversion of responsibility to voluntary and community groups such as faith-based organizations. As born-again evangelical Christians, Olasky and Bush were kindred spirits in their tendency to see issues such as poverty and family breakdown as symptoms of dysfunctional behaviour, fuelled in part by welfare dependency. In so far as religious agencies combined practical care with programmes of moral re-education, they were regarded as addressing both symptom and cause, and helping to reduce society's burden of welfare expenditure.

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It is now commonplace in the UK to include faith-based organizations in the delivery of welfare provision: in projects with young offenders, new schools and inner-city academies, residential and day care for the elderly, addiction services and neighbourhood regeneration (Dinham, Furbey and Lowndes 2009). Religious organizations are seen as rich in what is known as 'social capital' (human resources, the ability to forge networks, to mobilize resources, and to espouse the values that foster altruism and community service) (Bretherton 2010, pp. 31–58). As public expenditure has come under increasing pressure, the role of the voluntary or 'third' sector assumes greater prominence: as stakeholders or partners in government initiatives, or even as an arm of service delivery. However, the new role of religion in welfare provision is not entirely novel if viewed in historical perspective.

From medieval times, welfare provision was a Christian ideal, with responsibility for poverty relief, education and care of the sick regarded as the province of religious foundations. As social democratic parties came to power in Europe, and began to build an infrastructure of statutory welfare systems, Christian churches and church leaders were glad to hand over responsibility to the State, which was regarded as the embodiment of popular will. At their zenith, post-war welfare societies such as in Scandinavia and the UK assumed a much more secular character. Belief in technocratic measures to stem poverty, alliance with forms of progressive politics such as feminism and socialism, an egalitarian, democratic spirit all conspired to weave a narrative that was 'optimistic, progressive and utopian' (Woodhead 2012, p. 10).

However, as churches moved with the dominant political culture, they experienced loss of distinctiveness. The religious roots of humanitarianism, philanthropy and welfare reform were forgotten. 'There was no need for religion once the promises of heaven had been translated to earth' (p. 15). As 'welfare utopianism' assumed the characteristics of a secular faith, it had no need for other kinds of – religious – faith to sustain it.

Religious engagement in welfare provision and social policy found itself marginalized when the economic tide began to turn in the late 1970s. As greater financial retrenchment slowed and then reversed the growth of welfare systems, and with the rise of neo-conservative ideologies, the gradual decline of this secular faith both reflected and engendered a loss of confidence in all the grand narratives of progress, science,

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humanism and collective action. In some respects, this gave faith-based interventions a renewed sense of relevance, especially for public theology, since the churches could speak in defence of a universal, benevolent and interventionist state against attempts to rein back its influence and reduce public expenditure (Archbishop's Commission on Urban Priority Areas 1985).

Concern to involve churches and other faith-based organizations in the delivery of public services, is not, of course, the invention of the current coalition government, but dates to the first term of the New Labour government in the late 1990s. What has re-emerged over the two or three decades since then has been a turn to a more market-oriented, entrepreneurial ethos among faith-based organizations. If they have a relationship to the State, it is more as partners, as part of civil society or under the auspices of charitable activities: a return to a pre-war arrangement, but (once again) not immune to secular, albeit neo-liberal, considerations of such things as competitive tendering, the contract culture, service-level agreements – all in the name of 'social entrepreneurship' as the new interface between religion and state. So religion has reflected the broader social trend towards more market-driven philosophies.

But while there may be benefits across the political spectrum in mobilizing 'faith' as part of a rejuvenated third sector, activists themselves see dangers (Dinham 2012). The language of social capital risks buying into the commodification of welfare services. It also threatens to instrumentalize faith-based contributions, thereby distorting and narrowing their concerns. Faith groups are in danger of colluding with agendas imposed from above rather than being free to articulate those of their own stakeholders, and especially their core values around empowerment, well-being and community development. Faith-based organizations may be regarded as providing 'warm hearts and safe pairs of hands' from government's point of view, then, but are not granted the independence to challenge or negotiate with their terms of engagement (Dinham 2012; Archbishops' Commission on Urban Life and Faith 2006). British Muslims in particular are concerned at the 'securitization' of religion, in the way in which initiatives such as Prevent Violent Extremism often seem to cast local religious institutions as agents of social control or surveillance within their own communities (Bleich 2010). Here we begin to glimpse the 'tensions, if not direct contradictions, between a liberal benevolence towards religious diversity and a growing fear that religious identity could present a serious

threat to community cohesion' (G. Smith 2004, p. 198). Governments are Janus-faced: 'good' religion is rewarded for its functional effectiveness in delivering social cohesion; but beneath that are anxieties about extremist or fundamentalist 'beliefs' as divisive and anti-social.

This contradiction between the mobilization of 'faith' as an imagined variety or category of social capital, and its institutional fragility (or its vulnerability to co-option by the State) serves to illustrate the problems inherent in a greater visibility of religion in public that is often decoupled from its traditional, mainstream institutional expressions such that 'the inspiration, motivation and effectuation of political theologies no longer lie within the cultural and institutional, ecclesial or communal heritage of the major religions or within the modern forms of political sovereignty with which their theologically . . . driven politics were historically, geographically, empirically, and conceptually linked.' (de Vries 2006b, p. 9) The loosening of established, institutional ties is evidenced by the 'increasingly delocalized, deterritorialized, and volatile mobility' of religion (p. 8). The flows of secularization engender the de-institutionalization of religion, while at the same time, State intervention co-opts organizational structures and bureaucracies in ways that threaten to instrumentalize and 'hollow out' the distinctive values of religious belief and practice.

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

One telling instance of the new visibility of religion in Western society, and thus the shifting boundaries between the sacred and the secular, has been the incorporation of the categories of 'religion and belief' into human rights legislation. Since the middle of the twentieth century, there have been articles pertaining to religious freedom which have been well-enshrined within national, European and international law. What is newer, however, is the constitutional inclusion of religious equality alongside other principles of anti-discrimination, such as race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and disability. While this may be seen as a straightforward extension of anti-discriminatory practices, however, sensitivity towards religious conscience and identity has sometimes conflicted with more general considerations of public welfare. It raises the question of whether there is in fact a hierarchy between different kinds of protected

characteristics, and how the exercise of public jurisdiction can be managed without passing judgement on the nature of belief itself.

> The emergence of equality and non-discrimination as important constitutional values, as well as the expansion of the protected grounds of non-discrimination to sexual orientation, has raised the prospect of a conflict, or at the very least significant tension, between these goals. There is also a widespread public perception that an increase in the protection of equality through human rights and discrimination law has led to an increase in 'conflicts' between different social groups. (Malik 2011, p. 22)

In Chapter 5, I will focus on the cases of conservative evangelical Christians who have either been prosecuted for breaking the law (such as the hoteliers who refused to let a room with a double bed to a same-sex couple in a civil partnership), or who have taken their employers to court for discriminatory practices (such as the airline worker and health-care professional dismissed for wearing crosses in breach of uniform regulation, the registrar who was disciplined for refusing to officiate at civil partnerships, and the counsellor dismissed for refusing to give sex therapy advice to a same-sex couple), and how these are symptomatic of the outworkings of a particular kind of evangelical (public) theology.

Before that, however, it is worth making a more general examination of how legal provision for cherished Western democratic liberties such as freedom of expression and belief is faring in the face of demands by religious believers to manifest their convictions in public through the wearing of symbols, mode of dress or through particular stances on moral issues, such as sexuality. How far ought religion to be incorporated into such legislation: is it a welcome expansion of essential rights that should be afforded to all citizens; or an example of abuse of privilege in order to introduce unwelcome and disruptive markers of particularity that will eventually undermine the coherence of a shared public domain?

As I have already outlined, the principles of freedom of belief, conscience and religion were among the first tenets of Enlightenment liberalism, as for example in the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America, which declared that 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof' (Gunn and Witte 2012). While the First Amendment was designed to put an end

to any state-sanctioned coercion, therefore, it also enshrined religious liberty – presumably, both belief and practice – within a body politic that was not so much secular as non-confessional.

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18 (1948) expressed a commitment to freedom of conscience and belief in the wake of the 1939–45 World War:

> Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. (United Nations 1948)

Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (1950) follows similar principles:

> 9.1 Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

> 9.2 Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. (European Declaration of Human Rights 1950)

This guarantees an absolute right to *hold* a religious belief, but sets more conditional criteria in relation to the ways in which such beliefs might be *manifested.* A belief does not have to be a religious conviction, and can indeed be an absence of belief. Article 9 also endeavours to differentiate between mainstream belief-systems and those that may be more ephemeral or trivial. Thus, Lord Nicholls in *R (Williamson)* v *SS Education and Employment* [2005] 2 AC 246 at paragraphs [23] and [24] ruled that a 'belief' within Article 9 (i) must not be trivial (ii) must be consistent with basic standards of human dignity or integrity and (iii) must be coherent, in the sense of being intelligible and capable of being understood.

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In the UK, the first formal anti-discrimination legislation was the Equal Opportunities Act, passed in 1975, pertaining to gender discrimination. It created certain exemptions, including religious organizations and certain professions, in which discrimination on the grounds of gender was not illegal. Subsequent acts, in 2003, 2006 and 2010 extended legislation to something called 'religion and belief'[2] and enshrined the terminology of 'equality and diversity'.[3] A person can claim discrimination if it can be proved that they have been treated less favourably solely on the grounds of their religion. 'It is unlawful for a person to operate a practice which would be likely to result in unlawful discrimination if applied to persons of any religion or belief' (2006, para 53).

What is it about religion, belief and religious identity that might give it privileged or protected status, such that it pre-empts the neutrality of public legislation? In a context in which religion is both more visible and more contested, the conventional demarcation between private conviction and public manifestation is breaking down, and nowhere more controversially than in the field of legislation that seeks to apply universalist criteria of freedom – which now must include religious freedom as a public fact – and differential considerations of religious conscience and behaviour.

However, the law has struggled with the connection between a 'belief' and its 'manifestation', on the grounds that it may be difficult to judge whether an act is a true manifestation of belief or not. For example, in the UK it was ruled that a Sikh student was entitled to wear a Kara bangle (one of the five symbols of Sikh observance) at school as a legitimate manifestation of their beliefs, whereas an evangelical Christian wishing to wear a silver ring as a sign of sexual abstinence before marriage was not *(R (P)* v *Governors Millais School)*. This suggests that behaviours *inspired* by a religion or belief are not necessarily *manifestations* of that religion or belief (see *Williamson* per Lord Nicholls at paragraph [35]). In the

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2 Part II of the 2006 Equality Act, paragraphs 44 and 45, frames the legislation around 'religion and belief'. Paragraph 44 of the legislation states: (a) 'religion' means any religion, (b) 'belief' means any religious or philosophical belief, (c) a reference to religion includes a reference to lack of religion, and (d) a reference to belief includes a reference to lack of belief.

3 By 2010, the 'protected characteristics' were defined as follows: (a) age, (b) disability, (c) gender reassignment, (d) marriage and civil partnership, (e) pregnancy and maternity, (f) race, (g) religion or belief, (h) sex, (i) sexual orientation.

Williamson verdict Lord Nicholls acknowledged this tension but defended the distinction:

> It is against this background that article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights safeguards freedom of religion. This freedom is not confined to freedom to hold a religious belief. It includes the right to express and practise one's beliefs. Without this, freedom of religion would be emasculated. Invariably religious faiths call for more than belief. To a greater or lesser extent adherents are required or encouraged to act in certain ways, most obviously and directly in forms of communal or personal worship, supplication and meditation. But under article 9 there is a difference between freedom to hold a belief and freedom to express or 'manifest' a belief. The former right, freedom of belief, is absolute. The latter right, freedom to manifest belief, is qualified. [He continued] in a pluralist society a balance has to be held between freedom to practise one's own beliefs and the interests of others affected by those practices. (http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200405/ldjudgmt/jd050224/will-1.htm, paragraph 16–17)

Similarly, once an appellant has established that something is a legitimate *manifestation* of belief, there are still further obstacles before they can prove *interference. Steadman* v *UK* (1997) 23 EHHR CD 168 and *Copsey* v *WWB Devon Clays Ltd* [2005] EWCA Civ 932 both ruled that claims for wrongful dismissal from workers who had refused to work on Sundays were not successful in proving an interference under Article 9. A worker who voluntarily accepts employment which involves Sunday working has no recourse to Article 9. If alternative provision is available, Article 9 is not breached: so (*R (Begum)* v *Headteacher and Governors of Denbigh High School* [2006] UKHL 15) and (*R (X)* v *Y School* [2007] EWHC 298 (Admin)) both ruled that there had been no interference in prohibiting Muslim girls from wearing *jilbab* and *niqab* traditional dress, since they had the option of attending other schools with more flexible uniform regulations.

Arguably, however, this perpetuates a dichotomy of belief and practice and an assumption that 'private' belief cannot be allowed to intrude into the world of 'public' practices and legislation. It grants unconditional freedom to the rights of conscience but remains unable to adjudicate on how, or even whether, that might be translated into action. This is still evident in the way in which judicial decisions remain resolutely agnostic on questions

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of the nature and origins of beliefs in question. This is most acute in cases where religious conviction conflicts with issues of sexual discrimination, since 'there is very little social consensus that allows us to determine how we should develop and police the boundaries of what constitutes a legitimate sphere of inner religious belief or lawful manifestation of that belief' (Malik 2011, p. 25). It is a perspective which regards religion as a voluntary activity – 'just another set of preferences and lifestyle choices' (Plant 2011, p. 12) – rather than the deepest well-spring of one's values and as part of an identification with a community of faith, neither of which can be abandoned or compromised at will.

So, for example, Article 9 of the European Court legislation (to which many of the UK-based cases go on appeal) rests on a dichotomy between *belief* and *practice*, between inner and external expression, which reflects a modernist, post-Enlightenment distinction between freedom of individual conscience and the non-coercive, non-confessional nature of the public square. Yet commentators note that it is often difficult to separate one from the other, and 'in particular, the way in which restrictions on action can have an important impact on the inner dimension of religion and belief' (Malik 2011, p. 24).

> The protection of an absolute right to freedom of belief and freedom of conscience has been a great achievement of liberalism but it has very often assumed that such beliefs and conscientious behaviour is to be seen as essentially private. (Plant 2011, p. 10)

Referring to *Watkins-Singh v Aberdare Girls' High School Governors* concerning a Sikh's right to wear the *Kara* or silver bangle, Whistler and Hill argue that there are signs that courts are beginning to judge on the wearing of religious symbols as a practice that transcends the *forum internum* of personal conscience. This may indicate a shift towards understanding wearing of religious symbols and dress not as expressions of prior religious beliefs but as cultural practices that delineate public identity. It represents a greater emphasis on the 'participation function' of religion, away from symbols simply being outward 'signs' of inner belief – a property of the *forum internum* of an individual's world-view. The open wearing of a marker of religious allegiance serves as a 'token' (Whistler and Hill 2012, p. 4) of an individual's participation in a community; and, potentially, begins to conceive of religion not as belief, or practice, but as an expression of

identity – thereby transposing into the *forum externum* of the public sphere. It also suggests a greater openness towards regarding the significance of religious symbols as resting in their capacity to tie individual believers into a community of faith: an expression of belonging, rather than believing (Whistler and Hill 2012, pp. 46–7). A stress on religious identity as an integral whole, rather than belief which is then *applied* in practice or behaviour renders religion more comparable to forms of identity such as gender, disability, race or sexuality, which are inherent or ascribed, but not chosen. In some respects, this runs counter to other post-secular trends which suggest a greater privatization of religion, as measured in institutional affiliation or even in indices of spiritual orientation.

> Citing an identity does not conclude an argument about legal privilege and obligation. Rather it marks the opening of a debate – a debate that is normative rather than empirical. (Plant 2011, p. 14)

However, court judgements so far have failed to generate a conclusive consensus on the extent to which an individual can legitimately expect the workplace to be a forum in which they can exercise freedom of conscience in the manifestation of belief and identity, or whether their duties as employee must require them to subordinate religious values to corporate policy. This becomes more complex if, for example, faith-based organizations are called upon to deliver public services and receive public funding. Must they be expected to observe equality and diversity legislation, notwithstanding the well-established principles of derogation? The view is that under these circumstances the 'contracting out' principle would prevail, and such organizations would be required to withdraw.

> Although the belief-conduct distinction is not an ideal conceptual device, where there is a conflict between religion or belief/culture and sexual orientation discrimination there may be a need to respect the rights of belief and conscience, whilst at the same time taking a strict approach to discriminatory conduct by limiting the scope of exceptions as well as evaluating the impact of these exceptions in practice. (Malik 2011, p. 38)

Nevertheless, it should be remembered that Article 9, and other equality legislation, has never been the only tool for the protection for religious

belief, if its potential prohibition or curtailment is seen as violating other aspects of a person's rights. There is actually a range of measures by which religion and belief can be protected. For example, the Religious and Racial Hatred Act 2006 prohibits the stirring up of racial hatred; and the Equality Act 2006 also guarantees the existence of faith schools, so that children of a particular faith tradition can be educated separately in accordance with its teachings. Similarly, employers may be required to make arrangements of 'reasonable accommodation' to facilitate religious observance, even on an individual basis, if requested.

In a report monitoring instances of religious organizations and individuals complaining 'of "cultural" discrimination, including prejudice, misunderstanding, indifference or ignorance about religion' (Woodhead and Catto 2009, p. 15), the Equality and Human Rights Commission recorded a mixed picture. While incidents of religious beliefs and believers 'being misunderstood, denigrated, ignored, trivialized, distorted or ridiculed, including by the media, in education, and in public discourse' (2009, p. 15) do not amount to direct discrimination in terms of the tangible withholding or misdirection of physical goods and services, they do expose the tension between liberal principles of freedom of expression – including the right to challenge the beliefs and actions of others – and respect for cultural difference, including religious practices and identities. This is perhaps not surprising, and as precedent is developed, courts may establish clear criteria for passing judgement. For the time being, however, the difficulties of finding appropriate balance between respect for religion and belief and other criteria of equality and diversity within the legislation continue.

Conclusion

Religion remains a significant part of global culture although that is subject to significant differences across regions and societies. In this chapter, I have been concerned to map these global trends but also to begin to engage in a diagnosis of some of the most remarkable shifts and new trends in the public profile of religion. I have focused on what is happening in the Western context, given that historically the emergence of modern liberal democracy in these societies established particular conventions regarding the relationship between religion and the public sphere. But given the

relative decline of religious affiliation in the West, and new signs of political engagement elsewhere, it is clear that many of the rules of engagement may be in need of revision.

While religion may be returning to the public square, both as source of social capital and informing the new search for 'values', this is not a reversal of secularization or mere religious revival, since secularist discourse is still buoyant and many influential voices continue to question the legitimacy of any kind of religious contribution. Indeed, a recurrent thread in this chapter has been how difficult it is to draw definitive fault-lines between 'belief' and 'unbelief' and how relationships between institutional religion and a secular public domain are similarly intimately intertwined. As Charles Taylor argues, the option to believe is, for modern people, irrevocably conditioned by the awareness of the possibility of non-belief (2010). Similarly, even for those who remain religiously faithful, the prospects for effective interventions by religion in the public domain are affected by the widespread loss or deficit of religious literacy. The shift from public faith to private belief has considerable bearing on the way public theology communicates with constituencies that do not share its immediate concerns.

The re-emergence of religion, especially in aspects of legal and social policy, raises significant challenges to a conventionally modernist separation of religion and politics. To what extent could religious conscience or principle ever become a regulating, even an over-riding factor in a person's public behaviour, even if that conflicted with prescribed attitudes or behaviour in relation to discrimination on grounds of sexuality? This accentuates the problems of how a liberal democracy should go about accommodating a diversity of values and lifestyles in a pluralist society, while allowing religious voices and interventions to operate with integrity.

In my next chapter, then, I will consider the more theoretical dimensions to our contemporary situation. According to the sociological orthodoxy of the secularization thesis, the resurgence of religious activism across a number of public contexts is impossible under the conditions of modernity. How do we conceptualize this: by maintaining a narrative of European exceptionalism, or retaining a distinction between 'the West and the rest'? Or is it necessary to rethink the universalism and inevitability of secularization? If so, what do we put in its place?

2

The Unquiet Frontier

Mapping the Post-Secular

> Britain now finds itself in a situation in which old and new forms of commitment, power and organization co-exist and compete with one another . . . why Britain can be religious and secular; . . . why the majority of the population call themselves Christian but are hostile or indifferent to many aspects of religion; why governments embrace 'faith' but are suspicious of 'religion'; why public debate swings between 'multiculturalism' and 'integration'; why religion is viewed as both radical and conservative; why we build multi-faith spaces . . . but can no longer speak of God in public. (Woodhead 2012, p. 26)

> Secularisation is happening, yet secularisation theory is wrong. (Brown 2001, p. viii)

Against many of the predictions of twentieth-century Western secularization theory, which foresaw the gradual disappearance of religion from the public domain, evidence has emerged in recent years of the persistence of religious faith as a public and political phenomenon. Justin Beaumont has argued that 'the public resurgence of religion is arguably one of the defining features of the twenty-first century, contrary to the modernist and secularist assumptions of much of the twentieth' (Beaumont 2010, p. 8). Empirically speaking, the resurgence of religious activism around the world serves as counter-evidence to any forecast that religion is losing its public impact. Yet it is involved with a revision of theoretical frameworks as well, in the shape of the narrative of secularization, in which modernity and social differentiation herald a decline of religious institutions and beliefs.

Some of this is to do with global socio-cultural dynamics, with a growing politicization of faith and its re-emergence as a shaper of cultural, sociological and economic processes. New manifestations of public religion are emerging, especially in the global South, calling into question the

universality of normative Western models of religious decline. Yet even in Europe – increasingly coming to be seen as the exception not the rule of secularization – religion is returning to public prominence. These are the trends that are informing revisionist perspectives on the sociological orthodoxy that religion is disappearing from public life and ceasing to have political significance. In a reformulation of his original secularization thesis, Peter Berger has claimed that it is now more accurate to talk about a process of 'desecularization' (Berger 1999):

> The world today . . . is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some cases more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labelled 'secularization theory' is essentially mistaken. (p. 2)

Yet there are reasons to believe that we are not witnessing a linear process, a religious revival or reversal of secularization, which is what 'desecularization' implies. This rather more ambivalent situation is captured in Linda Woodhead's characterization of some of the contradictory and unresolved attitudes towards the place of religion in public life. Certainly, there is legitimate talk of the 'new visibility' of religion frequently conditioned by the impact of global diasporas and global political forces; and yet in many quarters, the classic trajectory of 'secularization' as denoting the decline of long-established faith traditions and the marginalization of religious and theological language and values from the public mainstream still predominates. Most acutely, for example – especially in Europe – public scepticism towards religion, often reflecting secularist views inherited from the Enlightenment, is stronger than ever. Public disquiet regarding the legitimacy of religious and theological discourse – or the influence of faith-based organizations as providers of education, social care and other forms of welfare, for example – within a free society reflects continued unease that this breaches the neutrality of the public realm, so necessary for maintaining the conventions of liberal democracy.

If, as many commentators conclude, what distinguishes our contemporary situation is the renewed awareness of religion in public, then the chief challenge is how to respond to its changing presence, and to manage the interface between sacred and the secular. The current condition may therefore be better framed in terms of the simultaneous and dialectical presence of re-enchantment and secularized and secularizing socio-cultural trends.

This transcends the binary of mere religious revival or sociological revisionism, and represents the unique juxtaposition of *both* significant trends of secularism and continued religious decline (not only in Northern Europe, but certainly undeniably so), *and* signs of persistent and enduring demonstrations of public, global faith. A cluster of social and political theorists, among them the philosopher Jürgen Habermas, are also now speaking of the 'post-secular' public square, and acknowledging that religious values may have a role to play in what he calls 'the ethics of citizenship' (2006).

While it is a contested concept, what characterizes post-secularity is, in my view, its very paradoxical and unprecedented nature. The emergence globally and nationally of revitalized religious activism as a decisive force, alongside the continuing trajectory of institutional religious decline accompanied by robust intellectual defence of secularism in Western societies, takes us into new territory, empirically and theoretically. All to greater or lesser extent hinge on the legitimacy of religious institutions to intervene in public affairs, and how public authorities arbitrate between competing accounts of citizenship and the common good.

In this chapter, I want to consider some of the ways in which the paradox of the post-secular might be felt, at what Charles Taylor has called 'the unquiet frontiers' of modernity (2007, pp. 711–27), and what that means for our established conventions of negotiation between the two supposedly incompatible fields of religion and the public square. The ideal of the neutral secular state as a means of framing a public space free of ecclesiastical privilege and ensuring a process of free communication in which all citizens can participate, which is one of the hallmarks of Western liberal democracy, serves in many respects as the benchmark of our considerations, as the re-emergence of religious identity throws out new challenges to our construals of citizenship, belief and the nature of the public realm itself. What traction is gained on our understanding of the role of religion in the world – and especially the shifting dynamics of 'public' and 'private' – by adopting the alternative terminology of the post-secular? Can secularization continue after the secular? Is the West experiencing a resurgence of traditional forms of religion, or its reinvention and mutation (Davie 1994) into unprecedented manifestations of a newly sacralized world?

But finally, I want to ask whether the associations some people make of the post-secular with the deconstruction of some of the binaries of modernity – private/public, faith/reason, sacred/secular – offers opportunities to revisit the ways in which dominant understandings of modernity were

constructed, not least as a gendered phenomenon. Religion in the lives of women has been scandalously overlooked and under-theorized within secular feminist thought, so something like the post-secular may actually create new space to think of ways in which both religion and secularity are evident in relation to women's participation in the public realm.

The re-emergence of religion in public, in areas such as politics, urbanization, social policy and law, may well turn out to be the defining characteristic of our generation. The question is whether our conceptual frameworks are fit for purpose, and whether discourse of the 'post-secular' possesses sufficient clarity and explanatory weight to meet the challenge. I will close this chapter, therefore, by considering how appropriate the terminology of post-secularity may be for advancing enquiry into the nature of public faith. My conclusion will be that we may be seeing the end of the hegemony of secularization, but not necessarily the total demise of *secularism* or of some aspects of secularizing social and cultural tendencies. Any new frame of reference needs to embrace the deeply contradictory and unresolved nature of post-secular turns in political discourse and their accompanying challenges for public theology.

After Secularization

Who still believes in the myth of secularization? Recent debates within the sociology of religion would indicate this to be the appropriate question with which to start any current discussion of the theory of secularization . . . Armed with 'scientific' evidence, sociologists of religion now feel confident to predict bright futures for religion. (Casanova 1994, p. 11)

One way of locating the emergence of talk about the post-secular is to regard it as part of the revisionist agenda of the secularization thesis: the theory which posits a process by which religion gradually ceases to be the primary authority for individuals and societies. If secularization refers to the process by which religion declines in significance, the basic premise behind that is a theory of modernization. Secularization as understood within sociological studies is essentially a narrative about the *inevitable* decline of religion in modern cultures, occasioned by the dynamics of modernity itself: modernization, the rise of technology, rational and

bureaucratic procedures, liberal democracy, urbanization and industrial capitalism (Bruce 2002, pp. 2–5).

Classic definitions of secularization such as that advanced by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann speak of 'the progressive autonomization of societal sectors from the domination of religious meaning and institutions' (1966, p. 74). Similarly, Bryan Wilson characterizes secularization as a process by which 'religious institutions, actions and consciousness, lose their social significance' (1982, p. 49). The public profile and influence of religious values and institutions is the main focus of my discussion, since my concern is for the relationship between theology and practice, belief and citizenship. Nevertheless, the broader question of the erosion of the 'sacred canopy' of axiomatic belief and the resulting marginalization of personal religion is also of deep significance:

> Secularization relates to the diminution in the social significance of religion. Its application covers such things as, the sequestration by political powers of the property and facilities of religious agencies; the shift from religious to secular control of various erstwhile activities and functions of religion; the decline in proportion of their time, energy, and resources which men devote to super-empirical concerns; the decay of religious institutions; the supplanting, in matters of behaviour, of religious precepts by demands that accord with strictly technical criteria; and the gradual replacement of specifically religious consciousness by an empirical, rational, instrumental orientation; the abandonment of mythical, poetic, and artistic interpretation of nature and society in favour of matter-of-fact description, and, with it, the rigorous separation of evaluative and emotive dispositions from cognitive and positivistic orientations. (Wilson 1982, p. 149)

Classic definitions of secularization tend to focus, therefore, on the dwindling social prominence of religion as indicated by three key variables: the decline of formal, institutional religion; its increasingly marginal status in public life; and its diminishing significance for personal conduct and meaning. Steve Bruce elucidates this three-dimensional perspective in the following terms:

> In brief, I see secularization as a social condition manifest in (a) the declining importance of religion for the operation of non-religious roles and

institutions such as those of the state and the economy; (b) the decline in social standing of religious roles and institutions; and (c) a decline in the extent to which people engage in religious practices, display beliefs of a religious kind, and conduct other aspects of their lives in a manner informed by such beliefs. (2002, p. 3)

Possibly more profound than the public marginalization of religious interventions in the public square, or the attenuation of religious authority in matters of moral or political judgement, is the displacement of the 'sacred' as lying at the heart of reality and the 'disenchantment' of quotidian experience. Invoking Peter Berger's famous concept of the sacred canopy (1990), Grace Davie highlights the impact of this very dimension of secularization on people's phenomenological apprehension of everyday life:

For the great majority, serious convictions are not only rejected from a personal point of view, they become difficult to comprehend altogether . . . Notably absent is the over-arching sacred canopy, an all-encompassing religious frame expressed organizationally as the universal church. This no longer makes sense in the modern world. (2001, p. 25)

Despite its having become a somewhat 'unfashionable theory' (Bruce 2010), its proponents continue to defend the claims of the classic secularization theory in Western society, especially when it comes to evidence which continues to point to the social and cultural marginalization of religion, the dissolution of clear patterns of religious socialization and the plummeting of attendance, membership and institutional viability of mainstream Christianity. Commentators such as Bruce would not deny that some of these currents flow faster than others, or that some indicators of decline might be temporarily retarded by migration, local revivals or forms of identity politics. Nevertheless, the thesis still has its defenders, who argue that such evidence is insufficiently convincing and that the predominant trend for religion in global society – not simply the West – is still one of secularization.

The most apocalyptic accounts of secularization base themselves on quantitative indicators of the fortunes of mainstream Protestant and Reformed traditions. Steve Bruce predicts that by 2031 the Church of England will be 'reduced to a trivial voluntary association with a large portfolio of heritage

property'(2002, p. 74) and that smaller denominations such as the Methodist Church will have vanished altogether. Callum Brown concurs with this apocalyptic prognosis, arguing that 'the culture of Christianity is gone in the Britain of the new millennium. Britain is showing the world how *religion as we have known it* can die' (Brown 2001, p. 198, my emphasis).

However, Brown's evocation of religion 'as we have known it' throws up one of the complexities to the debate. It may be relatively straightforward to map the quantitative, institutional decline of formal religious affiliation, but less easy to trace the changing contours of personal faith and privatized spirituality, especially if the very paradigms of belief, practice and identity, and their manifestation as collective or individual phenomena are themselves evolving.

Secularization has been contested, therefore, on both empirical and theoretical grounds. One revisionist approach to secularization adopts the evidence of the proliferation of new religious practices and affiliations, and deduces that this is a reflection of enduring forms of spirituality that represents a 're-enchantment' or 're-sacralization' of the world. Such a view would claim that religion has not disappeared but has been displaced from the public into the private. A characteristic of this relocation is that it is not a return to old ways of being religious but an emergence of new ways of being religious.

> The situation appears to be less one of secularization and more one of the relocation of religion. In other words, we will conclude that, as mainstream religion loses authority, new forms of significant religion will evolve to compensate. (Partridge 2005, p. 39)

While this may offer reassurance that non-traditional forms of religion will fill the vacuum caused by the decline of older, institutional expressions as a form of 'compensation', it also implies that religious sentiment is merely 'displaced' from one to the other, without loss of social prominence or cultural significance. Yet for public theology, such a de-institutionalization or privatization of religion represents a potential diminution of its ability to engage at a structural and organizational level with other aspects of public life.

Genealogies of the Secular

Others, however, disagree with the very premises of secularization on conceptual and theoretical grounds as much as an empirical basis. Jose Casanova has advanced a similar threefold model of secularization to that of Bruce as denoting the declining social significance of religion; the structural differentiation of religious and secular spheres; and the privatization of religion (1994, p. 7). However, he expresses his scepticism towards what he termed the 'myth' and 'fallacy' of secularization, grounded in his identification of secularization as an artefact of a particular theory of Western modernization, in which spheres subsequently deemed 'secular' – the State, economy, civil society and science – were disaggregated from the overarching realm of Christendom. Casanova questions whether these different dimensions of religious decline and marginalization are indivisible – and hence part of a unitary process – or whether they function as independent variables, and thus experience, potentially, different trajectories. Casanova's conclusion is that the homogeneity of modernization has been framed through a Eurocentric lens, thus obscuring the possibility that, for example, a process of 'differentiation' might be distinguished from that of 'privatization' (pp. 38–9).

Other commentators, too, choose to regard secularization as a social construction associated with the rise of Western modernity, and by that virtue by no means inevitable or exportable to the rest of the world. In short, the secular has a history, a 'genealogy' (Asad 2003, p. 192). Craig Calhoun challenges the perception of the secular and the doctrine of secularism as 'absence' or subtraction, or as an axiomatic, ontological concept.

> Whether we see it as an ideology, a worldview, a stance toward religion, a constitutional approach, or simply an aspect of some other project . . . secularism is something we need to think through, rather than merely the absence of religion. (2010, p. 34)

Traditional versions of the secularization thesis would consider modernization to be a universal, unilinear process, associated with the emergence of industrial capitalism, the growth of cities and the expansion of technologies. This generally posits a close, causal relationship between modernization and secularization or rationalization. While the effects of secularization have only been felt most acutely in the twentieth century, the roots of the process are held to go back to the Reformation, which engendered the rise of

rationalism and individualism (Bruce 2002; Casanova, 1994). The Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century and the democratic revolutions of eighteenth century, plus the massive social and economic changes associated with the Industrial Revolution, hastened these trends whereby the bonds of social convention were loosened, and the forces of free enquiry and scientific rationality went to work on the traditional thought-forms and social structures of Christendom.

What is important to note is the extent to which this process is associated with the European and North American Enlightenments of the eighteenth century, which celebrated the self-determining and emancipatory powers of human reason, unfettered by the bonds of autocracy, tradition or superstition. In so far as religious institutions and dogmas inhibited free enquiry and critical reasoning, they were to be regarded as enemies of Enlightenment. However, as many historians have pointed out, there were many forms of expression of Enlightenment, some of which were explicitly atheist or secularist, but others that anticipated the emergence of suitably rationalist and freethinking forms of religion to accompany the flowering of human intellectual achievement in the arts, natural sciences and political economy (Calhoun 2010, pp. 40–1).

This is not to deny the existence of a world-view that might be deemed 'secular', one governed by rational, this-worldly and empirical, rather than supernatural referents or magical or ritual practices. Western modernity was marked by the emergence of spheres such as the market, the State and the person that are not governed by belief in divine agency but in human autonomy, reason and technical regulation. The 'social imaginary' (p. 36) of activities such as business, industry, medicine and government is conceived according to this- and not other-worldly criteria.

Another significant contribution to this debate has been Charles Taylor's recent work *A Secular Age* (2007). In common with many of the secularization theorists, Taylor portrays secularization as a multi-faceted phenomenon, with three particular dimensions. The first refers to the diminishment and marginalization of the public role of religion; the second denotes a decline in religious affiliation. The most significant of the three for Taylor, however, refers to changes in belief and unbelief, whereby belief in God shifts from being a taken-for-granted assumption to becoming 'one option among others' (2007, pp. 2–3). For Taylor, this third trend had Christian roots, rather than simply being the inevitable outworking of modernization. The secular age is characterized neither by an inevitable and universal declension of

religious belief, nor by a clash between sacred and profane, but by a 'back and forth' dialectic between secular wisdom and religious faith.

Taylor is concerned to tell the story of the historical and cultural conditions under which unbelief became possible – indeed, more tenable, more taken for granted than belief. Taylor's thesis would suggest both that the seeds of secularism were always present within religious traditions, and that the eclipse of the latter by the former is by no means inevitable. He argues that secularism and secularization are as much the result of internal dynamics and discourses, especially within Christianity, as the result of external, socio-economic or cultural factors. He rejects what he terms 'subtraction' theories of secularization, in which ideas of transcendence, or religious affiliation, are simply 'stripped away', leaving the rest of people's symbolic and material lives untouched. Nor is it a matter of shedding an anachronistic and deluded supernaturalism, leaving an enlightened, secular humanism in its place. Instead, a new view of the world came to predominate in the eighteenth century, in the shape of a kind of immanent humanism characterized by what Taylor calls the 'buffered self', the differentiation between public and private spheres, and the disenchantment of the universe, in the shape of naturalistic and empiricist epistemologies. Whether one is atheist or religious, therefore, the complicity of belief and unbelief requires everyone to adopt a reflexive and relativistic stance towards their own convictions. With an element of optional choice, Taylor argues, comes a shaking of the foundations of the universal, axiomatic, involuntary nature of belief.

However, Taylor's relevance to the debate about post-secularity rests on his interest in the factors that facilitate the persistence of belief, rather than simply the circumstances that propel its decline. His account of secularization attempts to conduct itself from an alternative set of premises, although he has been accused of being 'slanted regrettably in favour of Christian theism' (Kerr 2010, p. 321).

If there is such a concept as the 'post-secular', then, it must be recognized that secularization and the secular are in themselves already complex and diverse terms, and have histories that enable us to see them not as fixed shibboleths, but as heuristic and conceptual frameworks that may now be in need of reconstruction. The secular has a history, therefore: one that is complicit with modernity, which set in train a range of economic, political and cultural 'projects' to do with 'constitutionalism, moral autonomy, democracy, human rights, civil equality, industry, consumerism, freedom

of the market . . . that generate new experiences of space and time, of cruelty and wealth, of consumption and knowledge' (Asad 2003, p. 13).

Since many people have assumed that modernization is a universal process, advocates of secularization have assumed that secularization, too, would be a worldwide and globally uniform phenomenon. However, processes of modernization might unfold in different parts of the world in various ways, depending on how they were generated (for example, whether they were contingent upon economic transformation, as in Western Europe, or imposed by colonialism, as in Africa, or introduced by political elites, as in Japan and Turkey) and when they were transmitted (for example, if a society encountered capitalism in its early stages or in its advanced stages of production). Thus, as Shmuel Eisenstadt argues, it may be more appropriate to talk of 'multiple modernities', all of which interact with religious belief and practice in different ways (2000, p. 593).

One version of secularization theory that attempts to take account of this is the 'co-existence' theory. This acknowledges that some forms of religion are not declining, but growing, even in Western societies; and begins to develop a framework that places greater emphasis on contextual circumstances, and the fortunes of religion as an independent variable, rather than an epiphenomenon of modernization. In his critique of 'subtraction' theories of secularization, Charles Taylor argues that they mistakenly assume that religion can simply vanish from the social or political domain without corresponding impact on any other variable. One might say that it has already bought into secularization or the modernist separation of secular and religious by regarding religion as dispensable and epiphenomenal in that way. Instead, as Linda Woodhead argues (Woodhead 2012), analyses of its changing futures must take account of the fact that religion is integrally tied up with changes in political economy, welfare, globalization, gender roles, cultural change and the law, all of which shape its changing contours in relation to wider society. Thus, changing contexts and circumstances engender new trajectories for religious belief and practice in ways that result in more nuanced relationships between religion and wider society:

Theories of secularization indicate how religion, and specifically Christianity, relinquishes (and/or is deprived of) its hold on the central structures of power . . . the question then becomes whether this process is contingent, i.e. dependent on specific circumstances, notably those that

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have been obtained in Europe, or is a necessary and an inevitable part of social development. (Woodhead 2012, p. 295)

One corollary of this might be a greater flexibility and diversity in the futures of religion, such that while in some contexts religion is in decline there are other contexts in which it is growing. Hence, secularization is not a universal or inevitable global process but contingent upon particular circumstances. Talal Asad is concerned to expose the artifice of secularism via a kind of 'genealogy' (2003, p. 192) which sees it as founded on a system of binary thinking between 'belief and knowledge, reason and imagination, history and fiction, symbol and allegory, natural and supernatural, sacred and profane – binaries that pervade modern secular discourse, especially in its polemical mode' (p. 23). In particular, the rise of global Islam as a political force exposes the limitations of conventional narratives about the fate of religion as equated with the eclipse of Christendom. Noting that 'the contemporary salience of religious movements around the globe' attracts both positive and negative responses, Asad calls for a re-evaluation of the very premises of secularism.

Asad's argument is that 'secularism' constructs 'religion' as its negated Other in order to establish its own coherence. The 'secular' brands religion as a matter of belief relating to an ontological category of the 'supernatural', whereas secularism by contrast deals with the natural and the social, in which the citizen is supreme public reality, and anything to do with transcendence or the non-material is consigned to the private and the interior. Yet this categorization is historically and culturally contingent, and emerged out of particular practices of reading the scriptures, discourses of religious experiences and of course ways of configuring the relationship between Church and State. In particular, the use of torture by the State was both a way of taxonomizing and controlling the human body, but also represented a displacement of the supernatural and divinely constituted authority by an autonomous State.

Ivan Strenski's thesis is, similarly, that attempts to segregate the spheres of two discrete phenomena known as 'politics' and 'religion' are futile, and rest on historically and culturally contingent grounds (2010). This is particularly apparent, he argues, when we try to understand what is happening, globally, in places such as Iran, Pakistan and parts of Africa, where religiously motivated political activity is burgeoning. To observers in the West, it contradicts a generation of sociological thinking whereby religion, relegated to

the private sphere, would inevitably die out; but the persistence and revival of religion in the public square also requires us to rethink our conceptual frameworks; and Strenski's contention is that by classifying 'religion' and 'politics' as separate and distinct, we lose valuable explanatory power. He therefore aims to challenge narrow definitions of 'religion', 'politics' and 'power', avoiding arguments that either claim them to be empty, meaningless categories or deterministic paradigms in which one sphere of life is seen as 'using' or 'corrupting' another – as he says, rather like a hammer to a nail. In relation to contemporary political phenomena, especially in the Middle East, he argues, only a subtle and complex synthesis of theological world-view and the exercise of political power will render a sufficiently thick description of religiously motivated actors in changing contexts.

Strenski argues that historically, people were ruled by a combination of religious and 'secular' powers, in which the theologically informed *auctoritas* of Church acted in a 'unified field' with the exercise of temporal *potestas*. When the two are decoupled, he argues, then *potestas* takes over, relegating religion to a private, subjective sphere. The value of continuing with the demarcation between politics and religion is, for Strenski, merely heuristic. Reductionist accounts which insist that a religious tradition such as Islam has 'nothing' to do with Middle Eastern politics are as inadequate as those which denounce it as inherently and irreducibly violent. Rather, we need to consider how religious factors help to 'make sense' of people's actions – especially if they themselves offer religious explanations. Does religion offer causal links that cannot be observed in any other way? Does it offer a better explanation than any other paradigm?

Thus, who speaks, to whom, and by what means, on behalf of religious bodies or traditions, is far from clear. This raises the question of how far public authorities, indeed the population at large, should be expected to be familiar with the concepts, knowledge and vocabulary by which to talk about religion or to empathize with those of faith. While some sections of that majority may hold a strongly secularist position, arguing that religion should claim no legitimate place in public discourse, others may argue that pragmatically speaking it is necessary to reach a degree of accommodation with faith-based perspectives. At the heart of this, therefore – and why Habermas is so pivotal – lies contested and often fraught debates about the proper role of religious faith in relation to the public sphere. This extends from the proper relationship between the exercise of citizenship and personal conviction in determining matters of conscience and civil conduct;

to the constitutional position of religious representatives; through to the basis on which faith-based organizations might participate in the delivery of welfare and social care.

Theorizing the 'Post-Secular': Jürgen Habermas

Talk of the post-secular owes its greatest boost to the intervention of the social theorist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas. His long career is characterized by a concern for the nature of the public sphere under modernity. In earlier years, his Marxist convictions steered him towards a broad sympathy with a classic Rawlsian position which required the creation of a non-confessional public space in order to ensure the most equitable conditions for the articulation of a rich and non-partisan discourse of citizenship and communicative democracy. From the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, Habermas's perspective begins to change, and he has called for a re-evaluation of the secular nature of the public square and the introduction of religious sources of reasoning (albeit mediated or moderated via processes of 'translation' into common terms) as an enrichment of our social and political imaginary. It is, for him, a means of incorporating 'what's missing' – namely religious values – into a renewed vocabulary of civic virtue.

In recent writing, Habermas has conceded that religious reasoning can and must be included in the 'flows of public communication', since they constitute powerful and irreducible sources of 'the creation of meaning and identity' (2008c, p. 131). For Habermas, the global resurgence of religion, coupled with significant critiques of the sovereignty of reason, make the case for constructing a 'postmetaphysical' account of communicative reason and of public discourse. Without denying the legacy of the Enlightenment, Habermans warns against the assumption on the part of the liberal state and its citizenry of the inherent irrationality of the religious reasoning (Habermas, 2010). The ready identification of modernization with secularization was, he realizes, too simplistic an account.

At a seminar with theologians at the University of Chicago in 1989, Habermas had already begun to advance an immanentist or non-realist political theology, in which hope in God serves as the grounding for pragmatic moral action, providing inspirational visions of human solidarity and 'thick descriptions' of hope and obligation (1992). In conversation

with members of the Jesuit School of Philosophy in Munich in 2007, Habermas alluded to a kind of melancholy in late modernity, a sense of lack within secular communicative reason – as he says, 'an awareness of what is missing' (2010), namely any sort of metaphysical or transcendental grounding of its commitment to things such as justice, progress and human dignity.[4]

What does the post-secular mean for Habermas? It means a time when religious beliefs and institutions return from their somewhat marginal position in Western modern societies and undergo a process of renewed public visibility. Post-secular may denote, then, 'at most a revision of a previously over-confident secularist outlook, rather than a "return" of religion to a stage on which it had once been absent' (Harrington 2007, p. 547). It may then be a reinterpretation of the logic of modernity, signifying the persistence of religion throughout what was formerly conceived to be a period of visible and inexorable decline. Yet how far might such a perspective surrender any critical purchase to be gained in understanding how the role of religion as institutional phenomenon and public presence has shifted in importance for everyday life? Or is Habermas wishing to revise his earlier contention that the after-life of religious influence on secular moral reasoning, rather than simply dissolving into the atmosphere of secular society, must always be embodied in the contemporary practices of particular faith traditions?

It is clear that Habermas regards the relationship between religious and secular forms of reasoning as complementary. Despite the seeming imbalance between religious and non-religious citizens in requiring the former to 'translate' their values into universally comprehensible terms, Habermas regards all voices – albeit suitably mediated – as legitimate contributions to pluralist public debate:

> To be sure, the content of religious expressions must be translated into a universally accessible language before it can make it onto official agendas and flow into the deliberations of decision-making bodies. But religious citizens and religious communities retain influence precisely in those places in which the democratic process *originates* in the encounter between religious and non-religious sections of the population. As long

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4 The impact of advanced technologies, especially in the biosciences, represents for Habermas a particularly acute challenge in this respect. See Habermas 2003.

as politically-relevant public opinion is fed by this reservoir of the public use of reason by religious and non-religious citizens, it must belong to the collective understanding of *all* citizens that deliberatively formed democratic legitimation is nourished *also* by religious voices and confrontations stimulated by religion. (Mendieta 2010, pp. 12–13)

Only one month after 9/11, on 14 October 2001, he gave an address at the Paulskirche in Frankfurt, on the topic of 'Faith and Knowledge', on the occasion of his acceptance of the Peace Prize, awarded annually by the German publishing industry in recognition of outstanding contribution to intellectual life. It is significant, then, that he used the opportunity to indicate a new direction in his thought, which had to date shown little interest in the role of religion in public life. It was followed by a much-publicized dialogue in 2004 with Joseph Ratzinger (later to become Pope Benedict XVI), and then by two further more extensive volumes: *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age* (2008) and the proceedings of a colloquium in New York, entitled *The Power of Reason in the Public Sphere* (2010). What prompted Habermas's new departure? What does it signal about the position of religion in social theory at the beginning of the twenty-first century? And how does it shape the debate about the post-secular?

A post-metaphysical consciousness consists of 'an agnostic, but non-reductionist philosophical position' which 'refrains on the one hand from passing judgement on religious truths while insisting (in a non-polemical fashion) on drawing a strict line between faith and knowledge' (Habermas 2006, p. 16; see also Mendieta 2010, p. 5). This indicates, I think, that Habermas's conception of the post-secular does in no way entail the assumption that post-Kantian Enlightenment thinking is about to be overturned. On the other hand, it rejects narrow conceptions of reductionist reason that devalue statements that cannot be represented in naturalistic or empirical terms.

In fact, one reviewer argues for a greater continuity between the 'later' and 'earlier' Habermas (Gordon 2011), observing that Habermas's work has always been propelled by the question of how a truly democratic public space might be constructed and upheld. For Habermas, the non-reductiveness of human communicative reason underpinned and guaranteed the possibility of genuine public consensus and procedural justice. The question is, how human beings are driven towards a commitment to common reason and consensus, and how culture inculturates us into an awareness of values. Unlike the Rawlsian liberal–contractual model, in which we must extract

ourselves from a particular cultural or ethical system or world-view in order to function as disinterested citizens, Habermas follows the Frankfurt School in seeing human beings as always already imbued with inherited values that may transcend, or be irreducible to, the protocols of communicative reason. While the critical scrutiny of reason requires a degree of reflexivity towards supernatural sources of morality, which relativizes such claims and reveals them as human constructs, the realization that ultimate moral commitments are prerequisites for civilization and the common good remains.

Habermas has thus always been ready to acknowledge that ostensibly secular democracies rely on world-views not reducible to secular reason; that concepts of justice and human rights may have various roots; and that religious or theological principles may continue to nurture and inform public debate. The question would then be, however, as to how far this is to be considered legitimate, and here, Habermas notes that religion may be an under-valued well-spring of progressive, democratic values, and there may be points at which the irreducibility and transcendence of religious principles can point to a depth of moral reasoning unavailable to secular understandings: 'Among the modern societies, only those that are able to introduce into the secular domain the essential contents of their religious traditions which point beyond the merely human realm will also be able to rescue the substance of the human' (2010, p. 5). However, there are still certain conditions under which such religious values can enter public discourse; and Habermas speaks of a process of 'translation' by which explicitly theological precepts might feed into common consciousness.

> Religious citizens who regard themselves as loyal members of a constitutional democracy must accept the translation proviso as the price to be paid for the neutrality of state authority toward competing worldviews. For secular citizens, the same ethics of citizenship entails a complementary burden. By the duty of reciprocal accountability toward all citizens, including religious ones, they are obliged not to publicly dismiss religious contributions to political opinion and [moral] formation . . . as mere noise, or even nonsense, from the start. Secular and religious citizens must meet in their public use of reason at eye level. (2011, p. 26)

Of course, this is still vulnerable to some of the criticisms of a classical Rawlsian position, in that religious citizens still must 'bracket out' their deepest convictions; here, the compromise is that they must 'translate'

religious reasons into a common language, which is governed by criteria of comprehensibility and credibility that are not of their making. Similarly, one reason for Habermas's acknowledgement of the enduring legitimacy of religious moral reasoning is that it may be capable of engaging with dimensions of human experience not immediately accessible to a discourse of pure reason; yet it is still the conventions of the latter by which such public contributions are to be judged.

The boundary established by the Enlightenment, between the public sphere of economic and political processes, and the private realm of faith, is thus dissolving under the paradoxical currents of religious resurgence and enduring secularism. Similarly, there is a crisis of secular modernity which appears to have lost 'its grip on the images, preserved by religion, of the moral whole – of the Kingdom of God on earth – as collectively binding ideals' (Habermas 2010, p. 19). Some people would regard the ideal of the Kingdom of God on earth as a secularized version of a complex theological teaching anyway, but Habermas's point is that mere pragmatism is not enough to sustain a global vision of human dignity and to move secular, materialist citizens to an awareness of what is missing: 'the violations of solidarity throughout the world . . . of what cries out to heaven' (p. 19).

> If we want to avoid a clash of civilizations, we must keep in mind that the dialectic of our own occidental process of secularization has not yet come to a close. A proper understanding of the eruption of religious violence upon the world, symbolized by the attacks on New York the previous month, would require a deal of humility and self-criticism on the part of the West to avoid any simplistic bifurcation of the world into peaceable, secular West and barbaric, religious others, not least because, due to global migration, Europe is no longer culturally (or religiously) homogenous. Whilst at no point does Habermas gesture in the direction of religious revival, he shows himself mindful of the impact of religious pluralism, not to mention the argument – generally advanced by conservative politicians and theologians, including Pope Benedict – that the very idea of Europe itself is premised on its being a Christian civilization (Gordon 2011, p. 4).

As Peter Gordon points out, however, this is not the same as conceding that widespread religious revival is guaranteed or that the precepts of secularism will be reversed: this is a misunderstanding of what Habermas

meant when he alluded to the 'missing' element of modernity, which was not religion per se but the ultimate infallibility of human reason itself.

Habermas inherits the distrust of the Frankfurt School towards a particular 'dialectic of Enlightenment' which instrumentalizes reason to ideological ends. Thus, he maintains an agnostic attitude towards the benefits of religion, observing that for the purposes of a truly inclusive public square, and for the pursuit of a genuinely self-critical communicative reason, secularism must avoid triumphalism and keep open the possibility that religion can nurture human solidarity. Ultimately, the welfare of a functioning democratic body politic has no need of 'the intolerance of a religiosity that is . . . certain that it retains exclusive ownership rights on human morality', but equally nor does it have much time for 'the intolerance of a secularism that is dogmatically certain of its independence from religion' (Gordon 2011, p. 8). What can be noted, however, is that the premises of communicative reason on which much of Habermas's philosophy rests are deeply humanist and humanitarian in their faith in the deep structures of human discourse to effect mutuality and consensus.

Habermas's consideration of the role of religion continued to be prompted by world events unfolding around him. The crisis of the global economy during 2008–9 has exacerbated material and structural inequalities and puts ameliorative efforts beyond the reach of the social democratic nation-state. Such globalizing trends 'degrade the capacity for democratic self-steering' (2001, p. 6) and renders all the more urgent the rejuvenation of a democratic political economy and a vigorous culture of public deliberation. Essentially, the logic of the market has 'hollowed out' any normative consideration of social justice.

> To me, global modernity looks like an open arena in which participants, from the viewpoints of different paths of cultural development, struggle over the normative structuring of social infrastructures that are more or less shared. It is an open question whether we will succeed in overcoming the atavistic condition of the social-Darwinist 'catch as catch can,' still dominant today in international relations, to the point at which capitalism, globally unleashed and run wild, can be tamed and channeled [sic] in socially acceptable ways. (Mendieta 2010, p. 8)

Habermas is thus further motivated to consider where potential sources of a renewal of civic virtue might be found. We might ask why he looks

to metaphysical or moral ideals, when a simple, pragmatic solution might have rested in the recovery of techniques for the cultivation of communicative reason, via the re-formulation of democratic political values derived, perhaps, from ancient (possibly Aristotelian) or modern (such as humanist or Enlightenment) philosophies. The answer seems to rest, once again, in the capacity of religious and metaphysical accounts of the dignity of the human person to serve as foundational reference-points.

Habermas has thus suggested that religion might be potentially emancipatory and progressive, rather than inherently antipathetic to human rights and a pluralist public discourse. This new regard for religion has led him to coin the term 'post-secular'. However, we should always note that he is not interested in the phenomenon in terms of what we might call its 'internal' dynamics – in terms of what is happening to religious belief, affiliation and practice. Nor is he interested in the changing discourse or adaptive strategies that people of faith might be adopting in order to respond to the new visibility of 'faith' in the public domain. Rather, as Michelle Dillon points out, it is entirely of a piece with his enduring concern for the fate of the Enlightenment project. The 'post-secular' and the re-admission of overtly religiously derived forms of moral reasoning ensures the rejuvenation of a fading Enlightenment project: one whose susceptibility to instrumentalized and absolutist forms of technical–instrumental reason was foreseen by his mentors within the Frankfurt School. 'The post-secular denotes that the secular, like the Enlightenment, fell short of its originally intended destination. It is not that secularization has not occurred; it is just that there are some complications that the persistence of religion has thrown on its tracks' (Dillon 2012).

Habermas points to the complex and contradictory nature of post-secular societies. Referring to Europe, he insists that secularization and de-institutionalization of religion continue. What has changed, he says, is 'the continued existence of religious communities in an increasingly secularized environment' (Mendieta 2010, p. 10). This is due to the novelty of religious pluralism occasioned by immigration, to the indirect impact of global fundamentalisms and to the new visibility of faith-based organizations in the wake of the restructuring of traditional social democratic state welfare systems (which may in their way represent a return to pre-twentieth-century and pre-modern societies in which the Church was a significant source of charitable and philanthropic activity). So the post-secular, for Habermas, does represent a new departure, in so far as 'religion maintains a public

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influence and relevance, while the secularistic certainty that religion will disappear worldwide in the course of modernization is losing ground' (2008b). I would like to pick up some of these threads in my analysis later: it reflects (a) an apprehension that the forecasts of the secularization thesis may be misplaced, (b) an acknowledgement that the equation of modernization and secularization – and the genealogy of the secular – may therefore also require revision, but (c) while the inevitability and universality of the secular may be in doubt, elements of secularism and the logic of secularization still condition the conduct of public discourse.

Mapping the Post-Secular

While the terminology of the post-secular came to public prominence in the early years of the twenty-first century, James Beckford has argued for a much longer pedigree, beginning with an article published in 1966 by the Roman Catholic sociologist of religion Andrew Greeley (Beckford 2012, p. 2). Nevertheless, it is a term that has assumed prominence since the late 1990s; but it is Beckford's contention that there has been such a proliferation of usage since then that the very currency of the term has become irredeemably devalued. He offers a typology of no less than six major interpretations of the concept. They embrace the contention that the persistence of religious belief and practice belies the existence of anything called 'secularization'; more modestly, a revisionist stance vis-à-vis secularization which notes both the reality of secularism and its limitations as any kind of meta-narrative; the re-enchantment of the secular, especially evident in the return of the sacred in popular culture; the deprivatization of religion and its resurgence as a public and political force; the reassertion of neo-orthodox world-views; and an eschewal of the very categories of 'secular' and 'sacred' (pp. 3–12). Some represent the view that secularism and secularization are now redundant; some that the post-secular represents a more modest and localized version of secularization; others that the post-secular is a reversal of secular trajectories (p. 12).

Essentially, Beckford is setting these out as ideal types in a heuristic exercise, but I am not convinced that his survey fully highlights what is emerging as the true essence of the post-secular: its ambivalent, paradoxical quality. Perhaps his second type is closest to my own perception: of the post-secular as 'building on' the secular, in which elements of secular modernity

endure, and continue to suffuse public life, which nevertheless displays signs of resurgent and new expressions of religious belief and practice. But whereas Beckford talks about 'building on' the analysis of secularization, or 'assimilating' the 'errors of secularization theories' into the academy, or 'integrating' the post-secular into feminist theory, I would wish to stay with the dissonance between these seemingly co-existent currents of dis-enchantment and re-enchantment. So it is my intention to work within a hypothesis of the post-secular as an awkward and contradictory space, where – particularly in relation to religion and public life – significant aspects of the new context are not easily or comfortably reconcilable.

For many, the language of the *post*-secular may evoke resonances with other concepts: postmodern, post-colonial, post-structuralist or post-human. Each of these terms has their own specialist discourse and complex genealogy, but one common feature appears to be the way in which the prefix 'post' is deployed in each. Does it denote a successor phase, temporally or chronologically speaking, in which one epoch or paradigm follows another? Or is the term being deployed to question the very stability and coherence of its associated concept? For example, postmodern may indicate merely the era after modernity or an architectural or aesthetic style after modernism – as in '"That was then, this is now"' (Hayles 1999, p. 6). Alternatively, it may signal the very reappraisal of the assumptions underlying the modern. For Bruno Latour, modernity rests on processes of categorization by which elements such as nature and culture, human and non-human, immanence and transcendence, are judged as ontologically distinctive. To acknowledge that 'we have never been modern' (1993) is to acknowledge that the axioms of modernity are not givens but contingent upon particular epistemological conventions.

Similarly, in my work on the 'Post/Human' I adopted the slash or oblique precisely to arrest attention, to argue that it 'should be read as an interrog-ative marker, a critical cue, for questions concerning the authors, objects and political implications of appeals to "humanism" and "human nature"' and to expose the 'categorical instability' of such terms (Graham 2002, pp. 36–7; Badmington 2004). The question is actually how the boundaries between humans, machines and nature have been established and policed. With the post-secular, therefore, it is open to question whether secularization has experienced a reversal, or religion a revival. This is because the very categories of 'religious' and 'secular' are themselves constructed, with

the latter occupying a particular public space independent of ecclesiastical control, and through which particular fields of law, politics, welfare and human rights are established.

What's Missing? Gender and the Post-Secular[5]

One way of conceiving of the post-secular is as a kind of 'third space' between secular reason and religious revival. It certainly causes us to re-evaluate the uncritical hegemony of secular reason not least in the way it served to occlude the experiences, contexts and identities of those excluded from the Enlightenment project. Jürgen Habermas has suggested that there is something 'missing' to secular reason in the shape of transcendental and metaphysical values; but it seems to me that we are in danger of neglecting the central role of gender – so integral to the conceptual and political formation of modernity – in our rethinking of the symbolic of the post-secular. Therefore, religion is not the only factor that's 'gone missing' in the post-secular reconfiguration of religion, civic identity and the body politic, since a major oversight in much theorization about the post-secular has been its highly *gendered* character.

As feminist theorists have long been reminding us, many of the same processes that gave birth to modernity's elevation of public reason, impartial and non-contingent subjectivity and models of the free, self-actualizing autonomous agent facilitated by the formation of liberal democracy, were not actually neutral or universal, but highly gendered. They rested on binary representations of women and men's differential nature; and they conceived of differential and gendered division of labour which often precluded women's claiming full humanity, let alone full and active citizenship. So gender, and women, are also in danger of disappearing from this new post-secular chapter in the debate about religion, politics and identity.

The silence of Western feminist theory on religion is surprising, but not if one considers the affinities, historically, between feminism and the

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5 Parts of this section first appeared as 'What's Missing? Gender, Reason and the Post-Secular', *Political Theology* 13.2 (2012), pp. 233–45.

Enlightenment and its view of religion as the antithesis of progress and human self-determination. Yet this is an ambivalent heritage, as many contemporary feminists, quick to see how postmodernism opened up critical spaces for the interrogation of the very constitution of modernity along gendered lines, have noted. While post-Enlightenment first- and second-wave feminism certainly benefited from a modernist appeal to autonomy, freedom from external constraint and self-determination, postmodern feminists have highlighted the extent to which concepts of subjectivity, Reason and personhood were androcentric. However, what feminists have been slower to realize is the extent to which Enlightenment feminism also unconsciously bought into a secularist agenda, with the consequent neglect on the part of most Western feminist scholarship of religion and theology.

The Gendered Nature of Modernity

As Jane Flax has observed, 'Few writers appear to notice that the dominant stories about modernity and modernization have necessary but repressed or split-off gendered components.' The coherence and normativity of modernity rests on 'what is not explicitly articulated or included . . . upon the unacknowledged and unexcavated elements remaining disturbed' (1993, p. 75). (Or as I might venture, on 'what is missing' from modernity's account of itself: in this context, its roots in a particular context of gender relations and representations.)

Flax and other feminist philosophers such as Genevieve Lloyd have identified the characterization of Enlightenment writers such as Kant, Hegel and Rousseau as a fundamentally gendered narrative about modernity, in which women and men represent (stand for) particular relationships to reason, self-actualization and freedom. Echoing binary and gendered constructions of nature and culture, body and spirit, affect and reason that can be traced back to Pythagoras: reason is coupled with transcendence and control over the things of nature, and thus construed as the antithesis of the feminine (Lloyd 1984). The distinction between form and matter in Platonic and Aristotelian thought was similarly gendered and hierarchical, and shaped Western Christian thought to the Scientific Revolution.

Nature has endowed the sexes with differential properties, including the endowments of Reason that guarantee the advancement of humanity to Enlightenment.

Morality and virtue pertains not to the individual but to the public corporate sphere and universalized rational principles. In gendered terms, this externalization of the self in order to discover self takes place in the world beyond domestic, familial, affective relationships. The vision of the rational, self-actualizing subject did not extend to women, who were still regarded as governed by nature. If the critical power of reason dethroned privilege, superstition and tradition and paved the way to a new social order governed by principles of freedom, human perfectibility and self-improvement, then anything regarded as its antithesis – emotion, superstition and religion – was labelled as suspect, by virtue of its appeal to unexamined authority and supernatural truth.

Women may be the guardians of the world of affect and sensuality – along with that of reproduction – but the advancement of reason is a male task. If men are to attain to the highest exercise of Reason, they must abandon the world of nature, embodiment and emotion, which are the preserves of women as befits their roles as carers and nurturers. By the early modern period, a similarly gendered demarcation of public and private is beginning to emerge, in which the responsibilities of women and men are separate, but complementary. For women to participate in the public realm would disrupt this arrangement, since private concerns must not threaten public virtue. Women must live vicariously through the men on whom they are dependent. Thus the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment wove an implicitly gendered narrative into their analysis of the relationship between the cultivation of Reason and the advancement of public virtue and good citizenship. This presupposes a gendered subjectivity, in which the human project is all about breaking with the infantile ties with the maternal in order to achieve an autonomous, reasoning and independent self.

As Flax remarks of Kant,

Modernization . . . depends upon and reinforces a series of splits and renunciations. The world is split into two private spheres: the world of work and the family and two public spheres: the world of scholarship/

knowledge and the state . . . The family guards children until they are able to develop the capacities of reason and autonomy. It is primarily a world of duty and obedience marked by the absence of reason. (1993, pp. 80–1)

Does this mean that the Enlightenment was irredeemably rooted in a gendered and patriarchal narrative? One answer would be that on the contrary, feminism emerged as a movement of modernity and, despite these critiques, it shares the core principles of Enlightenment. Certainly, an early feminist such as Mary Wollstonecraft called for such principles to be equally open to the aspirations of women, protesting against the triviality of women's ambitions and the harmful effects of their being made to bear the burdens of virtue on behalf of men. This was the true crime against nature. The Introduction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* establishes her claim to 'consider women in the grand light of human creatures who, in common with men are placed on this earth to unfold their faculties' (Wollstonecraft 1796, p. 5).

Wollstonecraft was using the logic of Enlightenment thinking to expose its own contradictions. She argued that the confinement of virtue into the private and domestic sphere impoverished the ambitions of the public domain, which could benefit from it. If women were permitted to be active citizens, they could humanize society more effectively than simply being restricted to domestic and intimate affairs. Both the domestic bourgeois sphere and the public world are distorted and one-dimensional.

Other feminist theorists, of course, took a different view, challenging the assumptions underlying Enlightenment humanism, and in particular its privileging of the virtues of individual autonomy, of transcendent and sovereign reason and the goals of self-actualization, not to mention its neglect of difference and context. Feminism has always been divided, therefore, towards the achievements of modernity and especially the legacy of the binary configurations of public and private, reason and affect, universalism and contingency. The Enlightenment, the scientific and democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century may have liberated humanity and emancipated individuals in the name of reason and self-determination, but its legacy in terms of affording women the status of free and active citizens has been ambivalent.

Feminist Critiques of Religion: Modern and Postmodern

In its rejection of authority that rested on the power of things other than reason and consent, Reason was both source of critique and arbiter of freedom. It dethroned privilege, superstition and tradition and paved the way to a new social order governed by principles of freedom, human perfectibility and self-improvement. In commending a neutral, universal uncontingent public realm, the Enlightenment was politically if not theologically 'secular'. Similarly, in their protest against the confinement to the private, domestic world of affect and piety, modern second-wave feminists saw themselves as continuing and expanding the Enlightenment commitment to emancipation and self-improvement. Hence much of Western second-wave feminism was secular, or anti-religious, seeing religion (at least in its orthodox, institutional forms) as a primary source of control of women, of the defence of their roles as 'natural' and God-given and thus as a major protagonist in perpetuating gendered division of labour and women's subordinate status to men.

> As the secular and rebellious daughters of the Enlightenment, feminists were raised on rational argumentation and detached irony. The feminist belief system is accordingly civic, not theistic, and is viscerally opposed to authoritarianism and orthodoxy. (Braidotti 2008, p. 3)

But there were always exceptions to that, and from the 1960s feminist studies of religion attempted to reintegrate the 'missing' elements of religion, theology and spirituality into feminist theory. It worked at developing 'post-patriarchal (re)interpretations of religious texts, traditions, practices, representations and histories' (Reilly 2011, p. 13). Similarly, by the end of the twentieth century, strands of postmodern feminist theory emerged – including of course, feminist Continental philosophy – that did anticipate the turn to the 'post-secular'. I am thinking of the neo-Lacanian psychoanalysis of Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, not to mention the neo-vitalist and decidedly Catholic sensibilities of Donna Haraway's post-humanist feminism. These contradicted the conventional stance of Western feminism, which claims exclusive descent from European Enlightenment and its critique of religious autocracy and superstition. They may not be conventionally theistic, but they did re-introduce concepts of the divine, transcendence and

spirituality back into mainstream feminist theory (Joy O'Grady and Poxon 2003; Jantzen 1998).

Nevertheless, most of the traffic between feminist theory and feminist studies of religion has been one-way. Sometimes, exceptions are made when it comes to considering women in the two-thirds world, or in acknowledging the inescapable themes of spirituality and faith in much post-colonial feminist and womanist thought. However, it leaves the default position of most Western feminism unchallenged, rendering religion and religiousness as the province of those 'marked by "religiousness as difference" or *vis à vis* contexts that have yet to "modernize"' (Reilly 2011, p. 7). Such a perspective inhibits new explorations of how globalization affects feminism as a political project and as a movement which proclaims and upholds human dignity and freedom, by insisting that religion is always and everywhere an enemy of autonomy, authentic identity and progress. It grants little credibility or political credit to faith-based movements, both in the West and in the global South, that struggle against autocratic power in the name of religion.

Yet just as Daniel Whistler and Anthony Paul Smith warn against the post-secular becoming a triumphalist return of reactionary theology (Smith and Whistle 2010), so too we must be aware of the risks of the post-secular simply to become squeezed between the irresistible force of secularism and the immovable object of religion, especially religious fundamentalism. And one of the tests of that, I would argue, is the way that both can be seen to inscribe themselves on the bodies and lives of women. Neither position provides sympathetic spaces for feminism, since one promotes reason, autonomy, individualism at the expense of lived experiences of contingency, embodiment and spirituality, while the other seeks to limit women's freedom in the name of obedience to traditional or 'natural' ways of life.

Part of the public anxiety over Islam, for example, has been its ability to disrupt assumptions about a secular public sphere. The veiled Muslim woman who brings her religious faith into her public, civil identity is targeted and demonized as the symbol of irrational fundamentalism. Judith Butler has criticized occasions when progressive causes have invoked secularist arguments for religious tolerance in ways that are dismissive, even defamatory, of religious minorities and serves as a sanction for state violence (2008). The spirit of human autonomy at the heart of Enlightenment, paradoxically, actually colludes with racist and Islamophobic politics to deny Muslim women the right of self-determination: of the

freedom *to wear or not to wear* traditional Islamic dress as a gesture of self-determination.

> [T]he post-secular turn challenges European feminism because it makes manifest the notion that agency, or political subjectivity, can be conveyed through and supported by religious piety, and may even involve significant amounts of spirituality. (Braidotti 2008, p. 1)

Tina Beattie has attempted to make a specifically feminist theological response to the 'new atheism', observing that very often the 'God' against whom Dawkins and co. protest has already been deconstructed by feminist, queer and other liberationist critiques. She describes the debate as 'a small clique of white English-speaking men staging a mock battle about rationality and God' (2007, p. 10) and wonders whether the enemies and defenders of 'good old God' are simply playing the same game, as mirror-images of one another, trying to prove their sexual potency.

On the other side too, it is the bodies of women that are the sites of the resurgence of anti-modern religion. Issues of sexuality and abortion are frequently the signature campaigns for the religious right, as well as other issues that impinge on reproduction such as stem-cell research (Gupta 2011). For many women around the world, then, the post-secular does seem to leave them between 'a rock and a hard place': between the global resurgence of religion and multi-cultural appeals to difference and tolerance, and the imperative to protect the well-being and self-determination of women and girls in the face of authoritarian theologies.

A proper understanding of religion in the lives of women has been inhibited by the secular mind-set of modern feminism. But the post-secular, with its narrative of contradictory co-existence of faith and reason, of religion as continuing to exercise a strong influence on people's lived experience, may bring greater freedom of analysis. More nuanced understanding of the complexities of what happens when faith enters the public space may actually rehabilitate women of faith into the body politic as active citizens capable of directing spiritually and theologically grounded activism toward inclusive, constructive and emancipatory causes. However, since the post-secular continues to call for critical, reflexive and nuanced accounts of the actual relationships between faith, reason, gender

and power, it must continue to expose ways in which religion continues to be an inhibiting force for women, as well as a powerful source of agency.

> Without the prop of secularization as inevitable, and challenged by postmodern critiques of the oppressive discursive logic of the secular–religious binary, there is an onus on defenders of secularism to own its status as a purely normative political principle. This means clearly defining the purpose of secularism and justifying its operation in specified contexts. It also entails moving away from a defence of secularism as a foundational principle [an absolute] and refocusing attention instead on its place in an emancipatory, inclusive account of the democratic polity. From this perspective, the principle of secularism is invoked to underpin the conditions of human freedom, including, among other things, respect for religious pluralism. (Reilly 2011, p. 25)

It has been my contention that the post-secular invites us to think about 'what's missing' about secular reason; but it is also an opportunity to acknowledge and correct the (often hidden) gendered nature of our thinking about faith and reason, private and public, sacred and secular, tyranny and freedom. Just as feminist interventions into the discourse of the Western Enlightenment were so much a part of critical debate about the nature and trajectory of modernity, so now 'post-secularism offers the opportunity more openly to discuss and expose the dualisms . . . that have so hobbled women's lives, from a sociological, spatial and spiritual perspective' (Greed 2011, p. 108). In respect of gender, the post-secular thus invites us to consider empirical questions about the state of religion in the world (and especially its mobilization in the public realm) and conceptual questions about the extent to which scholars have had to correct their neglect of religion in their theorizing. Analysis of post-secular society must make space for theorizing in a sophisticated or meaningful way about the role of religion in women's lives, and de- and re-contextualizations of the relationship between religion, culture and gender. It will be open to the religious *and* secular roots (if the two can be properly kept separate) of authoritarian abuses of power, as well as of global emancipatory movements and the exercise of women's agency. It is about the ways both 'faith'

and 'reason' might inform discourses around the construction of gender identity, relations and representations (Graham 1995).

Conclusion

The secularization thesis presupposed a zero-sum game between the 'religious' and the 'secular', as if they were incapable of co-existing, or even that elements of one might not suffuse the other. As this paradigm has come under increasing pressure, the search for an alternative conceptual framework has generated terms such as 'desecularization', 're-enchantment' or the 'deprivatization' of religion. However, these fail to capture the complexity of social and cultural developments in which significant marks of religion *and* irreligion are evident, and actively shape our everyday life in varied and sometimes unexpected ways.

Religion may be returning to public prominence, although some of that may reflect its greater degree of instrumentalization by a bureaucratic, secular state. Yet there is evidence to suggest that some forms of religious expression never actually went away, especially when it comes to its more vernacular, heterodox and non-affiliated manifestations. This has some significance for a study of religion in public, however. Even if there are signs of the persistence of religion, such evidence suggests that, if they endure, religious beliefs, practices and identities are relatively privatized and de-institutionalized. This, crucially, still represents an attenuation of the public, structural profile of religion in a post-secular society. On the other hand, evidence for other patterns of institutional participation – trade unions, political parties, voluntary associations – would suggest that other parts of civil society are just as fragmented and fluid as religion.

Yet this is a situation that is '*post*-secular' since the relative eclipse of religion under modernity is undeniable. As Charles Taylor argues, Westerners cannot *not* live, on a quotidian basis, often at a quite unconscious level, within the 'immanent frame' of secularity. Similarly, at a more theoretical, intellectual level, the dominance of secularization as the major conceptual framework for the study of religion under the conditions of Western modernity means that it cannot simply be disinvented. Any alternative approach still has to contend with the after-life of secularization, even as it searches for a new paradigm: 'Secularization is now so established that it has shaped the

entire field: how agendas are set, research questions asked, survey questions framed, data collected and analyzed' (Woodhead 2012, p. 3).

The difference is that now 'the secularization thesis' can be seen as one perspective, one paradigm, among many. No longer a neutral lens but one way of ordering some of the evidence; as Woodhead observes, 'we are dealing with something more fundamental than a dispute over evidence: fundamental commitments are at stake as well' (2012, p. 3). Sociologists of religion are well known for keeping their distance from 'normative' judgements in relation to the truth-claims of the systems they study; but here, apparently, it seems that advocates and opponents of secularization hold their relative positions with something approaching religious conviction: 'So theories of secularization, bound up with secular commitments, may be just as value-laden and passionately held as theories of de-secularization' (p. 4).

In truth, the categories of 'secular' and 'religious' co-exist in complex inter-relationship: neither is unitary or monolithic; both have histories, which are mutually intertwined; both have genealogies that need to be traced and analysed; both serve political, religious and heuristic ends. Nor are the reasons for rival theories that one focuses on European exceptionalism, while the other draws upon global evidence. It is global and local, theoretical and conceptual (Martin and Catto 2012, pp. 376–7).

Certainly, a world-view that is naturalistic and rational has replaced a more supernatural one, and modernity is characterized by empiricism, autonomy, liberalism and democracy. However, this is not a simplistic victory of enlightenment over ignorance. Rather, religious identities can be mobilized in some times and places; religion may work to give meaning and purpose; it can support innovative social and cultural movements, or it can oppose them. But this begins to sketch a reality in which flexibility of interpretation, attention to context and above all to the agency of critical actors are required, in order to engender an analysis free of the binary and zero-sum expectations of secular/religious. 'Once you abandon the idea that religion stands on a preordained downward slope, a space opens up for alternative modes of modernity, some religious and some not' (Martin and Catto 2012, p. 377).

Linda Woodhead's contention is that at the height of the secularization thesis, an assumption that religion was irrevocably on the decline created a vacuum for many new kinds of religious expression to proliferate, as it were, 'under the radar' of both governmental and theoretical attention: a diversification of religion in more non-Christian, de-institutionalized,

feminized, neo-liberalized directions. When circumstances conspired to render these forms more visible, statutory authorities had no clear strategies for managing them; and so long as the secularization thesis occupied the theoretical high ground, neither did the academy. This sense that old paradigms are no longer fit for purpose, and that new ways of thinking are necessary, certainly resonates with many of the issues that inform this book and which, in part, inform its title of *A Rock and a Hard Place*. Religion is no longer privatized, but demands attention in the public square. The conventional settlements of establishing boundaries between faith and reason, sacred and secular, religion and politics, have not moved with the times. Yet we struggle, still, to find new, equitable and imaginative ways of moving forward.

Looking at the UK context, it is clear that the current situation is characterized above all by complexity and ambivalence. I am clear we are not talking about religious revival, and yet equally I am not convinced that the resurgence of religious discourse and practice is but a blip on an otherwise undisturbed trajectory of modernity. Similarly, while the resurgence of 'religion' and things of the spirit may be interpreted as posing a challenge to modernity's emphasis on rationality, contemporary discourses founded on the continuing triumph of reason and science continue to maintain a vigorous defence of secularism in many quarters. Religion is both more visible and invisible: more prominent and more vicarious; more elusive institutionally (and intellectually, theologically), and yet more cited, more pervasive. So this new dispensation represents significant challenges to existing assumptions about the way religious voices are mediated into public spaces. Faith-based organizations and secular civil government alike must learn to navigate a path between the 'rock' of religious revival and the 'hard place' of secularism, with little in the way of established maps or rules of engagement to guide them.

> The apparent triumph of Enlightenment secularization, manifest in the global spread of political and economic structures that pretended to relegate the sacred to a strictly circumscribed private sphere, seems to have foundered on an unexpected realization of its own parochialism [not least what other scholars term the 'particularism' of European secularism] and a belated acknowledgement of the continuing presence and force of 'public religions'. (de Vries 2006a, p. ix)

What de Vries and Sullivan underplay, however, is the paradoxical and novel nature of the post-secular. It is more than simply religious revival or sociological revisionism, in that it consists of a unique juxtaposition of *both* significant trends of secularism and continued religious decline (especially in Northern Europe), *and* signs of persistent and enduring demonstrations of public, global faith. For the post-secular defies simple talk of a reversion of secularization, since religious observance and participation is still on the decline – at least in terms of its de-institutionalization in much of Europe – and yet vigorously resurgent; maybe not in the same time and the same place all at once, and often, at least as far as the West is concerned, indirectly via the influence of global diasporas and transnational political loyalties.

One of the implications of the phenomenon of the post-secular, therefore, is that the conventional demarcations of 'public' and 'private', 'secular' and 'religious' are breaking down, along with the protocols governing the nature of public discourse and civil activism in liberal democracies. It is not clear, for example, that non-theological reasoning is any the less subjective or partial than any other form of public discourse. Similarly, the expectation that only people of faith might 'bracket out' their deepest moral convictions is no longer viewed as the ideal condition for participation in political life – on the contrary, it is increasingly regarded as a restriction on the exercise of free citizenship. Moreover, it is the case that churches and other faith-based organizations have, historically, been closely involved in affairs of state, governance, welfare and political mobilization without violating restrictions on non-establishment of religion. Finally, the emergence of global religious movements that refuse to recognize the separation of public and private, Church and State, has highlighted the difference faith makes to the lives and motivations of communities and individuals. All these factors provide the context in which public theology carries out its work, and shapes its expectations, procedures and objectives – not to mention its social and cultural reception and effectiveness. However, there are other factors that shape public theology's own discourse and future priorities, and it is to those I shall now turn in Chapter 3.

PART 2

Post-Secular Public Theology

3

Lost in Translation?

The Dilemmas of Public Theology

> The voice of God has been marginalized. Now we are being asked to enter into the arena of action again, but with some uncertainty about whether the voice is being heard in the new context. (Dorey 2008, p. 43)

Introduction

Over the past two chapters, I have been tracing how the emergence of post-secular society signals that the conventional demarcations of 'public' and 'private', 'secular' and 'religious' are dissolving. With that goes a series of shifts in the relationship between the discourse and practices of faith and the contours of liberal citizenship. It is not a foregone conclusion, for example, that non-theological reasoning is any the less subjective or partial than any other form of public discourse. Similarly, the expectation that people of faith should suspend their religious convictions is increasingly regarded as symptomatic of the hollowing out of the moral dimensions to public debate. Furthermore, it is already the case that churches and other faith-based organizations have, historically, been closely involved in affairs of state, governance, welfare and political mobilization without violating restrictions on non-establishment of religion. Finally, the emergence of global religious movements that transcend the separation of public and private, Church and State, has highlighted the continuing contribution of faith to the lives and motivations of communities and individuals.

Where does public theology stand in all this? Public theology has reached a decisive stage in its development – as Storrar puts it, a '*kairos*' moment (Storrar 2007) in terms of its current challenges. It faces the collapse of Christendom in the West, the loosening of ties between Christian observance and wider culture. Yet even if Christianity's 'discursive power' (Brown 2001) is waning, other manifestations of religious influence and activism in public still endure. As Christendom passes away, then, public

theology has to come to terms with the fact that it no longer speaks from a position of privilege, but also that its contribution, while not immediately comprehensible to non-theological publics, is undergoing renewed scrutiny. The 'really existing dynamics of globalization cannot be grasped or guided without studying the relationship of faith to culture, culture to societies, and societies to the formation of a new public . . . We need a theology wide and deep enough to interpret and guide this new public' (Stackhouse 2007a, p. 33). How, then, can public theology undertake this task of speaking into a plural public square? Are the conventions and assumptions on which it has depended appropriate to these changing times?

Public theology sets itself two main objectives: first, of 'defining and defending a public role for theological discourse in a religiously pluralistic society' against the privatization of religious belief; and second, of promoting a 'societal commitment to maintaining the quality of our public life and to pursuing a common good' (Doak 2004, p. 9). So a concern for the very health of the body politic, and the cultivation of civic virtue, has always been at the very heart of public theology. Public theology also 'attempts to illuminate the urgent moral questions of our time through explicit use of the great symbols and doctrines of the Christian faith' (Hollenbach 1976, p. 299) – of course, this is what all theology seeks to do in some respect, but the distinguishing feature of *public* theology is that it draws its agenda from matters of public concern beyond the Church and, similarly, seeks to communicate its deliberations back into wider society. As Kathryn Tanner puts it, public theology rejects 'an idea of the Christian religion that would restrict theological inquiry to purely spiritual questions of individual salvation', aiming instead 'to draw out the implications of Christian symbols and doctrines for issues of general socio-economic and political moment' (1996, p. 79). However, as I shall indicate, this dual emphasis on public debate and Christian tradition, while a hallmark of public theology's *raison d'être*, is in fact the focus of much discussion, and takes us to the heart of issues of theological method, epistemology and mission. This only serves to accentuate the relevance of questions not only of actual procedures of engagement but interrogations of the very theological, philosophical and metaphysical concepts that underpin and inform faith-based engagement in public issues. From where does the (public) theologian speak? How immersed does she need to be in the orthodoxies of the institutional Church? What is entailed in the process of 'translation' from the doctrines and practices of the Church into the vernacular

of social media, journalism, public policy and everyday Christian witness? Amidst the pluralism and scepticism that characterize post-secular Western culture, can there be any guarantee that religious voices will be heeded anyway?

As its proponents and critics would argue, in speaking to and from multiple 'publics' – including academy, Church and society – rests 'theology's strength and no little of its confusion' (Tracy 1984, p. 230). In seeking to engage with a range of contemporary 'publics' that appear, ostensibly, more hostile to 'religion' yet seemingly amenable to matters of 'faith', public theology faces particular challenges. It will be required to be more articulate about itself as well as being more sensitive to the realities of pluralism. How will that be done? Should public theology continue to communicate in the magisterial language of academy and institutional church bodies; or will it be more convincing to take a more confessional, performative turn, in the shape of the counter-cultural witness of insurgent grass-roots communities? In a way, this is another sense in which public theology is caught between a rock and a hard place: of fidelity to its own traditions and world-views alongside an openness to a diverse and critical public domain. Arguably, the characteristically dialogical, transparent nature of public theology is all the more important given the emergence of cultural and religious pluralism in the context of global civil society.

Origins and Characteristics

Public theology is the study of the public relevance of religious thought and practice. It may variously refer to 'a body of literature, a form of discourse, a way of doing theology and ethics, a tradition within the Christian church, and a field of study' (Breitenberg 2010, p. 4). It is both academic discipline and ecclesial discourse, in that it seeks to comment and critically reflect from a theological perspective on aspects of public life such as economics, politics, culture and media. While it is important to appreciate the breadth and diversity of the discipline, it is also striking that there is a strong consensus as to its core features: a concern to relate Christian teaching to corporate, societal, as well as individual conduct; and a commitment to a particular kind of theological method, which is prepared to submit to the procedural norms of public discourse.

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While the term 'public theology' may have very recent currency (Marty 1974), the issues and activities that this particular term is trying to elaborate have, arguably, existed in Christian tradition since its very beginnings: in the documents of the early Church such as Pauline and other epistles, which sought to negotiate the relationship between Church and world and to adjudicate for the faithful between the conflicting loyalties of Church and State. It has always been concerned with the Church's relationship to the world, to political power, to economic problems, to governance, to moral questions, to citizenship and national identity, which figure consistently throughout Christian history.

From the mid-twentieth century, for example, in South Africa under the Nationalist Apartheid regime, many of the churches were active in resistance to the State through popular campaigns and theological debate. Theology was not incidental to the battle for hearts and minds: in 1982, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church issued a 'confession', proclaiming apartheid a heresy. In September 1985, in response to the government's declaration of a state of emergency, a group of South African churches issued the *Kairos Document*, which contrasted different types of theology according to their political function. State theology colludes with the status quo, primarily through a literalist reading of Romans 13; and Church theology relies on generalized platitudes but makes little social impact. However, 'prophetic theology' is biblical and contextual, and harnesses a liberationist theology to issue a message of hope and a call to action.

> The Church should challenge, inspire and motivate people. It has a message of the cross that inspires us to make sacrifices for justice and liberation. It has a message of hope that challenges us to wake up and to act with hope and confidence. The Church must preach this message not only in words and sermons and statements but also through its actions, programs, campaigns and divine services. (The Kairos Document 1985, Section 5.6)

Post-apartheid, the South African churches have developed their public presence through reconstructive programmes of welfare and regeneration, accompanied by rich resources of theological reflection, public statements and publications (Koopman 2003, p. 4). It is clear that public theology is engaged in a number of these activities at any given time. Within the academy, for example, study centres such as the Beyers Naude Centre

for Public Theology in Stellenbosch are engaging many secular agencies around issues of democracy, social justice, poverty, while other networks focus on training activists around health care, land use, campaigning; or theological education and biblical literacy for lay Christians. Yet there is another, more congregationally focused form of public theology, which is simply aimed at equipping church communities in disadvantaged areas to participate in social transformation, using models of theological reflection and Bible study to facilitate deeper consciousness of issues such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence and land use (de Gruchy 2007, pp. 37–9). John de Gruchy gives examples of what he regards as good practice in public theology, which spans media comment, the education of church leaders and laity in public affairs and the ministries of hospitality and social justice within marginalized communities. These, and many others, he argues, illustrate how public theology works across the boundaries of academy, Church and society. From these examples, de Gruchy deduces that the best kinds of public theology do not seek to silence other voices but to facilitate open and accessible dialogue; that public theology must make the connections for ordinary Christians between the biblical witness and contemporary issues; that it must exercise a preferential option for the poor, both in its praxis and its spirituality.

One major strand of contemporary public theology originates from the United States of America and the work of Martin Marty at the University of Chicago, who is widely credited as the first person to use the term. Marty was at pains to identify a tradition in theological thought that was less philosophical and speculative than empirical: rooted in the realities of religious individuals' and communities' behaviour, and in particular in their characteristic engagement in public and social issues. Marty referred to the 'public church', characterized in particular by the mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic denominations in the US and distinguished by a commitment to 'relate private faith to public order' out of its own traditions and teachings. In part, this can be seen as a refusal by these churches to allow the constitutional separation of Church and State to privatize religion, but also to regard themselves as a full and participating constituency of the body politic (1981, pp. 98–9).

Marty also notes the significance of individual contributions to the development of a distinctive Christian social witness in exemplary figures such as the urban pastor and socialist activist Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918) – advocate of the 'Social Gospel' in the early twentieth century – and the public

intellectual and Christian ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971) (Marty 1974). Marty's main concern is to distinguish between what he regards as these mainline Protestant traditions – plus that of the Roman Catholic John Courtney Murray – and evangelical traditions of personal conversion and piety. Theologically, this strand of social activism and comment articulated an important insight that institutions and organizations needed to be called to account, and that some kind of theological reflection on their role in shaping public affairs was needed. Christianity is more than simply about personal salvation or 'spiritual' questions at the expense of temporal or worldly concerns. It has a public bearing that goes further even than thinking about the 'public' impact of the Church as institution, and reflects a conviction that it is acceptable, even essential, for theology to engage in matters to do with the ordering of our common life; to be concerned with the ordering of life beyond the ecclesial, to embrace the whole of society; and to introduce a theological perspective into public debate. It is theology that speaks from within a religious tradition, addressing questions of public significance, seeking to influence a wider culture and helping to shape the way problems and policies are addressed.

So Martin Marty is credited with bringing the term public theology into the vocabulary, although he, like others, would say that its hallmarks of identifying a social and collective dimension to the Christian gospel, of the need to incorporate rigorous analysis of socio-economic conditions and of there being a 'public' role for the churches and theological comment to contribute to the good of society, are evident in many thinkers before that.

Alongside the North American tradition there is a strong European, especially British, strand of public theology, represented by Anglicans such as William Temple, Ronald Preston and Rowan Williams, and Presbyterians such as Duncan Forrester and William Storrar. These traditions emerge markedly from the established positions of the Churches of England and Scotland, articulating a strong tradition of incarnational theology coupled with strong localism via the parochial and congregational systems. Will Storrar relates how the renaissance of Scottish nationalism was served by an activist public theology based at the University of Edinburgh. In 1989, the Church of Scotland sponsored a report on Scottish self-government, and the churches joined with secular and non-aligned lobbies during the referendum on constitutional reform in 1997, which led to the establishment of a Scottish Parliament in 1999 – which, while it awaited the completion of its new headquarters at Holyrood, met in New College, the home

of the University's Faculty of Divinity and the venue for the Church of Scotland's General Assembly. Storrar characterizes this as a form of 'post-modern politics': peripatetic, consciously participatory, cross-party, with a deliberate emphasis on democratic capacity-building. The contribution of the Scottish Reformed tradition – theologically orthodox and politically radical (Storrar 2007, p. 19) – was a crucial element in forging this broad-based partnership. Storrar concludes that public theology should aspire to be ecumenical, global and local, rooted in global civil society as well as the churches, collective and inclusive, and transnational in its collaboration between its various international agencies (p. 25).

The growth of a global guild of public theology has been greatly facilitated by the creation of the Global Network for Public Theology in 2007 and the establishment of the *International Journal of Public Theology*. Traditions from Africa, Asia, Oceania and Latin America are emerging with distinctive contextual approaches; but in general, they share the common features of investigations into the public significance of religious discourse, a commitment to pluralist constituencies and contextual approaches and to render its language accessible to non-theological audiences (Jacobsen 2012). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, the dominance of the mainstream Protestant churches that gave birth to these traditions of public theology is being eclipsed by numerical decline and the politicization of evangelical Christianity such as the New Christian Right as well as emerging public activism of forms of Pentecostalism in Latin America. This is one reason why we may have to consider the future of public theology in the face of its own diminution and secularizing forces as well as the pressure of alternative styles of Christian engagement.

Catholic Social Thought: Common Good and Virtue

The relationship between Roman Catholic social thought and public theology is a little more complicated. The democratic revolutions of the late eighteenth century, especially the French Revolution of 1789 represented a major privation for the Roman Catholic Church, as it saw its traditional privileges abolished; and this shaped the attitude of the Church to democracy and popular government for over a century, epitomized, perhaps, by the notorious *Syllabus Errorum* (Syllabus of Errors) issued by Pius IX in

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1864, which condemned rationalism, communism, science, higher criticism and freemasonry. This may be explained by the greater ambivalence towards liberal democracy within the Roman Catholic Church, which would not have recognized the legitimacy of the modern state and thus failed to see why magisterial pronouncements would need to address secular powers. It is a matter of debate, then, as to whether Roman Catholic social teaching was inhibited from adopting a more 'public' mode of discourse due to the equivocal nature of its attitude toward modernity, liberalism and democracy.

Nevertheless, the beginnings of an identifiable tradition of Papal social teaching may be traced to the publication in 1891 of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, in which, in response to industrialization and the exploitation being endured by industrial workers, Pope Leo XIII called for major changes in the socio-economic order and for the recognition of workers' rights and trade unions. After 1891, an identifiable tradition of Catholic social thought (CST) (rather than the terminology of public theology) emerges, communicated in the main through Papal encyclicals but also present in regional Bishops' documents, including those from the Latin American Bishops' gatherings in Medellin in 1968 and Puebla in 1979 (Hennelly 1990). We should not forget, however, the influence of Roman Catholic teaching in many European countries such as Holland, Germany, France, and Austria upon Christian democratic parties and trade unions, as well as the writings of public intellectuals such as John Courtney Murray and the influence of Roman Catholic pressure groups. All this represents a significant resource for the churches, ecumenically speaking, in relation to matters of economics, politics and culture, and some of the features of CST are worthy of note at this stage.

In contrast to earlier documents castigating modernist thought and secular institutions, *Rerum Novarum* offers a more measured evaluation of the particulars of political and economic life, advancing 'an increasingly clear analysis of human rights and responsibilities, the positive role of the state and the importance of civic organizations' (Carr 2012, p. 239). A recurrent thread in this and subsequent encyclicals is the repudiation of the extremes of unregulated power on the part either of the state or the market. This was a theme notable, particularly, in the encyclicals of John Paul II (*Laborem Exercens*, 1981 and *Centesimus Annus*, 1991).

CST advocates the doctrine of 'subsidiarity' as a way of valuing mediating institutions and as representing an important principle to ensure full

participation in social organizations (Ivereigh 2010, pp. 168–9). It has also traditionally manifested a decidedly personalist emphasis which places a high premium on human dignity (pp. 21, 162–3). By dint of humanity's created, interdependent nature, human flourishing assumes a decidedly interpersonal rather than individualistic quality. In contrast to modern, liberal, contractual conceptions of justice, for example, CST has argued that it is rooted in the reality of our common humanity and interdependence and is hence about pursuing a flourishing common life. In light of such a theological anthropology, politics cannot be merely about facilitating private choice or individual freedom. Rather, it is about building up a thriving society in which everyone can share in public goods; and the task of Church, civil society and State alike is to cultivate public and intrapersonal virtues in such a way that all citizens realize – in both senses of the word – such a vision of the common good (Hornsby-Smith 2006).

To obey the imperatives of God's justice, Christians draw on visions of the good which inform discourses of public life. This entails the formation of people of civic virtue who hold fast to this vision and who embody – incarnate – it in their lives. In collaboration with others of good will, Christians are called to participate in the practices of shaping opinion and policy making. However, a consistent thread is the insistence that the social teaching of the Church has little credibility unless it is translated into action (Ivereigh 2010, pp. 28–30).

In contemporary terms, therefore, many of the features of Roman Catholic social thought would seem familiar to Protestant and Reformed public theologians: whether it can be restricted to the pronouncements of the magisterium, or official church authorities, or whether it exists in the writings of public intellectuals and consciences of politicians; the significance it affords to the grass-roots activism of congregations; and the acknowledgement given to the natural and social sciences in shaping theological reflection on matters of economics, poverty, bioethics and medical research, marriage and sexuality, and so on (Davis and Chappell 2011).

However, since the Second Vatican Council, CST has articulated theological and ecclesiological understandings which reflect a greater 'respect for the legitimate autonomy of other social institutions . . . acceptance of some responsibility for the well-being of the wider society . . . commitment to work with other social institutions in shaping the common good of the society' (Himes and Himes 1993, p. 2). This is especially evident in documents such as *Gaudium et Spes*, in which there is an essential affinity

between 'the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men [sic] of this age especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted . . .' and '. . . the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ' (*Gaudium et Spes*, Section 1)*.*

Such theology acknowledges the presence of God at work in history as well as within the Church, as well as prefiguring the later emphasis within theologies of liberation of the 'preferential option for the poor'. Similarly, *Pacem in Terris* (1963) is framed in the language of natural law and addresses itself not simply to the Church but to all people of goodwill. It is widely held, however, that after the accession of Benedict XVI, the Church moved further towards an exclusivist position, in which the Church is the primary mediator of revelation and moral guidance (Verstraeten 2011). Nevertheless, documents such as *Deus Caritas Est* (2006) still stress that the function of CST is to educate the consciences of the faithful and to offer principles by which a just social and economic system might be ordered.

An example of contemporary Roman Catholic social teaching at work may be seen in the substance of the document issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales in advance of the last General Election in the UK (Bishops' Conference of England and Wales 2010). *Choosing the Common Good* was prepared primarily for the ordinary lay voter but also, as Archbishop Vincent Nicholls comments in his Preface, to introduce wider society to some basic tenets of Roman Catholic social teaching. Typically of much public theology, then, this is a report by church leaders addressed to Church and nation. In its diagnosis of the banking crisis of 2007–8, the Report argues that above all it was the breakdown in trust that brought the global economy to its knees. In that respect it corresponds with much of Catholic social thought in its critique of unregulated institutions in pursuit of profit with no heed for the human implications. In response, the Bishops argue that society as a whole needs to 'rediscover the centrality of personal responsibility and the gift of service to others' (Bishops' Conference of England and Wales 2010, p. 8).

The report argues that the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church contains the concept of the 'common good' which can assist in this moral reorientation. This is a rich tradition of Christian social ethics, not confined to the Catholic tradition, but in this context it is interesting to see how the Bishops frame it within a wider context of natural law and virtue ethics. The common good expresses the highest flourishing of all people (as a collective), echoing the philosophers' understanding of the life

best-lived as that which aspires to attain the fulfilment of our deepest nature as God's creatures. Thus, we are interdependent with one another, and it follows therefore that any pursuit of the common good will enhance the bonds of solidarity and mutuality, countering the corrosive effects of atomism and self-interest.

> A society that is held together just by compliance to rules is inherently fragile, open to further abuses which will be met by a further expansion of regulation. This cannot be enough. The virtues are not about what one is allowed to do but who one is formed to be. They strengthen us to become moral agents, the source of our own actions . . . The Christian virtues of faith, hope and charity root our human growth in the gifts of God and form us for our ultimate happiness: friendship with God. (Bishops' Conference of England and Wales 2010, p. 12)

To be schooled in the virtues of the common good is about more than abiding by moral rules. Rather, it is to learn the habits of the good life, and to internalize them so that we are independent of external regulation. The virtues of prudence, courage, justice and temperance serve as antidotes to a culture of hedonism, opportunism and atomism; and although the Report does not take this route, one is left to assume, I think, along with other proponents of virtue ethics, that the practices of faith and immersion in a community with traditions, core precepts and distinctive ways of life, are the means by which such a *habitus* of faith is communicated.

This is reminiscent of the spirit of Vatican II, in terms of articulating a framework within which secular vocation of the laity might be formed. Yet in turn, it places the onus on the institutional Church, via such instruments as its catechetical formation, to be serious about equipping people for this kind of citizenship. We might want to question, however, whether a Church that models a hierarchical and centralized model of authority and obedience would ever see that the cultivation of a greater moral autonomy might also be the logical outcome of such an understanding of virtue. Nevertheless, *Choosing the Common Good* also models other classic features of contemporary public theology in that it sets out its stall on the basis of a central tenet of Christian (in this case Roman Catholic) social teaching, but in such a way as to establish common territory with a wider tradition of moral philosophy which is, currently, also rediscovering the language of virtue in relation to political economy (Sandel 2010; Stiglitz 2009).

The Report gestures towards other traditional bulwarks of Roman Catholic moral teaching, such as abortion, marriage and the family which stand in stark contrast to the generally progressive flow of mainstream public opinion. This might lead us to ask, whose 'common good' is being upheld, exactly? Is it negotiable, or even discernible beyond the boundaries of a particular tradition, or enshrined simply within the outworkings of extant tradition? Here, therefore, are areas in which there would be clear conflict over the precise substance of the 'common good'; and unless such contradictions were confronted, the term can only remain at the level of a fairly abstract moral axiom with little actual purchase on specific matters of policy. Nevertheless, this example of recent public theology in the UK gives some demonstration of an intervention into a public process from an institutional Church that counts itself as part of the wider civil society yet acknowledges the importance of speaking from its own tradition, and which sees the report as contributing to the cultivation of moral discernment and civic vocation among its own members.

The Scope of Public Theology

Public theology takes place in a variety of contexts and has a range of practitioners. In our short book on urban theology, Stephen Lowe and I identified three main genres: 'the type of public theology that engages with issues of public policy from a faith-based perspective', such as church reports or public statements, 'the processes of guidance or formation that equip Christians . . . to exercise faithful witness in relation to the secular world': directed more, perhaps, to an internal audience of church members who wish to reflect theologically on matters of public issues, and the 'study of how a faith-commitment might [in]form the public conduct of politicians' and other public figures: in other words, how private conviction transforms into public policy (Graham and Lowe 2009, pp. 4–5).

Writing from the South African context, Dirkie Smit identifies three modes of understanding and practising public theology: that 'related to the public sphere in the sense of a normative vision underlying contemporary democratic life in democratic societies'; a second strand which focuses more on practical activism, 'ranging from reflection on and active involvement in church, state and politics (such as apartheid) to faith, theology and economic life' (Smit 2007b, pp. 443–5), with particular emphasis on

the role of Marty's 'public church' in civil society and social action. Third, is 'nothing more than a value-free description of the fact that they have specific publics in mind in their theological activities' – a more comprehensive area, denoting any kind of theological comment that has a public bearing or audience (p. 446).

E. Harold Breitenberg, similarly, identifies writing by theologians and church leaders, work that defines and refines the discipline itself (such as this volume), and a more normative and constructive element, intended to facilitate forms of individual and congregational witness. Rather than thinking about its authors or practitioners, other writers focus more on the various functions of public theology. Max Stackhouse speaks variously of the normative, constructive and critical or apologetic modes of public theology, and of the threefold task of defining 'the operating values and norms that dominate a social or cultural ethos . . .' determining 'what values and norms are right' and the constructive dimension of 'calling upon people to enter into the reconstruction of the social or cultural ethos' (Stackhouse 2007a, p. 231).

In delineating the various sub-genres of public theology in this way, Stackhouse holds open the possibility that one particular expression of public theological practice – such as a church report or programme of social action – might itself have a variety of modes of address and function: from an interpretative or diagnostic stage, to a critical and normative voice as well as prescriptive or constructive dimensions. This also corresponds quite well to other fields such as practical theology and theologies of liberation, which articulate a methodology of 'practice–theory–practice' or the fourfold model of the Pastoral Cycle, based on a hermeneutic of 'see–judge–act'. In turn, this alerts us to the importance of holding together modes of critical and constructive discourse as well as blending the modes of critical, textual debate and comment with that of performative praxis in a synthesis of 'theologically grounded and informed interpretations of and guidance for institutions, interactions, events, circumstances, policies and practices, both within and outside the church' (Breitenberg 2003, p. 64). This is also evident in the way in which, increasingly, a perspective of virtue ethics is informing the work of public theologians (thus linking with perspectives in pedagogy and practical theology) by which ordinary persons of faith may be equipped theologically to read 'the signs of the times' and apprehend a larger set of meanings amidst economic, cultural, political and global trends (Schweiker 2010; Paeth 2010).

Whose Public?

When public theologians talk about the 'public' it is not synonymous with party politics or simple matters of government. Rather, as Max Stackhouse put it, 'the public is prior to the republic', since 'the moral and spiritual fabric of civil society is and should be more determinative of politics than politics is for society and religion' (2007a, p. 101; see also Tippett 2004). Public theology is more comprehensive than political theology, since the well-being of societies rests on more than matters of State and encompasses the economy, legal systems, voluntary and charitable activity, media and, crucially, faith-based organizations. If political theology is concerned with political processes and institutions and the relationship between models of temporal authority and divine rule, public theology seeks to interpret the moral, metaphysical and theological dimensions of a society's economic, cultural and intellectual milieu. In that respect, it is concerned with the material realities of social institutions and a sphere of normative ideals, constituted by informed public opinion, characterized by freedom of speech and expression; a 'specifically discursive sphere of interchange in civil society . . . the sort of deliberation in common that shapes a responsible citizenry' (Tanner 1996, p. 80).

In considering the scope of the 'public' itself, the most influential voice for public theology has been David Tracy, who identified the task of Christian theology as addressing three distinct constituencies, or 'publics': Church, society and the academy. Writing in 1981 about the 'social portrait of the theologian' he argued that all theology emerges from a number of contexts to which the theologian is accountable. The pluralism of modern society requires anyone, including the theologian, to take into account a variety of perspectives and sources on the nature of human understanding, what makes a good society, how people will make moral decisions and so on.

Because of this diversity of constituencies, it is a fallacy, then, to believe that theology is 'solely a self-expression of the church's own self-understanding' (Tracy 1984, p. 230). Theology, as talk about God, endeavours to speak about the whole of reality – even when these different publics are difficult to reconcile – because it is asking profound and enduring questions. Theology is not only preoccupied with interpreting its own classics for the sake of the tradition itself, but to interpret the religious dimensions of a culture 'at the limits of human inquiry and human experience' (p. 232). These are questions

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that all individuals and all cultures ask themselves, and religious classics represent one major source of a response to such 'limit-questions'.

> The pluralism of cultural worlds has enriched us all with new visions of our common lives and new possibilities for an authentic life. Yet it does so at a price we can seldom face with equanimity. For each of us seems to become not a single self but several selves at once. Each speaks not merely to several publics external to the self but to several internal publics in one's own reflections on authentic existence. The fundamental questions are indeed questions by and to a single one. An individual answer, however passionate or tentative, is ultimately also singular and deeply personal. Yet the addressees of our reflections, including the conflicts of the addressees in each self, are several. (1981, pp. 4–5)

Tracy's concern for the public character of theology is motivated by his perception that religion, like much of culture, has become so privatized in contemporary life that theology has been confined to, or retreated into, a world of interiority, or 'reservations of the spirit' (p. 13). But resistance to such privatization is impelled by the 'universal character of the divine reality', that is the 'God as understood by the Jewish, Christian and Muslim believer, [who] is either universal in actuality or sheer delusion . . . Any authentic speech on the reality of God which is really private or particularist is unworthy of that reality' (p. 51). So, religion is never simply a matter of personal or private devotion. It carries over into the believer's life in all aspects of the public domain, such as economics, civil society, the State and culture. Similarly, if 'public' is anathema to notions of a spiritualized, privatized faith for the individual, the corollary is an emphasis on the significance of religion's impact on public discourse:

> . . . theology, while related to intensely personal commitments and to a particular community of worship, is, at its most profound level, neither merely private nor a matter of distinctive communal identity. Rather, it is an argument regarding the way things are and ought to be, one decisive for public discourse and necessary to the guidance of individual souls, societies, and, indeed, the community of nations. (Stackhouse 2006, p. 165)

Like David Tracy (1981), Max Stackhouse insists on the 'public-ity' of theology. In a pluralist (and increasingly globalizing) culture, theology must address multiple publics. To Tracy's three publics, Stackhouse adds a fourth public, of economics and the market, and summarizes these four areas of public life as respectively concerned with 'holiness, justice, truth and creativity'. These are values implicit in the theological canon which public theology seeks to promote in relation to these various publics of Church, society, academy and market (2006, p. 166). The first of the publics, 'holiness' corresponds to Tracy's 'church', and refers to the 'authentic religious public', and the theological questions here concern the nature and content of religious teaching: 'What can and should be preached and taught among those who seek faithful living and thinking according to the most holy, and thus the most comprehensive, righteous, and enduring, reality to which humans can point?' (p. 166). This is a theology that addresses communities of faith, and considers how their members may be nurtured in their vocations in relation to their lives as voters, volunteers, campaigners, parents, students, consumers, workers.

Second is justice, pertaining to the 'political' public, and again the theological issues at stake relate to the values – 'the moral and spiritual fiber' (p. 166)– by which a healthy civil society might be maintained. 'What can provide those in authority with a vision of and motivation for just institutions in society so that the common life can flourish?' (p. 166).

Third is the 'academic public' – and note that this is the realm of 'truth', and the Church – which is the forum for mutual, critical dialogue amongst scholars. 'What can offer reasons and withstand critical analysis, offering convincing arguments, warrants, and evidence for the positions it advances in the context of serious dialogue amongst scholars?' (p. 166).

A fourth public, of economic life, addresses questions of labour, work and production: 'What allows human life to flourish, to be relieved of drudgery, and to contribute to material well-being by encouraging creativity in production and distribution?' (p. 166) – to which we might add, 'consumption' as a critical focus for our incorporation into late modernity's further 'publics' of consumerism, media and leisure. In keeping with Stackhouse's concern for the impact of globalization on economics and civil society, too, it may be necessary to consider the global aspects of all forms of 'creativity' as a matter for public theology.

Overall, however, public theology itself recognizes the pluralism and autonomy of these domains of the public in contemporary society. We

can see, then, how far such a sensibility has travelled from any kind of assumption that public theology operates in an era of Christendom, since it demonstrates a respect for autonomy of political processes and the public domain while being prepared to share responsibility for building and sustaining a healthy public realm – perhaps in theory (by asking questions about the nature of participation, pluralism, what makes a good society), and in practice (by nurturing the virtues of effective citizenship among Christians and others). Certainly, public theology seeks to influence public debate, while maintaining awareness of pluralist nature of society. It is not about trying to 'convert' non-Christians or to impose an ecclesial monopoly or theocracy on society.

Dirkie Smit also adopts a fourfold definition of public life, to encompass politics, economics, civil society and public opinion (increasingly, managed through various forms of media) (2007b). He is following Habermas's demarcation of four spheres of the democratic public: formal institutions and processes of governance, including political parties, judiciary, civil service and regulatory agencies appointed by the state; the market and labour, what Habermas terms the 'customers', the 'suppliers'; voluntary and community organizations, and fourth, public opinion. Sebastian Kim further elaborates on this, to advance six dimensions of the public: state, media, market, religious bodies, academy and civil society (2011, p. 13). The interactions between these different spheres will be complex and contextually determined; but it serves further to highlight the extent to which public theology increasingly speaks into and is itself shaped by, multiple and changing constituencies. These are subject to a range of factors that include the activities of transnational corporations and non-governmental organizations, transcontinental patterns of migration and diaspora, as well as local economic factors and expressions of civil society.

The 'Oscillating' Public Sphere

Any attempt to define the prevailing use of the terminology of the 'public' in public theology must take account of debates about its very coherence. Like definitions of the secular, it is a constructed and contingent category. As I argued in Chapter 2, modern assumptions about the scope of the public have been much criticized by feminist scholars, who argued that the public–private distinction was often overlain with gendered assumptions which

implicitly enshrined unequal power relations and established a political and cultural ontology of gender that assigned women and men to separate spheres, thereby making it problematic for women to achieve full and equal agency in public life.

As I have already argued, the gendering of public and private formed part of the configuration of modernity and one of the processes of the post-secular reconfiguration is to challenge the automatic conceptual and political alignments of women with the private, familial, domestic and non-political. Yet in practical terms, public theology has yet fully to integrate a constructive feminist analysis into its canon in such a way as to privilege women's voices and perspectives. The issue of women's rights in Church and society is clearly of relevance to public theology, but it is something that has attracted comparatively little attention until recently (McIntosh 2007). As Heather Walton memorably argued, Duncan Forrester's dismissal of some forms of theology as only interested in the 'domestic housekeeping' (Forrester 2001, p. 127) affairs of the churches may represent a robust rebuttal of a particular kind of ecclesial introversion, but it unconsciously adopts a gender bias whereby 'the public is often differentiated from the feminized environment of both the church and the domestic sphere' (Walton 2010, p. 31).

In general, the various categories of 'public' deployed by public theologians have tended to follow a broadly Habermasian route, in which the emergence of the modern, democratic public sphere depends on the creation of a specific sphere of activity, the 'life-world', free of colonization by the market or the State. Yet that, too, may be changing with late modernity, as the boundaries between production, reproduction, symbolic and material activity, between the State, the market and civil democracy, interpenetrate. Discussion of the relationship between the 'public' and the 'private' often uses metaphor in order to express the distinction and to emphasize its binary nature. These include a contrast between that which is hidden or withdrawn and that which is revealed and accessible (Weintraub 1997b, pp. 4–6). Alternatively, Sheehan characterizes the dichotomy in terms of knowledge and disclosure about an individual, and the extent to which 'others have limited access to information about them, to the intimacies of their lives, to their thoughts or bodies' (2002, p. 22)

While our particular notions of public and private emerged as a result of the formation of particular institutions such as the State, capitalism and the individual within modernity, understandings of the two as distinct realms

is not unique to contemporary society. For example, Hannah Arendt's work highlighted the distinction between the public and the private as a fundamental feature of Classical Greece (1958). However, participation in the *bios politikos* was only open to adult males, and not women or slaves, and this gives us a clue to its roots in the material circumstances of political economy and the division of labour. For the Ancient Greeks, the relationship between public and private emerged from the rise of the city state, which enabled people to conceive of a life apart from and beyond their domestic and familial life in the household (*oikos*). For Arendt, this corresponded with a distinction between the realm of work and labour on the one hand and that of action on the other. The realm of the *oikos* was driven by the basic necessities of survival: of material subsistence, of producing and reproducing human life. According to Arendt, the private sphere was understood in terms of its very 'privation': it was deficient in those things that made us truly human, which rested in a capacity to transcend natural needs and contingencies and to achieve self-determination and freedom (Arendt 1958, p. 58ff; Weintraub 1997b, pp. 10–12).

As Europe's economy developed from an agrarian, subsistence pattern into industrial capitalism, the relationships between public and private spheres, the organization of production and the nature of political life began to shift. From the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, activities that had once been carried out in the confines of the household and the family transferred into new social spaces of production, differently regulated, and creating new social classes and interest groups. The burgeoning capitalist economy was supported by new economic forms of regulation, such as the market and capital investment – banking, entrepreneurs and profit-holders – as well as the development of the modern nation-state. Yet the early modern period was also characterized by the development of a new commons of public information, opinion and debate, such as newspapers, tracts and journals: which, as the history of the popular press at this time has documented, was not just for the political and economic elite. This represented an intermediate 'public' space between the State and the market and the private realm of the family and consisted of citizens, who, of course, understood themselves increasingly according to the workings of the State, concepts of suffrage and the vicissitudes of the economy.

This is the context for Jürgen Habermas's work on the origins of the public sphere in early modernity, which he understands as a distinctive communicative space characterized by dialogue and open debate. It owes

much to the Classical Greek notions of the *bios politikos* set apart from the world of necessity and aspiring to an ideal of civic virtue by means of the exercise of reason and freedom of expression. Yet as well as its gendered dimensions, such a model of the autonomous, democratic public square presupposes that the commonwealth of communicative reason is free and open to democratic control, and that the space of civil society is free from the encroachments of either state or market. When it comes to debating the nature of free expression in contemporary global society, however, it is clear that politics and media alike are vulnerable to government control and commercialization. Is the 'public' therefore losing its independence, and disappearing into the pocket of the market rather than remaining in the open space of democratic civil society? 'Critical debate among citizens is replaced by a staged debate in a studio that is carried out in their name' (Thompson 2011, p. 55).

The classical model of the relationship between public and private may need to be significantly rethought in order to accommodate the role of communications media as not just reflecting or reporting news but actually constructing the very nature of 'public' debate; indeed the constitution of the public sphere itself:

This idea of the private sphere as a physical space like the home – an idea that was integral to the way that the Ancient Greeks thought about the private realm – is unsustainable in a world where information and communication technologies have transformed the ways that information is disseminated, accessed and controlled. (Thompson 2011, p. 62)

When we begin to consider the various 'publics' into which public theology may be speaking and intervening, then, we may need to be aware of the extent to which they are fluid and contested. It may require us to think again about the integrity of Jürgen Habermas's democratic communicative space of the public realm, which may be vulnerable to incursion and adulteration by the State and the market – and increasingly bear the imprints of global capital.

Unfortunately, the autonomy of the public realm and the viability of civil society as an independent space of active citizenship appears increasingly compromised in late capitalist post-welfare societies. Robert Putnam's analysis in *Bowling Alone* (2000) suggested that within the voluntary associations of civil society in the US, patterns of participation and activism are on the

wane. Hardt and Negri argue that a symptom of late capitalism is the whole-scale privatization of public space, such as the conversion of urban plazas to shopping malls and community housing to gated settlements (2000). This is not just about the restriction of movement, but the way in which many public services (such as hospitals, prisons, schools and leisure facilities) are falling under the auspices of commercial providers. The market is being used to manage demand for public goods such as health, education and social care. Michael Sandel refuses to accept this trend as merely a matter of fiscal convenience, but regards it instead as a moral issue, which denotes 'the corrosive tendency of markets' (2012, p. 8). To put a price on everything reduces any statement of public value to a purely monetary one. It fails to acknowledge any sense of a society's public goods as transcending the status of commodities and eventually undermines the nature of democratic society itself. He invites us to consider

> what's troubling about a world in which market thinking and market relationships invade every human activity. To describe what's disquieting about this condition, we need the moral vocabulary of corruption and degredation. And to speak of corruption and degredation is to appeal, implicitly at least, to conceptions of the good life. (pp. 186–7)

As we saw in the previous chapter in his discussion of the post-secular, however, Habermas has been one of the main theorists concerned to challenge the hegemony of the global market, insisting upon the necessity of a robust public sphere in countering the ideology of neo-liberalism. Indeed, it is the amorality of the global market, plus its apparent inability to save itself from imminent collapse, that leads him to turn to religious values as one potential source of alternative global values. Thus, for Habermas, the notion of the communicative public sphere gains renewed relevance as a means of alleviating the worst symptoms of neo-liberalism and globalization. Yet it would appear that the capacity of civil society as a buffer-zone between the forces of the state and the market is itself under pressure.

While writers such as Habermas have indicated how our experiences of public and private were the products of modernity, and especially the by-products of particular modern forms of assembly or public literature, therefore, it also needs to be remembered that these spheres and the demarcation between them continue to evolve not only in the light of new forms of

political economy but in the face of new technologies, such as computer-mediated communications. Indeed, some scholars suggest that computer-mediated communications may be 'eroding the boundaries between "publicity" and "privacy" in fundamental ways' (Weintraub and Kumas 1997, p. xi).

Computer-Mediated Communications and Democracy

Let us continue, then, to consider how the acceleration of virtual technologies and computer-mediated communications are reshaping understandings of what is hidden or private, how the postmodern, post-secular citizen is constituted as an actor in the public domain, what forces mediate such action and participation, how this impacts on our sense of self and self-in-relation, whether concepts such as a political commons or shared space of dialogue is possible. To begin with, it is one thing to say that the boundaries between the public and private are shifting and another to argue that they no longer exist, or are meaningless. However, it may be that we are entering a time in which – rather like the boundaries between the sacred and the secular – inherited conventions governing the fault-lines between the public and the private are being displaced by new understandings, new practices of everyday life, requiring us to learn a new vocabulary of public and private in relation to self and society. It means that we need to give more attention to the ways in which shared spaces of communicative and deliberative exchange are constituted, how decisions shape our lives and where they are made and by whom, and the impact of emergent technologies upon all that.

We may need to turn our attention, therefore, away from a model of political engagement as equated with the conventions of parliamentary democracy with its infrastructure of voter behaviour, party membership, political campaigning and so on, and focus instead on a more less centralized and formalized understanding of the practices of citizenship,

> more attuned to the potential changing perceptions of citizens less inclined to be dutiful and open instead to a more personalized and self-actualizing notion of citizenship . . . The playful repertoires of innovative YouTube videos, mobile texting language, protest music and the celebration of trivia may all be regarded as aspects of the political. (Loader and Mercea 2011, p. 761)

In particular, there is the question of whether new technologies really enable alternative grass-roots perspectives to emerge as significant opinion-formers, or whether public debate, including the internet and social media, is still dominated by corporate interests, dictated not by considerations of a truly autonomous public sphere but by the imperatives of the market. Joanna Redden's research into media representations of global poverty and discussions of international aid and development in Canada and the UK suggests that although the overwhelming bias is towards corporate, neo-liberal solutions, there are discursive spaces in which social media and other online networking can infiltrate public consciousness in order that the voices of those at the grass-roots may be better represented (2011).

Another question is whether new technologies help to build up a broader constituency of politically involved citizens. Henrik Serup Christensen and Asa Bengtsson's research in Finland concludes that it is more the case that it is those who are already politicized and actively involved who are extending their campaigning strategies into online domains; but evidence suggests that these campaigns are then recruiting new participants, thus broadening in a limited but tangible way the scope of political engagement (2011).

This debate is about levels and modes of participation in a realm of politics and civil society, albeit requiring a degree of reorientation on our part concerning what is meant by the 'political'. But it may be important to consider how understandings of 'public', and our very identities as premised on a clearly demarcated distinction between public and private, may be changing. The evolution of communication from print to radio and television to the internet and social networking, has altered the very nature of the public, the private and the relations between them; and of public communication from that of 'broadcasting' to more interactive and decentralized modes. Both the public and the private have been reconstituted as spheres of information and debate that are largely detached from physical locales and identifiable, authoritative sources, creating a much more fluid situation in which the boundaries between public and private are blurred, porous and subject to constant negotiation. A world in which communication, identity and the management of information is simultaneously 'publicly private and privately public' (Lange 2007) evokes a sense of the inversion of our inner, private and public, visible selves. Social networks such as Facebook, MySpace and YouTube are formed through the linking of personal profiles into sprawling social webs of connection, making personal information

publicly available to a potentially infinite range of contacts. This is the way we manage our identity, public persona and private relationships, which may be intimate but never, online, completely 'private'.

Globalization

As public theology develops its global and multi-cultural perspectives, it is concentrating more on the faith-based aspects of global civil society and on the praxis of grass-roots organizations across cultural and religious boundaries, often in global urban contexts. It is thus well placed to consider how religious belief and affiliation, perhaps uniquely, is expressed and reconfigured within the interstices of local, national and global currents (Beaumont and Baker 2011). Globalization has become the new context within which all future priorities of public theology will be determined (Storrar, Casarella and Metzger 2011). The demonstrations in Seattle, USA in December 1999 were largely responsible for bringing the term 'globalization' to public attention. They also represented the first showings of sustained critiques of globalization, which have perhaps been most graphically continued by the worldwide 'Occupy' movements in 2011, which mobilized against global finance and the subordination of other economic and political priorities in favour of corporate bail-outs in the face of bank insolvency (Rieger 2012).

Sociologists such as Roland Robertson and Anthony Giddens define globalization as an ideal type in terms of the compression of space and time in the face of new technologies and transport infrastructure. Yet the prominence of the 'global' also conditions what is happening at the local and national level:

Globalization can be located on a continuum with the local, national and regional. At one end of the continuum lie social and economic relations and networks which are organized on a local and/or national basis; at the other end lie social and economic relations and networks which crystallize on the wider scale of regional and global interactions. Globalization can be taken to refer to those spatial–temporal processes of change which underpin a transformation in the organization of human affairs by linking together and expanding human activity across regions and continents. Without reference to such expansive spatial connections, there can be no clear or coherent formulation of this term . . . A satisfactory definition of

globalization must capture each of these elements: extensity (stretching), intensity, velocity and impact. (Held et al. 1999, p. 15)

The development of the global economy is associated with the rise of transnational corporations and multi-national trade and fiscal agreements such as the European Union, the ASEAN Free Trade Area and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). While globalization might be considered as a product of economic drivers, however, it has widespread cultural dimensions, in terms of global communications, tourism and population migration. In 2000, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) identified four basic aspects of globalization: trade and transactions, capital and investment movements, migration and movement of people and the dissemination of knowledge. The greater global mobility of capital (and to a certain extent labour markets, or at least the way one labour force can be substituted for another) has a number of effects. It affects the autonomy and significance of the nation-state. National economic and legal jurisdiction may, for example, be overruled by regional or trans-national institutions such as the European Union, the World Trade organization, the United Nations, the Group of Eight (G8) and its larger sibling, the G20. Similarly, it is a truism of globalization that many of the world's biggest commercial corporations have larger gross national product than many nation-states; and the power of such major businesses to invest or relocate will have significant impact on an entire country's economy. At the time of writing, protests and boycotts against several large multinational corporations are taking place in the UK against these companies' use of legislative loopholes in European tax law, which enable them to avoid paying tax on income earned within a particular national jurisdiction.

Finally, the very liquidity of capital and money has shifted the centre of gravity of the global economy away from production towards financial trading of stocks, futures, currencies and virtual commodities. Such trading, was, of course, at the root of the global financial crisis of 2008, further demonstrating how no single national monetary market or trading system was immune from the spread of so-called 'toxic' finance.

However, global non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also been growing in size and influence and may serve as a counter-weight to global capital and conventional political processes. While global NGOs are not new, their global reach has extended, as has the global infrastructure of organizations that link specific interest groups with transnational

institutions such as the World Bank or United Nations. While such bodies extend activities across national boundaries, focusing their energies on humanitarian and development projects, however, statistics suggest that membership and control remains concentrated in a few hands. For example, 60 per cent of international NGOs are based in the EU and one third of their membership is drawn from Western Europe (Union of International Associations 2000).

Global civil society 'both feeds on and reacts to globalization' (Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor 2003, p. 7). The expansion of the global economy and governmental connections provides the 'supply side' of global civil society in terms of trade, investment, travel and communication that facilitates access to a global public sphere on the one hand. On the other, global civil society acts as a 'demand pull' for mobilizing those who find themselves excluded from privileged global networks (ibid.). In that respect, global civil society is an ambivalent concept, serving both to displace the power and influence of the nation-state in favour of neo-liberal solutions, and to stimulate alternative forms of political, economic and civic processes.

Nevertheless, the prevailing attitude towards globalization appears to be a largely uncritical acceptance of a broadly neo-liberal political economy, including 'a strong preference for free trade, the demand for broad governmental deregulation so that corporate decision making and the flow of capital may be less inhibited, balanced budgets as the norm for governments, and the assumption that technological innovation and the latest models of global communication networks are the sine qua non for a country's economy' (Gillett 2005, p. 16).

Among public theologians, Max Stackhouse has been at the vanguard of considerations of globalization, seeking a 'third way' to the polarization between globalization's most enthusiastic advocates and its demonizers (2006; 2007a). Religion has played a role, historically, in the evolution of a global society, and its influence is still crucial, especially in fostering autonomous 'publics' beyond the purely economic. In its potential to transform the world's poorest communities, and to facilitate a new era of human unity, globalization is, for Stackhouse, truly an occasion of 'grace' (2007a). Stackhouse may appear at times too sanguine as to the destructive and impoverishing effects of global capitalism (in economic and cultural terms) although his insistence that religious traditions must participate fully in debates about globalization and not be driven to the margins is also important. Significantly, also, such debates provide an opportunity

for public theology in the Christian tradition to engage in sustained dialogue with other faith perspectives – something under-developed in public theology to date.

However, as global connections have strengthened, via bodies such as the Global Network for Public Theology (see p. 75), the discipline is gradually becoming more attuned to its own global diversity and to ways in which developments associated with globalization, such as wealth and poverty, media and communication, neo-colonialism and global politics, have an impact. The paradoxical effects of globalization are also felt in terms of the simultaneous homogenization of global diversity and the resurgence of localism (albeit often manufactured or romanticized). This can be frustrating to nascent expressions of contextual theology, which at their very point of emergence are confronted by 'a totalizing ideology . . . which does not take sufficiently seriously the production and practice of local knowledges', and find themselves overwhelmed, once more, 'by the domineering nature of metanarratives' (Sebastian 2009, p. 264). The dynamics of globalization compress and dissolve expressions of diversity, as local voices are engulfed by the norms of imported mega-churches and the effacement of indigenous cultures and spiritualities (Pearson 2007, p. 154). From a post-colonial point of view, therefore, globalization can appear as nothing more than the perpetuation of neo-colonialism.

> Where can the poor in this world sleep? . . . In a world, marked by a technological and computer revolution and also by a globalization of economy . . . will there be room for those who are poor and excluded and today are trying to liberate themselves from inhuman conditions that trample on their identity as human beings and children of God? (Gutiérrez 1996, p. 116)

This question of globalization is developed by Clive Pearson in relation to public theology in Oceania, the 'liquid continent' – literally and metaphorically, in terms of its geographical location, cultural diversity and fluid demographics. Pearson considers the nature of public theology in a context in which globalization threatens to overwhelm vulnerable indigenous cultures. Even the language of 'public theology' may be an imposition. In Oceania, it is emerging as a forum of commentators wishing to comment on public issues and distinguishing their work from civil religion, in so far as there is a critical tension between Church and rituals of national life.

Yet it still remains halting, fragmented (2007, pp. 163–5). Furthermore, there is the question of how inherited theological traditions actually get put to work in such a way as to be 'unequivocally' contextual (p. 167). Even the interchanges within participants of a global network in public theology, then, reflect and reproduce the conflicting forces of homogeneity and diversity: how to sustain a common discourse for the purposes of mutually informing the other, without simply reproducing a dominant set of protocols and approaches? (pp. 167–9)

Voices from the global south also point to the close association of public theology in the US and Europe with a Habermasian notion of public realm, pointing out that while other contexts have thriving traditions of civil society and extra-governmental protest (often with the churches in the vanguard), there is a risk that this gets universalized. The danger is also that, notwithstanding a preferential option for the marginalized, public theology refuses to acknowledge that their claims fall outside the remit of conventional publics, or represent spaces squeezed by the encroachments of global capital.

> If . . . public theology is defined . . . only where the conditions of participation are, to a greater or lesser extent, already met, then vast regions of society in the great majority of existing nations cannot be the context for public theology. (Cochrane 2011, p. 55)

As globalization blurs the boundaries between global, national and local, it is important, therefore, to consider where the public spaces are opening and closing. Something like HIV/AIDS, concerning as it does the intimacy of sexual relations, may also fall beyond the conventionally 'public'. Yet in contexts such as South Africa, its impact is felt in all aspects of life: of children, families, workplaces, health care, churches as well as government policy. Add to that its disproportionate effect on women, and the urgency of rethinking the conventional distinctions of public and private is self-evident (Landman 2011; Ayallo, 2012).

Public theology in Brazil took much of its inspiration from Liberation theology that emerged from 1960s, and which based itself on the principle of the preferential option for the poor as a 'practical and epistemological locus from where theology is to be developed' (von Sinner 2007, p. 340). It began with the reality of extreme poverty, often analysed through the lenses of Marxism and dependency theory and pioneered by the basic ecclesial

communities. As Liberation theology diversified, however, to embrace the dynamics of race, gender, sexuality as well as class, it also struggled to keep up with political and economic changes of late 1980s and 1990s. Liberation theology has gravitated towards the development of a theology of citizenship, and as its economies develop and urbanization takes hold, there has to be a shift of emphasis from the land and rural communities to urban activism (von Sinner 2007; 2009).

Public theology needs to be aware, therefore, of the 'oscillations' (Storrar 2009) of the public sphere and the challenges and opportunities that this might present. The democratic public sphere has both 'contracted and expanded' (Storrar 2009, p. 249) under the encroachments of neo-liberal markets and the insurgent potential of new social media and grass-roots organizations. This is of particular significance to a discipline such as public theology which may have a self-understanding of its own identity and spheres of intervention that do not keep pace with changing understandings of the nature of the public and private, the particular exclusions and biases they may embody, and how that reflects on understandings of concepts such as the 'common good'.

The Theology of Public Theology

To recap, then, public theology is not simply concerned *about* the public, but concerns itself with a particular kind of theological method *in relation to* the public. It cannot simply be comprehensible to those who share its Christian reference-point, but offered into the pluralist public domain in the interests of a common good that transcends the sectional interest of any given religious creed or tradition. Public theology is public because, methodologically, it observes procedural criteria associated with dialogue within a pluralistic public sphere: 'it is willing to encounter secular, philosophical and non-Christian religious orientations to the world and to explain its claims in their language' (Stackhouse 2007a, p. 107). The discipline inhabits the boundary between the religious and the secular and its language undertakes an act of 'translation' in order to communicate to a non-specialist audience. Furthermore, it is public because it believes it has a contribution to make to a wider audience beyond the boundaries of faith; and finally, because it takes seriously a responsibility to assist with the cultivation of civic discourse.

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David Tracy's work has been foundational for mainstream public theologians in this respect. First, he unequivocally articulates concern for the corporate, political and societal meanings of faith, in contrast to forms of religious belief and practice that confine faith to private and pietist intentions (Breitenberg 2003; Stackhouse 2006). As we have seen, public theology refers to the ways in which religion interacts with questions of economics, media, politics, law, globalization, social justice and environment; and while these disciplines and world-views are diverse, they converge within a commitment to a shared realm of political and civic action:

> A key point is that while public theology is theologically informed discourse, its warrants and method of argument are not restricted to those that are specifically religious, such as Scripture and church teachings. Instead, explicitly theological sources and criteria are joined with insights and warrants drawn from other sources of insight; together these are brought to bear on issues, institutions, and interactions of society in ways that can be grasped and evaluated by all and who may also possibly be moved to action. (Breitenberg 2010, p. 5)

Tracy argues that the public realm is necessarily characterized by a 'shared concept of reason'; in other words, it could not function without agreed procedures of communicative discourse by which competing claims are subjected to public deliberation, and decisions reached by democratic means. According to Tracy, issues are interrogated according to shared norms such as intelligibility, truth, rightness and reciprocity. Tracy's understanding of public theology derives from his understanding of the generic significance of the 'classics' of religious traditions, which themselves deal with universal human questions (1981).

This further enshrines Tracy's commitment to facilitate the publicity of faith and practice in ways that render it transparent to critical scrutiny (Breitenberg 2003). Public theology should not confine itself to the internal discourse of the Church, but be mindful of its accountability to a broader constituency of non-Christian disciplines and faith traditions. It seeks to be accessible and comprehensible to those within and outwith the Christian tradition, including the 'cultured despisers' of religion. 'Every theology . . . has to meet the test of public reception' (Stackhouse 2007a, p. 84). This is an important ideological and methodological element, since it suggests not

only a level of accessibility to a general audience but a degree of account-
ability too. '[I]f theology is to be trusted to participate in public discourse
it ought to be able to make a plausible case for what it advocates in terms
that can be comprehended by those who are not believers' (p. 112). In
order to continue making truth claims the theologian must develop public
criteria for such affirmations. All authentic theology is public discourse,
meaning 'discourse available (in principle) to all persons and explicated
by appeals to one's experience, intelligence, rationality, and responsibil-
ity, and formulated in arguments where claims are stated with appropriate
warrants, backings, and rebuttal procedures' (Tracy 1981, p. 57).

Elsewhere, Tracy talks about theology emerging from a dialogue or cor-
relation between religious classics, which address persistent and funda-
mental questions of human concern, the nature of God, and so on, and
'common human experience and language'. By virtue of our humanity
we share powers of reason, we are capable of moral action, we glimpse
something of the good. Theology proceeds by means of 'mutually criti-
cal correlations between two sets of interpretation: an interpretation of
the Christian tradition and an interpretation of contemporary experience'
(Tracy 1984, p. 235). The role of theology in the public realm is to inter-
pret its own classic texts in the light of the situation in which it finds itself.
However, the process is mutually critical, in that the context itself raises
questions and poses challenges to which the tradition must respond. A
critical correlation may produce relations of identity, analogy or conflict
between different sources, although in general the conversation will pro-
duce analogy, or 'similarity-in-difference'. But even in cases of conflict,
it is often the theological tradition that will be in need of corrective. The
end of such correlation, however, is the imperative to relieve suffering and
affirm human dignity. This is also an important principle for public theol-
ogy: that it is possible to hold a conversation based on shared principles
of rational moral discourse and believe that religious tradition points to
elements of human experience that are held in common and thus achieve
consensus.

Public theology speaks of itself as 'bilingual' in drawing from the
resources of its own tradition while listening to, and being comprehen-
sible by, non-theological disciplines. This is only right if it is not only to
address the interests of the Church but the well-being of the world. The
aim is engagement, and public theology tries to practise what it preaches

in conducting its researches dialogically and *in public*, through colloquia, consultation and dialogue with policy-makers and activists. Hence, public theologians speak of the *bilingual* nature of the discipline, its discourse attempting to root itself in 'religiously informed discourse that intends to be intelligible and convincing to adherents within its own religious tradition while at the same time being comprehensible and possibly persuasive to those outside it' (Breitenberg 2003, pp. 65–6).

As one means of bridging the two worlds, public theology has adopted the method of middle axioms, which emerged in the mid-twentieth century in the work of Oldham, Temple and Preston. Will Storrar characterizes them as 'mediating moral directives that have a key function in the middle ground between the shared beliefs and related ethical principles of Christianity, and the very specific judgements that Christians . . . must be free to make . . .' (2004, p. 38). While grounded in theological principles, they function as provisional and interim norms to guide further deliberation. As a result, they are not necessarily explicitly theological; rather, they have to occupy a middle ground, but are heuristic, provisional and 'derivative' and not 'primary' (Temple 1976, p. 67). However, it is debatable whether they are intended to be the sum total of Christian social thought, or rather opening gambits sent to facilitate public conversation and manufacture a shared space of discourse.

> Temple divided his list of guiding principles into two levels. The primary Christian social principles, of God's purpose, and of the place of humanity in the world, are relatively stable and are 'principles on which we can begin to act in every possible situation'. The 'derivative' principles (freedom, social fellowship, and service) are also still useful, but in the early twenty-first century's situation of religious and moral plurality they need re-examination. Some of these principles will remain constant, but others may develop and change with time. Temple's earlier writings provide the resources to do exactly that. So, to work adequately with 'middle axioms', one must go behind and beyond them. (Dackson 2006, p. 245)

This suggests that public theology espouses middle axioms or strategies of bilingualism as attempts to embody a synthesis of Christian theology and broader political principles. However, it never intends these categories

to be any more than particular contextually orientated representations of more enduring tradition. Duncan Forrester attempts another approach to the mediation of theological language into public discourse. In most of the industrialized West it is no longer possible to assume a Christian culture or an automatic place for the churches to speak in public. Thus, the task of theology is to offer '"fragments" – insights, convictions, questions, qualifications – some of which may be acknowledged as true and as necessary complements or modifications or enlargements of conventional and commonly accepted accounts of justice' (Forrester 2001, p. 3). These fragments originate in a tradition that has an internal integrity and coherence of its own, although it cannot be transported wholesale into the pluralist discourse of public debate. Fragments are best because they do not claim to represent absolute, reified truths, but are rather offered as pragmatic insights from a particular community which may prove 'illuminating' for the wider body politic.

Fragments are parts of a whole that has been shattered. Does this reflect a prelapsarian world-view of a perfect time prior to the Fall? In using this metaphor, Forrester is clearly acknowledging the kind of analysis of a ruptured public sphere in which all grand narratives have lost their purchase. Forrester's public theologian forages for useful fragments, hoping to find beauty and illumination in the 'pieces of glass or gems that catch the light and display [their] wonderful colours' (2001, p. 157). Nevertheless, like those who pan for gold or the poor of the two-thirds world who earn a pittance sifting refuse from land-fill sites, hunting for buried treasure involves discarding a lot of rubbish. For many, the fragments of tradition are far from liberating, inflicting instead 'the unhealed wounds of homophobia, gynophobia, domestic abuse, sectarianism, personal guilt' (Walton 2010, p. 33). Such retrieval and rehabilitation of the tradition is arduous and ambivalent and may yet yield little of value. Is the Church simply living off the fragments of the past or reworking them as 'dangerous memory' for the sake of witnessing to the world? Do new narratives and resources of hope and obligation need to be engendered? What if we characterize, instead, the modest witness of contemporary public theology as partial, prototypical, proleptic: awaiting the actions of divine grace to transform them from a mere work in progress to its ultimate fulfilment?

Objections to mainstream public theology's strategy of bilingualism, mediation or dialogue are premised on an understanding that any attempt

to find common ground, or to speak truth to power, represents a fatal dismantling of the integrity of Christian witness. Take, for instance, Michael Northcott's critique of what he calls Duncan Forrester's strategy of 'infiltration' via use of 'fragments' of Christian tradition: 'his aim is to bend the ear of the Powers in such a way as they may hear an element of Christian truth quarried but necessarily detached from, the realms of Christian faith and practice. The idea of fragments as the core of a public theology carries with it the clear implication that theologians have no business to tell the story of the Gospel in the public square in a secular or postmodern society' (2004, pp. 218–19). Northcott invokes instead the radical reformed tradition of John Howard Yoder to argue for a counter-cultural Christian witness that lives according to its own distinctive mores, uncompromising in its indifference to dialogue with secular powers. There is, argues Northcott, no point in 'trying to gain a public hearing for particular truths *culled* from the Christian tradition' since that inevitably means they will be 'distanced from the narratives of God's way with God's people' (p. 219; my emphasis: Northcott's point is made all the more strongly by his use of the metaphor of 'culling' in relation to the factory-farming of salmon). The answer for Northcott is not to attempt some kind of civic Esperanto but to form communities of practice whose calling is 'to follow Christ and to witness to Christ's Lordship . . . to do the business of Jesus . . .' (pp. 220–1). To work at one remove from the practices of the Christian community is to adulterate and dilute its integrity. The practices of the Church must speak for themselves, uncompromisingly and unapologetically.

Conclusion: Public Theology Beyond Christendom and Secularism

Conventions in public theology such as bilingualism, mediation and middle axioms all reflect this enduring commitment to articulate a form of discourse which, while rooted in the practices and traditions of Christian theology, is also accountable to wider debate. In different ways, all these approaches defend the right both of theology to speak about and into public issues, and to advance the conviction that theology must do its

reflection in public as a transparent and generally accessible form of discourse. In that respect, they articulate a theological reading of the secular as a legitimate sphere for God's self-revelation and salvific grace.

However, if this means adopting a rather sloppy assumption that 'there is . . . something inherently progressive in theological discourse *per se* when coherently and rationally expressed, which usually means avoiding references to God in any form that could be recognized by the untrained reader' (Walton 2010, p. 25), then public theology has failed both to keep faith with the well-springs of its own tradition, and to be true to the realities of the contexts and publics in which they find themselves – and above all, to bring forth resources that make a difference.

In this chapter, I have identified how public theology locates itself in relation to a number of 'publics' or spheres of common life; how it may assume a variety of roles such as prophecy, advocacy and solidarity; how its interventions as a form of public discourse may be performative, liturgical and sacramental or discursive (reflecting its multiple 'publics' and interlocutors). However, I have also argued that public theology has to make a theological argument for its own long-term relevance in the face of three major challenges. First, that of addressing an increasingly complex, pluralistic set of global and local 'publics', characterized among other things by the paradoxes of post-secularity; second, whether or not it can rely on the continued existence of a common good of shared, deliberative discourse; and third, of its being able to sustain a convincing theological discourse that is not 'lost in translation'. In a world beyond both Christendom and secularism, in which no single world-view predominates, and the spaces of shared discourse may be few, the dialogical task of public theology assumes a heightened significance. If the articulation of values is foundational to the construction of viable civil society in a globalized context, then the ability to negotiate and mediate becomes all the more urgent.

> Our challenge is to develop a public theology that remains based in the particularities of the Christian Faith while genuinely addressing issues of public significance. Too often . . . in the process [of mediation] the distinctive substance and prophetic 'bite' of the Christian witnesses are undermined. On the other hand, theologies that seek to preserve the characteristic language and patterns of Christian narrative and practice

too often fail to engage the public realm in an effective and responsible fashion . . . If Christians are to find an authentic public voice in today's culture, we must find a middle way between these two equally unhappy alternatives. (Thiemann 1991, p. 19)

The debate is also tied up with understandings of the coherence of a shared space in which rational communication about ends, aims and substance of public life can be conducted. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, if there is no longer a neutral public realm in which rational subjects debate according to universal procedural norms, but is instead a fragmented, re-enchanted and contested collection of 'publics', then the idea that there is a common frame of reference or principled public realm beyond the pragmatism of our instrumentalized actions into which public theology can interject seems unlikely. What is at stake, then, even if at times it appears to be more a matter of degree, is first, whether apologetics are possible; whether theology acknowledges 'secular' or non-theological sources of wisdom as legitimate conversation partners, and second, whether non-Christian ways of reading the world are constitutive of theological discourse, not only as a deconstructive or critical tool, but as a substantive voice in a reconstructive project. In sum, then, this is a question about the self-sufficiency of (public) theology, and the permeability of the boundaries between Church and world: a question, no less, about the nature of God's self-revelation and the sources of the values on which Christian public identity and practice are founded in post-secular society.

Postmodernity, and the pluralization and relativization of public discourse, together with critiques of pure reason, have opened up a range of what are often known as 'post-liberal' or neo-orthodox theologies which look to Christian tradition and the practices of the Church for their identity. In response, liberal theologians have acknowledged the importance of remaining rooted in normative Christian tradition, but have held fast to the promise of a dialogical, apologetic and public quality to their reconstructive task. Most commentators agree, though, that public theology is faced with a difficult balance between adopting the language of wider society and potentially risking a loss of any distinctively theological grounding, and insisting on specifically Christian terminology, which fails to connect. 'Can a theologian speak faithfully for a religious tradition, articulating its

ethical and political implications, without withdrawing to the margins of public discourse, essentially unheard?' (Forrester 2001, p. 31). In the next chapter, then, I will turn to a more comprehensive critique of critics of the revisionist or bilingual approach, and consider whether a return to traditional orthodoxies, rooted in a distinctive and privileged culture of ecclesial practice and scriptural obedience, represents a more adequate response to the post-secular condition.

4

Public Speaking

Secular Reason and the Voice of the Church

> The true church is not entirely confident of its own faithfulness and not quite certain of its own boundaries . . . Ironically, then, the true church manifests itself precisely among those who cannot quite see the world as 'the World' because they cannot quite see themselves as 'the Church'.
> (Biggar 2011, p. 82)

Introduction

'From where does the theologian speak?' (Ward 2005, p. 4). So asks Graham Ward, referring to the encounter between theology and contemporary culture. Since the emergence of contextual theologies at the end of the twentieth century, this is a highly pertinent question for all those who deal in the production and distribution of theological knowledge. Acknowledgement of standpoint, and the impossibility of a neutral, disembodied and detached subject reflects the transition from modernity to post-modernity, from a world-view premised on objective, pure reason to one of reflexivity and contextuality. It is a reminder that there is no 'view from nowhere'; we all need to acknowledge the vantage points from which we see, interpret and communicate.

Such a question also heralds, however, the emergence into public theology at the beginning of the twenty-first century of new strands of theological discourse which reject largely modernist, liberal theological models. While this new wave contains a diversity of theological perspectives, for ease of analysis I will group them into 'post-secular' and/or 'post-liberal' approaches, in so far as they take their point of departure from that broadly mainstream tradition which I began to outline in Chapter 3. Post-liberal theology, associated with writers such as George Lindbeck, Hans Frei and Stanley Hauerwas, and those associated with 'Radical Orthodoxy' (John Milbank, Graham Ward, Catherine Pickstock, Daniel Bell and Phillip

Blond) are all dismissive of attempts to engage in constructive apologetics in a pluralist public realm. Such perspectives lament what they regard as the capitulation of theological liberalism to modernity, and seek to exercise forms of Christian witness that will restore the cultural and theo-political primacy of Christendom.

Those who would identify with the discipline of public theology have long been exercised by the question of how theology 'goes public', and how to balance the demands of pluralism and resistance to religious speech in public with the imperatives of speaking convincingly and coherently from a position of faith. Whereas post-liberals are concerned with giving a normative self-description of the beliefs of particular faith communities, liberals set out their stall according to a 'fully critical theological reflection' and the apologetic exercise of defending Christianity's intellectual and rational credibility in the public square (Kamitsuka 1999, p. 14). In the past, I have characterized these contrasting approaches as representing, respectively, theologies of 'discipleship' and 'citizenship' (Graham and Lowe 2009; Brown, Pattison and Smith 2012, p. 187).

At the heart of the matter is the question of the extent to which public theology should 'translate' its language of origin into speech acceptable and intelligible to a non-Christian audience in order to make any significant impact. This in turn rests on a particular theological understanding of the nature of revelation and common grace, and of the possibility of a shared space in which rational communication about the ends, aims and substance of public life can be conducted.

While this has been the precept of mainstream public theology, contemporary critics of liberal or revisionist stances argue that it is impossible to translate Christian faith comprehensively and without remainder into another world-view on the basis of an appeal to any kind of generic or universal religious experience, unmediated by culture or language. The end of modernity in the shape of postmodernity signals the 'post-secular' collapse of liberal theology's project to construct an apologetic in the face of secular reason. It heralds a new kind of theological intervention into public discourse, which eschews what its proponents see as the doomed attempts of liberal theologians to influence public morality or political policy by means of some kind of accommodation to secular mores and procedures. This new mood also owes something to Alasdair Macintyre's recovery of virtue ethics by reconstituting the *polis* and any concept of civil society as dependent on the cultivation of the virtuous community. After

all, the original meaning of the term *ekklesia* is of a political assembly, the body of Christ that is also a body politic. Hence, the public speaking of a theologian is sanctioned by its faithfulness to a distinctive ecclesial ethic, rather than a quest for public coherence or relevance. No wonder, then, that George Lindbeck himself once observed, '[p]ost-liberals are bound to be sceptical . . . about apologetics' (1984, p. 129).

To return to Graham Ward's original question, we find he is looking to clarify the relationship 'between Christian discursive practices and the production and transformation of public truth' (Ward 2005, p. 5): or how the traditions of one particular community can be mediated into a wider, possibly pluralist and public domain; indeed, whether it is permissible or legitimate even to venture that one may have a bearing on the other. At one level, we may see this as a call for the kind of intellectual transparency to which any scholar interested in the integrity of their work might aspire. Yet at another, for Ward it is a prolegomenon for a discussion of the essentially *apologetic* nature of theological engagement, in order that 'an account be given of the relationship between Christian living (and talking) and the implicit values of public consciousness' (Ward 2005, p. 2).

Given that Ward has been one of the prime movers behind one of the theological movements I want to consider, namely Radical Orthodoxy, and given that one of the theologians of the twentieth century to have influenced the turn against liberal apologetics is Karl Barth, it is interesting that Ward rejects Barth's dismissal of apologetics. However, I am not convinced that this represents a whole-hearted embrace of apologetics on Ward's part. He clearly believes in giving an account of the relationship between Christian values and those of wider culture, and commends a process of 'reading the signs of the times' as an apologetic process. In that respect, he is saying no more than that theology needs to take its context seriously. But if we define apologetics as 'any publicly intelligible attempt to redeem the theoretical credibility of Christian belief' (Kamitsuka 1999, p. 46), then this commits the theologian to some form of communication which, in turn, rests on an assumption of accountability to the non-theological: to convince, to commend, and to construct a publicly accessible discourse by which theology can defend its values to those beyond its own speech-community. It raises the question of how theology is to be effective in influencing the public domain: if it speaks, from whatever vantage point, what guarantee is there that anyone is listening? Is it enough to say, in a post-secular society, that the practices of the Church constitute sufficient persuasion?

I will consider this further by looking, first, at the work of Phillip Blond, a writer who stands in the Radical Orthodox tradition and who has attempted to influence public debate through his think-tank, *ResPublica.* For one whose professional and academic training has been in Christian theology, Blond appears surprisingly reluctant to declare the theological roots of his political convictions. It is possible that this is an entirely pragmatic strategy, concerned not to alienate a largely secular audience that is suspicious of religious voices in the public square. However, it appears to have been self-defeating, since Blond's silence on the matter has simply excited a critical response from those who accuse him of some kind of sleight of hand. In refusing to 'go public', Blond omits to indicate the sources of the traditions and practices which will actually inform a renewed political and cultural economy of virtue and severs himself from the very theological roots that, supposedly, nurtured his political convictions in the first place.

I turn then to two further theologians who would both identify themselves as speaking from forms of ecclesial polity, although their strategies for speaking into the public square vary. Graham Ward is closely identified with the Radical Orthodoxy group, and is deeply informed by Barth's theology (albeit critically so), and yet has called for apologetics to be a central part of theology's mission. While his project of cultural transformation is rooted in theological tradition, therefore, a facility to engage in cultural critique also requires an ability to read and deconstruct prevailing cultural values theologically. The transformative task, in turn, emanates from the sacramental, doxological and political practices of the Church; but what is less clear from Ward's work is how far he is willing to allow such practices and the traditions that inform them to be subject to mutual critique and revision from sources outwith the Church.

Luke Bretherton's discussion of this locates the debate more firmly in concrete political engagement. How is the Church, framed and disciplined by its core narratives and traditions, to behave in public? Who are its allies? Where are its no-go areas? Where can it be found, and what are its political objectives? In his analysis of church-related local political activism he shows the complexity of the relationship between different parts of the public, which always already includes 'church'. In stressing the autonomy of the Church and an ecclesially centred social ethic within an autonomous civil society, Bretherton stresses the irreducibility of the gospel to just another form of secular politics. He finds however, that in order to be

true to its mission, such an ecclesial public theology necessarily finds common cause with its 'others'. Bretherton's discussion of the public speaking and acting of the Church in public thus shifts the focus into the realm of political practice, and concludes that one of the tasks of a public theological praxis may be to nurture the very integrity of the public space in which *both* discipleship *and* citizenship can be exercised.

Liberal Theology and Its Critics

In Chapter 3, I began to address Tracy's answer to the question, 'What is the self-understanding of the theologian?' (Tracy 1981, p. 5). In a situation of pluralism, the theologian faces the challenge of public credibility; and if they are to speak with any degree of effectiveness and conviction, they must contend with the fact that their 'claims to meaning and truth may seem doubtful to a wider public' (p. 3). At no point does Tracy deny that such a concern for wider accountability necessitates an abandonment of the particularities of Christian tradition, but is simply a requirement to show how they correspond or resonate with the beliefs of others. Certainly, the specific texts of Christian theology represent cultural 'classics' in so far as they address or illuminate generic human experiences – from thence derives the potential for their communicability – but their insights must also be accessible to those from other traditions and world-views.

Tracy is therefore a prime example of those who advocate the defence of Christian theology according to 'publicly intelligible' criteria, and who strongly affirm the notion of defending Christian claims in the context of a pluralist public realm. The work of the theologian consists of listening to the insights of the wider world using hermeneutical, historical and empirical tools in the service of a tradition that unfolds dialogically. The theologian thus weighs up 'the demands and plausibility structures' (1981, p. 28) of the multiple publics, searching for connections and contradictions via a process of 'analogy'. Exposure to a plurality of sources and appropriate humility in the face of the other lie at the very heart of this theological method, and reflect the contention that truth is analogical rather than univocal or monistic. Yet it is not an absolute folding of one thing into another but a play of difference that may adopt many modes: 'confrontation, argument, conflict, persuasion' (Tracy 1981, p. 446), 'listening'

and collaboration (p. 447). Such conversation proceeds from a place of particularity: 'each Christian theology can now continue to intensify the journey of intensification into its own particularity only by its willingness constantly to expose itself *as itself* to the really other' (p. 448).

Tracy's own position has developed over time (Tanner 1996; Kamitsuka 1999; Heyer 2004). He began by articulating a classic liberal perspective, in his understanding of the nature of religious experience. In *Blessed Rage for Order* (1975), he argued that theological reflection emerges from the correlation of 'common human experience and language' with the sources of Christian tradition. Later, in light of postmodern criticisms of modernist axioms such as the transparency of language, the neutrality and atomism of the rational subject and the universalism of cultural expressions, he comes to question any claim to a 'common unified essence' to religious experience (Tracy 1989). He acknowledges the contextual nature of religious traditions, and the extent to which no experience comes unmediated through language, symbol or cultural representation of some kind. So the 'classics' of Christian tradition have to be recognized as artefacts of particular times and places, albeit conditioned by human historicity. Nevertheless, even in their specificity, he would hold that religious 'classics' have a power to evoke truths that are capable of transcending their own particularity to evoke analogical responses in others. Furthermore, as an interpreter of a tradition, the theologian must acknowledge their own reflexivity, as conditioned by their own hermeneutical lenses. Thus, any process of correlation is always already conducted from, within and between specific communities of discourse; dialogue can only proceed by analogy, towards what can only be a provisional position of solidarity with concrete others (1981, pp. 446ff.)

Beyond Reason: Theology in Post-liberal and Post-secular Mode

Contemporary liberal theology may owe its roots to the eighteenth and nineteenth century, but the contemporary challenge rests in whether it has the resources to summon a response to the criticisms of twentieth and twenty-first-century theology, beginning with Barth and continuing with his successors in movements such as post-liberalism and Radical Orthodoxy. In objecting to a model of theology as dialogical and apologetic,

these perspectives would assert the incommensurability of theological and non-theological discourse and the impossibility of a benign and neutral public realm uncontaminated by the implicit violence of an anti-theological secular reason. In that respect, such anti-liberal theologies are continuing Barth's project to resist the hubris of liberal humanism and return to a definitive theological narrative by which a distinctively Christian identity may be asserted, repudiating any expectation that it should be beholden to secular authorization.

Liberal theologians such as David Tracy and Schubert Ogden have, according to their critics, 'so accommodated to modern culture for apologetic purposes that it no longer brings its particular word to the world but simply reinforces secular culture by providing it with a balm of transcendent security' (Kamitsuka 1999, p. 18). The Church cannot conform to the parameters of acceptable speech and action based on the compromises of secular reason; there is no such commensurate common wisdom, and the Church must have the courage to model itself on the exemplary narratives of Christ's passion, death and resurrection. Thus, 'the primary political role of Christians . . . is not to engage and transform the state, but to build up the Church as the only true polis with a genuine justice and peace that cannot be found elsewhere' (Doak 2007, p. 373).

Such a perspective argues that liberals' appeal to universal religious experience is a denial of the particularity of a Christocentric soteriology. It is feared that liberal theology tries to make Christian faith so accessible to secular people that they import unquestioned concepts at the expense of the integrity of the scriptural world and Christian practice (Kamitsuka 1999, pp. 177–8). It represents a resistance to the expectation that theology needed to accommodate to secular epistemologies, and advances instead a more 'dialectical' or antithetical relationship between Christian revelation and wider culture. It seeks to defend the integrity and particularity of theology against a liberal apologetic strategy that seemed to privilege its credibility in the eyes of Christianity's 'cultured despisers' (Schleiermacher 1996) over its obedience to traditional Christian orthodoxy.

This also owes a debt to the theology of Karl Barth, and the contrast he drew between 'religion' as a human construct and 'revelation' as divine event. Religion represents humanity's futile attempt to undertake an autonomous quest for salvation and truth; but the fallenness of humanity and the limitations of human reason render this fruitless. It is only through God's own self-revelation (in Christ) that it is possible to grasp the truth;

in the light of revelation, all truth-claims of religion are relativized. Barth characterizes this contrast as the difference between speaking and listening, between taking and receiving (1936, p. 302). For Barth, the theologian speaks from, and to, the Church. It was not, however, a matter of the Church staying out of politics – Barth would never have condoned a two kingdoms theology – but simply that when the Church spoke to a wider public, it could only ever be in the language of faith:

> Therefore the language of faith, the language of public responsibility in which as Christians we are bound to speak, will inevitably be the language of the Bible . . . One thing is certain: that where the Christian Church does not venture to confess in its own language, it usually does not confess at all. (1966, p. 31)

This refusal of theology in public should not, however, be misunderstood as a refusal of Christian political engagement. It is, rather, an expression of scepticism to theological discourse which attempts any degree of correspondence to 'secular' criteria of authenticity, beyond the norms of its own canonical boundaries. This theology is practised and as such demonstrably rooted in particular places and times, and as Kristin Heyer points out, does not 'indicate retreat from responsibility to the concerns of wider society but rather a different model of social ethics' (2004, p. 322).

For post-liberal theologians, this proceeds from a rejection of objective, universal 'foundations' that are generically accessible to everyone. George Lindbeck advances a 'cultural linguistic' model of theology, which, after Wittgenstein, argues that language proceeds according to particular paradigms of 'language games'. Language draws its meaning not from some correspondence with an objective reality, but from its functioning according to particular grammatical conventions. Language constructs and narrates a world-view, not the other way around. Rather, all knowledge begins in a set of antecedent (pre-existing) beliefs about the world; no knowledge exists without some prior belief. Truth cannot be translated or universalized, since there is no single, eternal truth to which it corresponds. All belief-systems are sealed from one another, but each set of beliefs is justified from within its own socio-cultural or linguistic framework.

Post-liberals would draw their core moral beliefs from what they term (after Hans Frei) the 'plain sense' of Scripture (Kamitsuka 1999, p. 17). Biblical tradition narrates and guides Christian communities' accounts of

building and inhabiting a scriptural world and represents a 'thick description' of the truth-claims embodied in a community's practices. This means that Christian doctrine is 'regulative' rather than descriptive or expressive. Truth is defined in terms of its coherence within the canon of Christianity rather than by its relationship to an external arbiter, such as history, or reason, or fact. Theological discourse serves as a communal norm (as opposed to propositional truth or representation of universal experience) for the facilitation of Christian identity. Scripture – and most particularly, 'intratextual' interpretations of Scripture – represents the authoritative source from which regulative ideals, and thus normative understandings of Christian identity, are drawn. Symbols and signs gain meaning according to the way 'they fit into systems of communication or purposeful action, not by reference to outside factors' (Lindbeck 1984, p. 114). For post-liberals, doctrine functions in a highly pragmatic or performative fashion: David Kelsey goes as far as identifying the praxis of the Christian community as 'primary theology' and the work of the theologian as 'secondary'. While it is open to revision, Kelsey would still argue that doctrine – such as, for example, the Trinitarian nature of God – serves as the ultimate hermeneutical measure for understanding culture, morality or human nature (2009).

Similarly, Lindbeck focuses on the development of a theologically 'skilful' Christian community, charged with developing an account of 'how life is to be lived and reality construed in light of God's character as an agent as this is depicted in the stories of Israel and Jesus' (1984, p. 121). However, should we infer that such an interpretive process resembles some kind of naïve reading in which texts are 'applied' to contemporary experience, Lindbeck insists that theological understandings are derived from 'intratextual norms of faithfulness' (p. 122), which accommodates the fact that the social contexts and assumptions of Christians vary greatly across cultures and throughout history. Furthermore, this is an intratextuality that is entirely open to critical methods and mindful of its exercise within a wider canon that is often contested (pp. 122–3).

Lindbeck does concede, however, that in some circumstances arguments from beyond the theological tradition could be used to establish certain principles that might be of use, at least as background theories, for forms of 'ad hoc' apologetic exchanges, such as general philosophical arguments for theism (Werpehowski 1986). This creates the possibility for some kind of dialogue, although the language-systems involved would always remain incommensurable. Rather than putting the burden of

evidence on 'an unqualified metaphysical claim about God as the logically necessary and unique condition of all moral activity' (Kamitsuka 1999, p. 83), and looking for forms of correlation or equivalence, the terms of engagement are about analogous relationships between Christian beliefs and other moral principles.

The strength of this perspective for public theology is that such a process of interpretation is always contextual: while the scriptural perspective is held to be primary, the task is to consider how it speaks to varying and complex everyday worlds of the believer. In talking of 'skills' of interpreting not only biblical texts but living human contexts, Lindbeck also privileges the quotidian and concrete nature of theological reflection as something orientated towards the formation of identity. It reflects an Aristotelian formulation of moral reasoning as that which issues in the life well lived.

Hence the emphasis on ecclesiology, and the priority of ecclesial practice and virtue for post-liberal theologians. For example, Stanley Hauerwas's approach to Christian ethics departs from what he terms 'quandary ethics', or an episodic consideration of moral dilemmas, in favour of a discipline that cultivates an ethic of character, circumscribed by the definitive narrative of Scripture. This is embodied and nurtured in the Church, which is 'God's New Language' (Hauerwas 1987), a living manifestation of the peaceable Kingdom, and it is called to be a beacon of hope in contrast to the secular world of violence and competition. It exemplifies 'Christian theology as a form of ecclesial service' (Kamitsuka 1999, p. 174) and embodies the ethics of Jesus, as revealed in the Scriptures. Herein lie the marks of its faithfulness to God. This is not, however, to obviate a vision of theology's end as informing its service to the world, simply that Hauerwas argues that the Church serves the world best not by offering a theological gloss to secular affairs, but by living up to its own calling:

> The church . . . must act as a paradigmatic community in the hope of providing some indication of what the world can be but is not . . . The church does not have, but rather *is* a social ethic. That is, she is a social ethic inasmuch as she functions as a criteriological institution – that is, an institution that has learned to embody the form of truth that is charity as revealed in the person and work of Christ. (1977, p. 143)

The Church's public face, and the public nature of its theology, must rest first and foremost in its fidelity to its own revealed tradition. As Lindbeck

has remarked, 'Only when the songs of Zion are sung for their own sake will they be sung well enough to gain currency in society at large' (1989, p. 54). Controversially, of course, this can be heard as an arrogant statement about the superiority of Christian practice. It is certainly intended to be radically non-conformist, especially in the writings of those such as John Howard Yoder, William Cavanaugh and Stanley Hauerwas, in which the Church models itself on the sacrificial and iconoclastic ministry of Jesus. The outworking of a radical Christocentric rule of life is the principal calling of a 'public' Church, as well as its chief witness. Sustained by its definitive narratives in Scripture and its exemplary practices in its sacramental worship, the Church puts into practice its vision of a restored human community in the transforming death and resurrection of Jesus. Thus, Cavanaugh describes how the Eucharist is a form of public theology: 'a Christian practice of the political is embodied in the Eucharist' (1998, p. 2).

Cavanaugh also contrasts the Christian view of human society with that premised by the modern secular state. Whereas the former posits the essential unity and harmony of humanity (notwithstanding the realities of sin), the latter assumes an atomistic and competitive model of human nature, in which the power of the State must be exercised in order to protect people from themselves. But in order for the State to gain and maintain legitimacy, it must discount the Christian narrative as public truth, establish itself as the temporal authority and relegate the Church to a privatized and spiritual realm. In liberal democracies, therefore, the Church is struggling against both its own privatization and its co-option into a secular vision of human welfare. What is needed, then, is not an evasion of the responsibilities of citizenship, but rather their discharge through the practices of discipleship. 'The role of the Church is not merely to make policy recommendations to the state, but to embody a different kind of politics, so that the world may be able to see a truthful politics and be transformed' (2004, p. 404).

The fear of many critics, however, is that the counter-cultural element, the refusal to play by the rules of the secular State, means the Church loses any foothold whatsoever in the public realm. Similarly, as Cavanaugh himself admits, 'it is by no means always clear in practice where the boundaries of the church lie' (p. 405). Those who belong to churches also live lives of 'secular vocation'; and although membership of a church may be of a different order to belonging to a gym, or a supermarket loyalty scheme,

or even a political party, are Christians not called to participate in shaping other institutions in the interests of common grace? Beyond a demonstration of its self-evident, counter-cultural virtue, how does the Church actually intervene effectively in public life? Perhaps there is a difference between *distinctiveness* and *exclusiveness* in these matters; but as we will see later, the boundaries between Christian identity and values and those of others may not be so absolute in actual practice.

Radical Orthodoxy

Radical Orthodoxy is another contemporary theological movement that has turned to a retrieval of distinctively Christian practices and traditions in order to distance itself from the cultural vacuum of modernity and from the perceived marginalization of theology as a form of public truth. Yet it neither withdraws from nor capitulates to modernity but seeks to 'out-narrate' it. Radical Orthodoxy is bold in its attempt to discover a 'new theology' that renounces the timidity and compromises of so-called modern theology in order to recover an Augustinian vision of the heavenly city. It represents a comprehensive Christian perspective that promises to supersede secularism, in its modern and postmodern varieties.

This is less interested with the task of critiquing and informing the praxis of local, national or transnational religious institutions and leadership in relation to established structures of governance, so much as narrating a *habitus* of (often scripturally based) faithful witness and discipleship. It challenges the modernist neutrality of the public domain, as a space in which the secular is constructed as implicitly anti-metaphysical and anti-theological. Hence, theology must approach the post-secular through 'a theological grammar which has never accepted an autonomous secularity and allied itself with the modern to its detriment' (Ward 2000b, p. 105).

If post-liberalism emphasizes the authority of Scripture, then Radical Orthodoxy places a higher authority on the continuity of the Church, using the language of 'faith' or 'participation' and advocating a return to its patristic and medieval roots, a retrieval of a premodern, Augustinian vision of *all* knowledge as divine and a recovery of the essentially sacramental, embodied nature of authentic Christian presence. This emerges

from Radical Orthodoxy's critique of the foundations of secular modernity as based on fundamentally anti-theological premises. In its separation of faith and reason, modernity relegates theology to the margins of acceptable discourse. Using the tools of postmodern philosophy, which unmasks the ideological and contingent nature of secular modernity, Radical Orthodoxy seeks the retrieval (or reconstruction) of 'a fully Christianized ontology and practical philosophy consonant with authentic Christian doctrine' (Milbank, Pickstock and Ward 1999, p. 2).

Secular reason always conceals an 'ontology of violence' that is anathema to Christianity's 'ontology of peace'. Phillip Blond's introduction to *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*, published in 1996, exposes the hubris of secular humanism in the following terms:

. . . unable to disengage themselves from whatever transcendental schema they wish to endorse, these secular minds are only now beginning to perceive that all is not as it should be, that what was promised to them – self-liberation through the limitation of the world to human faculties – might after all be a form of self-mutilation. (1996, p. 1)

God's 'erasure from human experience' has resulted in a crisis of modernity and philosophical outlooks which attempt to 'conceal the manifestation of transcendence' (p. 21). The secularism of late modernity sees no need for God; there is no need for moral realism either, since there is no objective good. Relativism and pragmatism hold sway but without fundamental values, no authoritative account of the world, there is no political vision.

However, without true value, without a distinction between the better and the worse, of course the most equal and the most common will hold sway. Of course the lowest common denominator will be held up to be the foundation of human civic life. What yardstick then for such a society, what measure do the public who must measure themselves require? (p. 2)

The project of Radical Orthodoxy is thus to 'reclaim the world by situating its concerns and activities within a theological framework', including 'the Trinity, Christology, the Church and the Eucharist' (Milbank, Pickstock and Ward 1999, p. 1). The need for any kind of 'public' theology that engages with non-theological disciplines is obviated since there is no

autonomous or common space to which all forms of discourse contribute freely and equally. For post-liberalism and Radical Orthodoxy, 'going public' represents a surrender to secularism, since it entails an acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the non-theological, a denial of the implicit biases of Enlightenment rationalism as inherently anti-theological. Instead, theology must 'out-narrate' secular reason by exposing its ideological basis as a discourse founded on the effacement of the sacred. 'In short, *there is no secular*, if by "secular" we mean "neutral" or "uncommitted"; instead, the supposedly neutral public spaces that we inhabit – in the academy or politics – are temples of other gods that cannot be served alongside Christ' (J. K. Smith 2004, p. 42). This offers us perhaps the clearest idea so far of how Radical Orthodoxy as public theology would supersede modern forms of political engagement, since Milbank states that the Church is no less than 'a new social body which can transgress every human boundary, and adopts no law in addition to that of "life" . . . [and] is attendant upon a diverse yet harmonious, mutually reconciling community' (Reno 2000, p. 42).

Radical Orthodoxy polarizes the theological community, and attracts supporters and critics with equal vehemence. The main areas of contention most relevant to a discussion of public theology include: Radical Orthodoxy's characterization of the 'secular' as representing an effacement of the transcendent such that it is impossible to consider non-theological sources as in the least bit generative of the knowledge of God; the critical and constructive task of Radical Orthodoxy itself, including its use of postmodern theory and its claim to rest on an Archimedean point of Christian tradition from which to stage its rehabilitative project; and its understanding of the Church, which often seems to allude to an idealized rather than historically and contextually located ecclesiology. To continue the metaphor of my opening section, however, if we were to ask Radical Orthodoxy from whence it speaks, we have questions about the admissibility of secular discourse into its self-understanding; the nature of its own authority (ecclesial, scriptural or whatever); the precise location of the Church that is premised as source and arbiter of theological truth; and its processes of mediation from divine speech into political and public intervention. But first, let us consider what actually happens when a theologian who identifies with Radical Orthodoxy attempts to engage in public discourse. It is an attempt to answer the standpoint question, 'from where does the theologian speak?' and to examine the connection between theology, political values and public interventions.

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Public Speaking: The Case of *Red Tory* (2010)[6]

This is the story of what happens when an academic theologian enters the world of think-tank politics. What does this particular form of tradition-centred, ecclesial, anti-modern theology look like when it 'goes public'? Author of *Red Tory*, Phillip Blond has been called 'the only significant thinker in the Cameron entourage' (Gray 2010). Trained as a theologian at Exeter and Cambridge, he has abandoned academia in favour of politics and public punditry, and is the founder of *ResPublica*, which describes itself as 'an independent, non-partisan think-tank'. There is no doubt as far as John Milbank himself is concerned that Blond's excursions into politics are an entirely legitimate outworking of the theological agenda of Radical Orthodoxy. Milbank is on the board of *ResPublica*, has shared a public platform with Blond at political events and announced the political coming of age of Radical Orthodoxy in Blond's work in approving terms:

> In Great Britain, Phillip Blond is developing a crucially important new mode of Red Toryism, which might in my view be seen as a kind of traditionalist socialism. This is already having a profoundly transformative effect upon British politics and, in effect, marks the political translation of the paradox of Radical Orthodoxy and the beginning of its entry upon the political stage. (Suriano 2009, p. 5)

Blond's book, *Red Tory: How Left and Right Have Broken Britain and How We Can Fix It* (2010) may be seen as part of a re-alignment of the centre of British politics at the end of the New Labour rule. As its subtitle suggests, it casts a plague on recent governments of both complexions, calling for a sea-change not only in political policy but in the very climate of morality of contemporary culture. Superficially, it represents a fusion of left-wing communitarianism and distaste for unregulated corporate capitalism with a zeal to break the stranglehold of welfare dependency and centralized State intervention. Beneath that, however, lies an ambition for the repair of political and civil culture 'at the ontological level' (Engelkele 2010) – especially in its thoroughgoing repudiation of the individualism, amoralism and secularity at the heart of neo-liberal consumer capitalism.

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6 Parts of this section first appeared in 'From Where Does the Red Tory Speak? Phillip Blond, Theology and Public Discourse', *Political Theology* 13.3 (2012), pp. 292–307.

The establishment of the Welfare State in the UK after 1945, argues Blond, destroyed the more mutualist and co-operative forms of working-class self-help. The result was the creation of a dependent, 'supplicant' (2010, p. 15) working-class, stifling ambition and upward mobility and enshrining a 'benefits culture' that fatally undermined collective mobilization. There must be a recovery of value of culture and tradition, of institutions such as family and 'little platoons' of civil society. He singles out the problems of individualism and loss of community at the heart of modern liberalism, which has no 'account of the social' (2008). Red Toryism's ability to span both ends of the political spectrum is apparent in Blond's antipathy to the centralized State, as well as to monopoly capital, since both have been allowed to grow unregulated at the expense of intermediate associations.

Crucially, however, the erosion of the infrastructure of civil society reflects a deeper crisis: one that is moral, not economic or political. Blond's chief concern is the decline of social mores, brought about by 'the triumph of a perverted and endlessly corrupting liberalism' (2010, p. 139).[7] A generation has been schooled in the belief that there is no such thing as objective truth, preferring relativism or any kind of shared values. '[A] nihilistic liberalism has over *a long period of time* almost completely eclipsed classical and Christian traditions of political life and argument, which always rested on a dispute about what was objectively good, and about the practice of virtue required to realize them' (2010, p. 139).[8]

Blond argues, therefore, for a recovery of 'a politics of virtue' (p. 35)[9] via the cultivation of the values and conventions of active citizenship. This cannot be effected by the State. It has to be 'organically embedded' in particular organizations: 'the restoration of civil society, of intermediary associations and alongside them a culture of reciprocally interlocked rights and duties' (p. 173). In calling for a reorientation of the education system away from technocratic, state-controlled education towards classical models,

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7   In November 2011 Blond spoke at a conference of Christian Concern (formerly Christian Concern for Our Nation), a faith-based political lobby best known for its defence of Evangelical Christians who regard themselves as disadvantaged by equal opportunities and anti-discrimination legislation. See http://www.christianconcern.com/our-concerns/social/phillip-blond-argues-that-secular-liberal-values-fail-to-deliver. For more on Christian Concern and similar lobby groups, see Chapter 5.

8   Ibid. my italics. Blond does not attach a timescale to the onset of degenerate liberalism.

9   See also pp. 269–70.

Blond commends 'Plato's idea of learning as recollection and Augustine's idea of learning as illumination' (p. 177). In virtually his only reference to religion, he notes the particular success of faith schools, as a means of communicating a clear narrative of objective truth and what it means to be human. 'It is for this reason that religious ideas of a transcendent God *seem to be uniquely able* to achieve both a sense of objective truth and to sustain an educational balance between child and teacher' (p. 171, my italics). Quite a modest claim; but since many people now associate education and formation on the part of the Church with abuses of power, or with anti-social segregation of children, it is a highly contentious proposal for the repair of broken Britain. Similarly, as Blond himself acknowledges, '. . . it is one thing to establish the case for virtue and a hierarchy of virtuous persons and values, it is another to create its content and initiate and shape its practices' (p. 171). Exactly so: yet *Red Tory* never gets around to identifying the actual sources and agents of virtue, or how is it to be nurtured and communicated.

There is still, then, a puzzling silence at the heart of Phillip Blond's political stance. How does religious conviction and theological discourse figure in his thinking? Who and where is his constituency? Whom is he trying to influence? Where does he stand? What are we to make of the mutual 'separation and *hidden* co-dependence' (Coombs 2011, p. 79) of theology and political philosophy? Is it a necessary form of strategic rhetoric to win support in a political culture otherwise suspicious of religious discourse in public, or a deliberate cloaking of controversial political theological influences? Or is it resignation in the face of the growing gulf between the discourse of religious belief and practice and the everyday world of the functionally secular citizen? Conservative quarters are full of commentators calling for a return to Christian or religious values; but what most of them do not address is the question of what will inspire a turn away from individualism and self-interest towards a new political and cultural economy of virtue. In effect, theology gets buried and is transformed into the language of 'virtue', 'open, honest and good behaviour', 'internal ethos', 'trust'. Whereas post-liberal theologians would speak – as does Blond – of the necessary cultivation of the virtues, rooted in the specific narratives and practices of a confessing community, and would regard the schooling in the habits of discipleship as the paramount task of theology, Blond never identifies who the agents or midwives of his much-anticipated moral

and cultural revival might be. What are the roots of such exemplary citizenship? What traditions, narratives and institutions nurture it? Where is the school of civic virtue and who are the bearers of renewed cultural values? These are questions on which Blond is remarkably agnostic; but why is this?

It may be a matter of strategy. The British public is judged to be strongly suspicious of politicians and public figures who profess a religious faith. In the words of Alastair Campbell, Tony Blair's former press secretary, 'we don't do God' in public life (Graham 2009b). There is evidence to suggest that towards the end of his time in office, even Campbell's boss had lost confidence in articulating his own religious convictions, for fear of being associated with the policies and world-view of George W. Bush and hence labelled as a 'nutter' (Graham 2009b). It may be, therefore, that in order to avoid alienating potential supporters, Blond has decided that discretion is the better part of valour. As one critic concludes, Blond 'cannot move in the think-tank world by talking about metaphysics and presence, still less – this being Britain – by talking about God . . . [The] double register of Radical Orthodoxy and Red Toryism is a near perfect encapsulation of the paradoxical location of religion in British politics: best hidden in plain view' (Engelkele 2010).

A further explanation for the absence of theology in *Red Tory* has been advanced by Nathan Coombs, who argues that Blond's political strategy is not an omission of theology but a fulfilment of the ambitions of Radical Orthodoxy, whose aim is to obscure its theological roots in the name of an esoteric political theology founded on hierarchy and the restoration of a form of theocracy in which the Church assumes many of the functions of the secular State. For Radical Orthodoxy, such a strategy 'aims to exacerbate a *hidden* duality, the full understanding of which remains the preserve of the few' (Coombs 2011, p. 90). According to this view, the theology of *Red Tory* must remain 'hidden in plain view', since it does not regard its task as one of explanation or persuasion beyond its own terms of reference.

Rather than subverting the Rawlsian separation of religion and politics and the neutrality of the public square, however, Blond's approach actually serves to perpetuate it. Whatever the reason, Blond's 'coyness' (Bunting 2010) towards his theological background has only succeeded in baffling and alienating many of his critics, who are fully aware of the theological connections but suspect some kind of 'sleight of hand' at work.

Far from demonstrating one of the central elements of Radical Orthodoxy, namely the ontological unity of faith and reason, then, Blond fails to make the connections. Blond's enigmatic approach relieves him from the burden of having to defend the plausibility of his theology, but he also fails to articulate a secure vantage point from which to defend his ideas. Despite the emphasis on speaking out of the specificities of tradition against the corrosive effects of malignant universalism, we look in vain for signs of any kind of praxis of faith in Radical Orthodoxy, and struggle to discern who might be the bearers of renewed social capital. In failing to speak from anywhere in particular he is, arguably, more vulnerable, not less, to the piecemeal encroachments and appropriations of the policy-makers who care little for the integrity of his political theology (Brown 2012).

Surfing the *Zeitgeist*: Graham Ward on Cultural Apologetics

Graham Ward was one of the original editors, together with John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, of *Radical Orthodoxy*. In more recent work, he has ventured further into the realms of contemporary culture, urban theology and Christian discipleship, to consider the implications of Radical Orthodoxy as a form of 'cultural criticism' (2005). Of all his colleagues, Ward is most alert to the resurgence of theological and spiritual sensibilities in late modernity, and to the re-emergence of the sacred amidst 'the hyper-realisms, the cyberspaces, the gnosticisms [sic], and the *faux* mysticisms of postmodernity' (2000b, p. 110). He examines cultural practices (including symbolic practices of representation) around art, nature, politics, consumption and sexuality, and offers a theologically informed response that culminates in proposals for the practices of the Church.

Concerned as he is with Radical Orthodoxy's project of 'the rigorous rethinking of the Christian tradition and its significance for reading the world' (Ward 2000b, p. 103), Ward is also interested in how cultural transformation takes place: how particular 'discourses of truth' become credible, in terms of transforming their cultural milieus, and how Christian practices relate to 'public truth'. It is thus a theology closely engaged with 'the implicit values of public consciousness' (2005, p. 2), the institutions and cultural mores that generate authoritative forms of truth and meaning, and is thus on similar territory to that conventionally occupied by public

theology. How, then, for Ward, does such cultural and public engagement and transformation take place? Back, then, to Ward's question I posed at the start of this chapter: from where – and perhaps on whose behalf, to what ends – does the theologian write and speak? What difference does Christian discourse make in the world?

Ward argues that if theology is to be truly authentic, it must be contextual; if it is to be contextual, then that must involve reading 'the signs of the times':

> To ask what time it is is [sic] to work with social and critical theorists, grasping and evaluating their methods, assumptions, conclusions and observations about living in various parts of the globe today. To ask what time it is requires taking cultural studies seriously. (2005, p. 3)

When it comes to defining 'culture', Ward describes it as 'a symbolic world-view, embedded, reproduced and modified through specific social practices' (2005, p. 5). It is symbolic and redolent of meaning, but also circulates in material cultures, social institutions and embodied actions. Similarly, 'discourse' is essentially a series of communicative actions, mediated through performative practices as well as semiotic systems. Discursive acts are 'what is involved in the production of believing' (2000b, p. 97). In the case of the theologian, discursive interventions might include 'writing sermons and treatises, church attendance, the living out of a Christian ethic, liturgies, acts of piety, etc.' (2005, p. 12).

This is not a dispassionate or idealized critique that deludes itself into believing it is immune from the circumstances of its own cultural production, however, since: 'we cannot reject the cultural *Zeitgeist* that situates and contextualizes us' (Ward 2000b, p. 104). *Kulturkritik* is 'a cultural *negotiation* between the revelation of Christ to the Church . . . and the "signs of the times"' (2005, p. 9, my emphasis), requiring attention to 'both the character of that Word and the character of the world' (p. 10). The critical task of a Christian cultural critique involves being attentive to cultural discourses and how particular beliefs are made and legitimized through discourse, and, in turn, how theological discourse might make meaningful intervention in contemporary culture.

Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice sets out a method for 'the negotiation between Christian living and thinking and the contemporary world' (Ward 2005, p. 4). Ward presents a new agenda for the 'engagement

of the theologically informed practices of the Christian with the larger social world that contextualizes him or her: a new *apologetic* task . . . This will be a public discourse, inscribing a cultural ethics, in which the theological finds its place as a voice already engaged in *contributing to* the production of public truth' (p. 173, my emphasis).

Yet if the theologian speaks critically, s/he also speaks therapeutically, redemptively; and Ward is adamant that the public interventions of postsecular theology can only speak from the vantage-point of tradition, uncontaminated by the hubris of modernity. The theologian is committed to reading the signs of the times, but advances a critical, transformative cultural critique that cannot but read through the lens of its own alternative *poiesis* of desire. Any address on the part of theology must be made on the assumption that there is a shared basis of discourse – or 'social imaginary'. It proceeds from our shared humanity and 'the relational nature of being human itself' (2005, p. 120), which is always already culturally manifested and mediated. In turn, the work of theologically derived cultural transformation takes place through the reschooling of the imaginary, through acts of *poiesis* and the articulation of desire – for God, oneself and neighbour (p. 152), exercised through everyday cultural practices of sociality.

> Theological discourse relates then to the productive transformation of culture by directing such transformation towards a transcendent hope. It works not only to participate in but to perform the presence of Christ. In and through its working the cultural imaginary is changed, and alternative forms of sociality, community and relation are fashioned, imagined, and to some extent embodied. (p. 172)

So, in the postmodern urban context in which global economics and virtual reality have dissolved communities and bodies, Christianity can correct this drift away from materiality with an account of an alternative body, inscribed within its own eucharistic theology. The dynamic is thus one of anatomizing one set of cultural ideologies, which serve the postmodern values of atomism, misdirected desire and rhetorical violence, and counterposing an alternative narrative that points uniquely to the city of God. Eucharistic practices represent the liturgical site of transformation, in which desire is re-educated and redirected.

Ward challenges Barth's rejection of apologetics as entailing any kind of 'negotiation' in relation to itself and any other discourse. He was not prepared to contemplate any such concession since for him, it implied an accountability, an acknowledgement of common grace that was alien to his theology. For Barth, the only kind of apologetics is that which proceeds from the Church's own dogmatic, exegetical and practical theology. True theology cannot represent itself in any other kind of derivative language, since an absolute gulf exists between human reason and revelation.

Against that, Ward contends that not even Barth was immune from the cultural circumstances of his own biography and thought. His antipathy to culture originated in a reaction against a form of Hegelian *Kulturprotestantismus* that conflated religion with the highest ideals of cultural progress. The only conversation is between the life of the Church and God's self-revelation, and not with the non-theological. Barth would deny that theological discourse needs to engage with other forms of cultural expression; his view of revelation would not accept that it depends on the terms of its own cultural production. Ward challenges this, arguing that all theology speaks from a *habitus* – a 'system of dispositions' (2005, p. 18) – which organize and situate its discourse, and which shape its reception and interpretation. Christian theology cannot transcend the cultural conditions of its own discourse.

However, is Ward saying any more than that theology is always to some extent influenced and mediated by its surrounding culture? What are the terms and conditions of that 'negotiation'? How fundamentally does culture shape and inform – even reform – the theologian's cultural pronouncements? What are the means by which a culture comes to know its redemptive potential: are there values and discourses already inherent within it that contain the seeds of transformation, or is it entirely dependent on the regenerative words of the theologian?

On the one hand, Ward gestures towards a more revisionist, liberal stance by adopting the language of Christian *apologetics* to describe the nature of his cultural critique. He argues that apologetics must take account of the *worldliness* of the Church, and Christians are in, if not of, that quotidian world (2011). This is the place from which they speak, albeit informed by the gospel of Christ. It is certainly important to engage in cultural critique to understand the preoccupations and desires of surrounding culture, in order to understand better the 'social imaginary'.

Then theology undertakes deeper cultural hermeneutics, in order to reflect back to the cultural imaginary both its own dynamics and a transformed, Christocentric reading: 'Theological discourse is necessarily involved in the wider cultural dissemination and exchange of signs . . . Christian theology is, then, implicated in cultural negotiations, and to that extent is always already engaged in an ongoing apologetics' (2005, p. 53). This is both a matter of proclamation and transformation:

> [A]pologetics orientates theological discourse towards a specific cultural and historical negotiation concerning public truth. Its task is evangelical and doxological. Upon the basis of apologetics rests, then, the Christian mission not only to disseminate the good news, but to bring about cultural and historical transformations concomitant with the coming of the Kingdom of God . . . [Apologetics] makes manifest the polity of the Christian gospel, its moral, social and political orders. (p. 9)

This talk of *orientation* implies a programme of attention to the signs of the times, but really says nothing about the apologetic task as one of commending or explaining, as traditionally understood. Similarly, *negotiation* is suggestive of some degree of interchange between world-views, but in addressing the cultural malaise it sees around it, is the theologian in communicative mode, or reparative, redemptive mode? Perhaps Ward sees no difference; for Barth, God's 'address' to the world would not be apologetic or conversational but always already a call to repentance. But there is no sense, yet, that theology learns from culture, even in the process of fulfilling culture's own quest 'to understand its own aspirations and limitations' (2005, p. 59).

Of necessity, theologians are caught up in the prevailing cultural discourse, with the requirement to engage in dialogue rather than delivering dogmatic pronouncements. Theology cannot evade responsibility for cultural engagement by regarding itself as possessing eternal, objective truth; there is no 'view from nowhere', but only the 'naming of a direction' (Ward 2005, p. 88). This seems like a generous acknowledgement of the integrity of cultural insights to contribute to public truth, but Ward still retains a perception of 'the Word and the world' as essentially of a different order, ontologically, to one another. Certainly, the necessarily mediated nature of all knowledge, including religious experience, means that it is impossible to escape from culture or to isolate theological discourse from

cultural analogy. While culture 'might suggest certain amendments' (2011, p. 117) to theological discourse, it does not have the authority to engage in more fundamental revisions. The 'sovereignty of God' is set over and against such worldly considerations as 'tolerance, an ongoing conversation between Christ and the world or the continuing relevance of theology to a secular landscape' (p. 117), as if they bore no resemblance or equivalence to Christian virtue.

On the other hand, however, Ward's notion of apologetics also remains rather elusive. He is certainly keen to depart from a view of apologetics as rationalist, a correspondence with propositional truth, something he regards as no longer adequate 'with respect to the situation we inhabit' (2005, p. 71). Ward opts for a more pragmatic (or performative) and contextual criterion, in terms of looking to Christianity's ability to furnish us with ways of life that are critical of dominant ideologies and which incorporate people into a community that exemplifies alternative, more redemptive values (pp. 135–7). Traditionally, it is defined as a work of commending the Christian gospel to the sceptic or non-believer, and involves a process of dialogue and persuasion. Yet this has historically presupposed that to some degree the apologist enters into the world of their interlocutor. As we shall see in Chapter 6, while the apologist may be intending to demonstrate the extent to which Christianity completes or fulfils other truth-claims, there is still an attempt to respect the other, to mediate the theological *into the world of the other*, that is absent from Ward's rhetoric. Clearly, Ward intends the entirety of his diagnosis of contemporary culture to be normative and theological; but are there no redeeming virtues in the prevailing *Zeitgeist*; nothing to be celebrated about life outwith the sacred canopy?

Ward characterizes the (public) theologian speaking from a liminal place, between the Church and secular culture: 'at its open western door – on the threshold between the world and the east-facing altar; as ready to serve in one direction as in the other' (2005, p. 59). This suggests, at first reading, a mutual encounter on equal terms, but in fact, the traffic is all one way. The theologian remains ensconced *inside* the Church, looking 'back into the church [from which] the order of life is presented' (p. 59). While the Church is the space of order, the (outside) world is contradictory and disordered, over-run by simulacra and synthetic thrills: the space of 'high points and squalid allies, neon-lights, plasma-screens, crowded tenements, seductions, excitements and destitutions' (p. 59). This is an arresting image, of a

world both full and empty at the same time; but there is no sign that it may contain the seeds of its own redemption, even if that needs further cultivation at the hands of Christian values. Instead, the Church's role is to bestow peace and reconciliation on a degenerate culture, while never appearing to require words of insight, healing or forgiveness in return. There seems no possibility, either, that theology might speak from profane places as well as from the sanctuary of the conventionally sacred.

But even if we accept Ward's placement of the theologian in the Church, addressing the world, we are still confronted with the criticisms levelled at Radical Orthodoxy, that in the absence of a sufficiently pristine tradition, it speaks from an idealized ecclesiology: where is this Church from which Ward's theologian speaks? Is it any more than an idealization? Who are the agents of this apologetic? Is it an individual task at the boundary of Church and world; is it about the collective praxis of the eucharistic community, practising a counter-cultural ethic; is the theologian the foremost spokesperson of the new apologetic – in which case, how do they speak and to whom, in what form? Where are the points of intervention into the political and cultural imaginary, and does that include policy?

Ward is aware of the danger of inscribing everything as a 'text' to the neglect of material cultures and cultural practices, and the reality of institutions. Nevertheless, he seems to privilege discursive and representational forms of culture, and references to concrete instantiations of the transformation of the public realm are few. How does theology become a 'transformative public practice' (2005, p. 61)? Where are the 'structures of engagement' (p. 113) for theology with respect to culture? Similarly, does the quest for a 'more aesthetic, more erotic' (2000b, p. 3) Christianity eclipse a more politically engaged version? Despite his calls for a concrete cultural *poiesis* rooted in the everyday practices of the Church, there is little indication of how these discursive acts are generated or how, strategically, they would be transferred into public debate.

Paying Attention: Luke Bretherton and the Praxis of Citizenship

Luke Bretherton, a British theologian based until 2011 in London, writes about the role of Christian witness in the public square from a perspective broadly in sympathy with Radical Orthodoxy and post-liberal theology. He summarizes the central issue at stake in these terms:

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> A key problem in contemporary Christian political thought is whether the church has a distinctive politics and is itself a particular polity or whether it is best understood as a constituency within civil society whose politics takes the form of democratization and a commitment to the liberal state . . . In recent years, a growing number of theologians have emphasized that the first task of the church is to be a [the?] church. For them, it is not the business of the church to invest itself in one particular form of temporal political order – namely liberal democracy . . . Figures such as Milbank, Cavanaugh, and the O'Donovans rightly contend that the church cannot simply derive an understanding of its political vision from *outside of Christian belief and practice* . . . in one way or another, they envisage different aspects of Christian worship as a counter-performance of social and political relationships to those conditioned by the modern state and the capitalist economy. (Bretherton 2010, p. 17)

This quotation neatly draws together many of the characteristics of this stance: ecclesial life as 'counter-performance' in the face of secular liberalism, the practices of the Christian tradition as the well-springs of an alternative to the perniciousness of secular modernity and the sterility of the neutral public square, and the self-sufficiency of theological readings of the human condition. Bretherton's journey into the implications for public theology take him along a different route, however: and arguably, to quite a different destination. A major reason for this may be that as a theologian he speaks not only from the academy, but from his own involvement in *London Citizens*, a broad-based, multi-agency (and multi-faith) grass-roots community organization. Christian voices and energies are among the most prominent in this organization; but the register of such engagement is one of pragmatism amidst pluralism. While the spiritual capital of Christian conviction forges a distinctive *habitus*, which practises and narrates a proactive public faith in resistance to the privatization of religion and the modernist instrumentalization of the Church by the State, Christians also need to ask themselves how they 'negotiate a common life with various non-Christian others in relation to the state and the market' (p. 17).

It leads Bretherton to advocate an *ad hoc* pragmatic political strategy founded on strategic partnerships, since current political demands necessitate dialogue in pursuit of shared goals that do not pretend to correspond perfectly or absolutely with partners' world-views, but which 'within

the contingent flux of prevailing political conditions' (p. 20) achieves the objective of effective political mobilization. The principles that emerge, then, are these: the nurture of fragile civic activism is to be valued in the pursuit of common goods; and the witness of the Church is always contextual and may require 'the ability to improvise faithfully' (p. 21) in order to be most authentic.

Bretherton's inspiration for this draws upon Augustine's understanding of the relationship between the earthly city and the heavenly city. Ostensibly, the two cities share the same cultural space, but operate according to very different logics: the earthly city is a parody of the city of God and can be read as a perverted imitation that is therefore subject to Christian critique. The city of God, as the representative of eschatological reality, relativizes and corrects the meaning and use of the earthly city which is ultimately only apprehended through its need for redemption by the values of the heavenly city.

Bretherton commends a strategy of what he calls 'double listening' (p. 99) in relation to churches' involvement in local community activism. This is for Bretherton a consequence of living as citizens in Augustine's *saeculum*, in which the realities of the two cities exercise their own particular jurisdictions. Christians have to live between the resurrection and the eschaton, anticipating the establishment of the city of God, while accepting the earthly city as the place in which faith is to be practised, however imperfectly.

Augustine's juxtaposition of the city of God and the earthly city suggests they are historically or temporally co-terminous yet governed by different values. Is church part of the decaying world or a herald of new emergent forms of political association? The truth is more complex. The Church cannot claim to be the exclusive enclave of love of God, just as the altruistic actions of those beyond its boundaries refute any view of the world as mired in self-love and without redeeming qualities.

> Augustine acknowledges that members of the city of God share with members of the earthly city a common interest in temporal goods – above all, justice – and a sufficiently common reading of them to permit a measure of public agreement. At the same time, it is clear that without love for God there is no true or perfect justice. (Biggar 2011, p. 43)

This is, in part, about forging a Christian identity and community for the interim, but also acknowledging the prefiguration of the coming Kingdom within the earthly city, which includes a recognition of those who, while not Christian, share a concern for justice, human flourishing and peace. But in stressing the task as one of 'listening', Bretherton reminds us of the Barthian insistence that humanity listens to God's revelation: the Word spoken in Christ and testified to in Scripture. Yet his experience leads him to suggest that Christians are called also to speak less and listen more, and to apply a degree of attention not only to God's word but to one's neighbours. 'It is a way of paying attention to others . . . and so stepping out of one's own limited perspective and enable new understanding to emerge' (Bretherton 2010, p. 87).

The pragmatic basis of political collaboration is founded on identifying and pursuing such 'common objects of love' (p. 83); but such hopeful engagement with the world, with many compromised and flawed institutions, prepared to respect and tolerate difference, is not a betrayal of Christian integrity but the very conditions of its realization. Christians should welcome the fact that they share common ground with others, as fellow recipients of grace and forgiveness as well as fellow citizens. The moral ambiguity of the world does not make it irredeemable or negate its potential for good.

Returning to a theme he explored in an earlier work, Bretherton likens this to a sensibility of hospitality – not an attempt to construct an abstract or sterile neutrality, but a commitment to 'dwell together in a given and shared . . . space . . . whereby one makes room for another' (p. 88). He sees this ethic as one profoundly enshrined in biblical tradition and Christian history, carrying a rich narrative in which Christians can locate themselves: of welcoming the sojourner and entertaining Christ in one's care for the prisoner, the homeless or dispossessed (Matt. 25). Yet it is also embedded in other religious traditions, and thus has the potential to resonate and unite across many urban communities. We begin to see how Bretherton starts with a paradigm of the distinctiveness of Christian values and finds that view moderated and expanded – inter-textually, one might suggest – by the question, 'who is my neighbour?':

. . . when confronted with moral problems the church develops specific patterns of thought and action. However, the response of the church is not developed in isolation from the life together of its neighbours. As it

develops its response, the church will be engaged with the life of those around it, who will inevitably be involved with and inform its discernment. In conjunction with the life of its neighbours, the church will also seek to establish patterns of sociality which bear witness to how a particular moral witness is transfigured by the actions of God. (2006, p. 197)

Bretherton's advocacy of a kind of pragmatic hospitable social ethic as the basis of Christian involvement with politics reflects much of the post-liberal critique of church-related public engagement as dangerously disconnected from its ecclesial, biblical roots. Yet it retains a kind of Christian realist commitment to the incarnational imperative to give oneself up to the world, however ambivalent and flawed it may be, while remaining rooted in a particular tradition and vantage-point. Yet the tradition itself, in 'making room' for others, finds sources of correction and renewal: 'in seeking the welfare of the city, even though it is Babylon, not only do we find our own welfare, but also we encounter God in new and surprising ways' (2010, p. 87). Whether he is consciously doing so or not, Bretherton's language here evokes Duncan Forrester's characterization of a (public) theology that 'seeks the welfare of the city before protecting the interests of the Church' (2004, p. 6).

This acknowledges particularity amidst pluralism in a creative tension. It suggests that religiously informed reasoning does not have to be indistinguishable from any other in order to facilitate forms of active citizenship. Attention to 'others' helps build the trust and capacity that is the very bedrock of a functioning public realm, to the endorsement of 'democratic politics as a proper vehicle of faithful discipleship' (Bretherton 2009, p. 15).

Discussion: The Baby and the Bathwater

Radical Orthodoxy and post-liberal theology both set themselves the task of articulating a more distinctively *Christian ethic*, founded on a recovery of a more distinctively *theological discourse*. It may be helpful, then, to differentiate further between those two phases of critique and reconstruction: the distancing from theology's perceived accommodation to secular modernity, and the construction of a distinctive vantage-point from which

renewed speech and praxis might take place. While much of mainstream public theology may be culpable on its susceptibility to the idols of the passing *Zeitgeist*, I would dispute that the solutions advanced by these self-styled post-secular theologies are as radical or as orthodox as they claim.

For Radical Orthodoxy, even this move from critique to reconstruction, via the appropriation of philosophy – pre- or post-modern – represents a paradoxical process. Having adopted a post- or anti-foundational critique in order to deconstruct modernity, how can Radical Orthodoxy defend its recapitulation in pursuit of orthodoxy (Hanvey 2000, p. 162)? This, in turn raises questions about how one embarks on such a rehabilitative pro-gramme, and all about speaking from, within and into: Does one appeal to an historic 'default position' from which theology proceeds? Does the desire to speak from a distinctive or authentic perspective become con-fused with a collapse into an exclusivist position? Does the concern to speak necessarily involve the injunction to listen, with respect?

From where does the theologian speak, then: is it simply in relation to their own tradition with no further reference to what is beyond the received canon? Here, Radical Orthodoxy is vulnerable to the charge that their retrieval of historical tradition in the pursuit of a reconstructive post-secular theology adopts a somewhat partial approach to their sources. They appear to commend a return to a point of authority uncorrupted by modernity as a fixed Archimedean point, but do not take into account how that is always already a particular reading of that source – effectively collapsing the hermeneutical distance between the contemporary theo-logian (who cannot disentangle themselves from their own modern and postmodern context, however disaffected they may be) and the exemplary sources of the past.

> Radical Orthodoxy cannot invent the flesh and blood of a Christian cul-ture, and so must be satisfied with describing its theoretical gestalt, ges-turing, in postmodern fashion, toward that which was and might be . . . Christian faith and practice must be raised to a level of purified abstrac-tion so that it can be saved from its own failure to make Christ present in the Church and in society. (Reno 2000, p. 44)

Reno's criticism is that in its search to locate the exemplary tradition, Radical Orthodoxy ends up constructing an idealized past, which is highly selective towards history. Dissatisfaction with the unsatisfactory reality of

the institutional Church led liberal theologians to privilege experience and context over the constraints of orthodoxy. Yet equally, Radical Orthodoxy feels the constraints of a compromised tradition and is required to remake it in its own image via recourse to what Eric Hobsbawm has termed 'invented tradition':

> 'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past . . . However, insofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of 'invented' traditions is that the continuity with it is largely fictitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition. (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, p. 1)

When it comes down to it, Radical Orthodoxy seems to suffer from an 'allergy to the particular' (Reno 2000, p. 43) and its critics have struggled to discern how it really connects with the actual inhabited context of ecclesial life. This may be a theology that claims to speak from the Church – but exactly which Church? It does not actually speak from an inherited tradition present in any specific historical era, but must rely on a theological heritage which is rather 'an invention, a determined culling from the past, an act of imaginative recovery' (p. 9).

Related to this is a further point, which concerns the degree to which the Church (as ecclesial alternative ethic or source of reparative praxis of modernity) is above criticism. Certainly the ethics of Christians cannot be entirely separate from the life and wisdom of the Church, 'sustained as a kind of free-floating wisdom' (Forrester 2010, p. 176). But does this mean that there is no salvation, or no justice, peace or love outside the Church; or that the credibility of the gospel is entirely dependent on the probity of the Church?

The problem comes when the life of the Church loses its moorings in the sufferings of the world, and the cultivation of ecclesial virtue becomes too self-sufficient or introverted such that this fuller vocation to the world is discounted. There appears to be little acknowledgement of encountering God in the practical, quotidian, ambivalent dimensions of human

experience, or of a way of doing theology which entails 'a wrestling with the intractable complexities and conflicts of history, ethical life, and politics' (Ford 2001, p. 394).

From where does the theologian speak, then: can it ever be in conversation with a pluralism of sources from which theological discourse might draw? In practice, even theologies that offer 'normative descriptions of Christian communal beliefs' (Kamitsuka 1999, p. 14) find it impossible not to engage with the surrounding culture. After all, Christian doctrine has always emerged dialectically out of engagement with its surroundings, and does so because such dialogue leads theology to modify elements of its own tradition. The history of Christian doctrine shows a succession of influences from non-theological sources, and the biblical witness itself frequently subverts any sense of a secure elect and repeatedly witnesses to an enlargement of God's covenant to embrace unexpected people and places. Critics of Radical Orthodoxy's appropriation of Aquinas, for example, point to his absorption of Aristotelian and Arabic philosophy, and thus the historical continuity of non-Christian influences with the evolution of Christian thought (Hanvey 2000). This was never a substitute for orthodox constructive theology, but an aid and providential partner. This is not to appease secular reason but to demonstrate how theology always speaks from and into particular occasions and contexts which are more like 'blurred encounters' (Reader 2005) than confrontations with degenerate secularism.

In defence of a post-liberal critique of secular reason, Kamitsuka perceptively wonders whether, in repudiating extra-theological authorities, they are aiming at a tendency to appropriate an entire secular metanarrative devoid of theological critique, whereas in practice the appropriation of non-theological sources on the part of liberal theology more closely resembles a heuristic use of social science (p. 181). This is what Werpehowski terms 'ad hoc apologetics' (1986), in which common ground is articulated in the interests of constructing a shared discursive space in which an interim ethic can be agreed, but without assuming that all differences are unconditionally dissolved. It is similar to Bretherton's pragmatic approach to Christian activism, which understands the creation of contextual strategies for mutual civic engagement as a worthy outworking of post-secular Christian activism.

The public theologian does indeed stand at the threshold of Church and world, of sacred and secular. But if some post-secular theologies are to be

believed, this can never be to risk such blurred encounters, or even to exercise hospitality to the un-churched by encouraging greater traffic between the two worlds: to invite the secular *into* the sanctuary, where it might even shed much-needed light in dark corners. For Graham Ward, however, the theologian speaks from the steps of the Church, but only to nail his manifesto to the door and then retreat inside. Yet,

> . . . we should recall that the actual world is not always divided starkly into believers and unbelievers, into Church and World. More often than not, it comprises a mélange of dogmatically certain believers, dogmatically certain unbelievers, and infinite gradations in between of more-or-less believers and more-or-less unbelievers. (Biggar 2011, p. 69)

From where does the theologian speak, then: from an imagined or evolving tradition? From the quotidian praxis of the Church in the midst of the world; or from an Archimedean perspective above and beyond any critical scrutiny? Such a vision falls short of any conception of apologetics as a communicative activity capable of seeing beyond its own frame of reference. The licence of the theologian to speak is nothing more than a self-fulfilling prophecy:

> The theologian is a heroic redeemer, a visionary, a genius. Intellectual virtuosity eclipses ecclesial obedience as the key to renewal. Theology becomes creative and inventive rather than receptive and reiterative. Intensely sensible of the failures of the modern Church and its modern theology, the proponents of Radical Orthodoxy seek to render Christian truth so perspicuous, so clear and evident at the level of theory, that the nihilistic temptation of secularity will be impossible, and Radical Orthodoxy's peaceful consequences will be made plain. Here, without doubt, Milbank & Co. are driven by ambition: if the actual practice of the churches in our time fails to make the truth of the gospel potent and clear, then theologians, theoretical shepherds of the speculative grasp, shall. But this ambition is not Augustinian; it is, I would submit, a quintessentially modern ambition. (Reno 2000, p. 43)

I have been presenting the claims of theologians who argue from a performative, Christian public witness rooted in the historic practices of the church as the basis for their public discourse, with a corresponding schooling

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in the virtues of Christian discipleship as the foundation for active citizenship. There is no reason, however, why the integrity of that has to be protected solely through the segregation of such mores from anything deemed secular, modern, liberal. There will, inevitably be correlation and overlap between Christian and non-Christian mores, just as there may be strategic partnerships between religious and non-religious stakeholders.

> There can never be translation 'without remainder' . . . from one semiotic system to another, but there is no reason to reject that significant translation can take place back and forth in the process of conversation. If this can occur, then a minimal common ground (albeit contextual and perhaps tenuous) can be established and interchanges (apologetic, mutually critical) can proceed . . . There is no reason to rule out in advance the possibility of participants from different traditions of inquiry engaging each other in good faith, mutually critical dialogue and working toward at least moments of overlapping consensus. It happens already. (Kamitsuka 1999, p. 97)

In this chapter, I have traced the fault-line that divides those theologians who regard non-theological disciplines as 'objectively and demonstrably null and void, altogether lacking in truth' (Milbank 2009, p. 306) from those who articulate principles of common grace and the universality of reasonable discourse in the name of a 'capacious God' (Atherton 2001, p. 5). While the objections of its critics are salutary, the liberal model is better suited to addressing a pluralist, post-secular context through its enduring principles of bilingualism, mediation and apologetics. It can learn some important lessons from post-liberals about where it speaks from and of whom it speaks: Jesus Christ as God's Word, God's 'address' to the world, and the radical claims that entails. Where and how the implications of such claims are nurtured, and how the people of God inhabit the places from which to speak and act, will need further consideration, and here the emphasis of the post-liberals on the practices and everyday faithfulness of the Church as a kind of performative apologetics is an important new element. Yet although there remains a task to rejuvenate what may be meant by the terms, the projects of bilingualism, mediation and apologetics – to a world ever more fragmented, more religious and more sceptical – are not so easily dismissed.

5

Crusades and Culture Wars

The Perils of Evangelical Identity Politics

Introduction

Chapter 1 charted the 'new visibility' of religion in public, one manifestation of which was the extension of equality and diversity legislation in Europe to include 'religion and belief'. I hinted then at some of the difficulties inherent in balancing recognition of religious identification with greater tolerance of diversity of lifestyles: where the logic of equality and human rights comes into conflict with religious and conscientious freedoms. In this chapter, I want to consider this issue in more detail, by focusing on the emergence of a particular kind of confessional public theology which rejects many of the principles of the liberal democratic public square. It seeks to restore the ascendancy of Christianity in public life against perceptions that it is under threat from the dual forces of multiculturalism and secularism.

The most prominent and contentious expression of this stance may be seen in the actions of a small number of conservative Christians who have brought high-profile legal cases in the UK against their employers, claiming to have experienced persecution for wishing to express their faith. This has generally followed disciplinary action by their employers for being in breach of the various equality and diversity legislation introduced in the early years of the twenty-first century (see Chapter 1). The number of cases is small, and all but one of the appellants have seen their cases dismissed by successive hearings and legal authorities, including the European Court of Human Rights. However, they represent one part of a wider, if disparate, network of opinion, campaigning and public witness, which all go to make what Richard McCallum calls the 'Evangelical Christian micro public sphere' (2011, p. 180).

I will argue that the 'discourse' emerging from this network rests on a number of strong themes or tropes which go to fuel a particular sensibility that may be characterized as 'evangelical identity politics'. These themes articulate a sense of loss in the face of religious decline; a polarized view of the world and of the relationship between 'Christ' and 'Culture'; a Biblicism that is suspicious of non-theological wisdom and cultural pluralism; and a vision of Christian public vocation as entailing a personal witness to objective moral truths. Confronted by the rise of secularism and increasing cultural and religious pluralism, the response of many conservative Christians has therefore been to 'clarify challenging and ever-changing moral ambiguities, provide answers to new moral questions, defend traditional viewpoints and establish fresh boundaries' (Hunt 2010, p. 188). In particular, liberalization of attitudes towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and intersex (LGBTI) lifestyles within wider Western society, in which 'a range of sexual and reproductive rights are increasingly wedded to expanding definitions of citizenship' (p. 184), has served as a particular lightning-rod.[10]

> The UK is essentially now a post-Christian society. Conventional moralities based upon a largely cultural-bound interpretation of Christianity have broken down and are continuingly challenged. Christian religion is now marginalised and largely confined to the private sphere. However, political developments in the secular world, typified by the developments of non-heterosexual rights, have increasingly drawn competing Christian groups into the public arena. A measure of the increasing secularisation of the UK is that such groups have to adapt themselves to democratic processes and discourse which, to one degree or another, secularises these constituencies themselves as part of a long-term process that now seems irreversible. (Hunt 2010, p. 197)

Many mainstream Christian denominations struggle internally with matters of sexual morality and the legitimacy of 'non-heterosexual' (Hunt 2010) lifestyles. This includes questions of whether LGBTI persons can hold ministerial office in the Church and whether churches can conduct same-sex civil partnerships or marriages. Given the divisions within Christian

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10   This has also been the case globally speaking in shaping the public stance of many conservative churches in Africa towards issues of homosexuality.

traditions themselves – which often extend globally – it is perhaps no sur-prise that changing sexual mores in society as a whole should prove such a stumbling-block for many, more traditionally minded, Christians. I wonder whether this represents another impasse between the seemingly irresistible force of implacable secularism and the immovable object of furious reli-gion. In this instance, it is manifested in this debate between equality pre-mised on liberal models of a neutral, non-partisan, agnostic public realm and sensitivity towards public displays of religious piety. Policy-makers are caught between the seemingly incommensurable hierarchies of equality, and how to adjudicate between rival sensibilities on religion. Furthermore, how are Christians to respond: are the allegations of persecution justified; what is the most appropriate form of Christian public witness in a post-secular society to be?

The 'Micro Public Sphere' of Conservative Religion

When Pope Benedict XVI visited Britain in September 2010, he spoke of a culture of 'aggressive secularism', reiterating his conviction that Christi-anity is an essential part of European civilization and the continuing sig-nificance of religion in public life. 'As we reflect on the sobering lessons of the atheist extremism of the twentieth century, let us never forget how the exclusion of God, religion and virtue from public life leads ultimately to a truncated vision of man and of society and thus to a "reductive vision of the person and his destiny". (Mackay 2010)

Benedict's sentiments have been echoed by other Roman Catholic lead-ers, such as Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop of West-minster, his successor Vincent Nicholls and Cardinal Keith O'Brien, former leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland. Much of the analysis is similar and entails an attack on 'aggressive secularism' (which is seldom substantiated), a defence of the right of the churches to speak out on public issues and the dangers of multiculturalism (in so far as it fails to acknowl-edge the historic legacy of Christianity for British society) as a fragmentary and divisive influence (Addley 2008). They have also attacked the British government's proposals to introduce same-sex marriage. (Under British law, same-sex civil partnerships are already legal, although not in places of worship. If same-sex marriage is permitted, religious leaders fear they

will be required by law to conduct such ceremonies.) O'Brien condemned such trends in uncompromising terms, arguing that marriage reform went against natural law and would signal 'the further degeneration of society into immorality' (Furness 2012).

The public stance of the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church is thus highly critical of what it sees as disastrous liberalizing trends in Western society, linking the decline of Christendom with the loss of significant and binding moral values. This particular combination of that 'declension narrative' with elements of traditional theology is also intriguingly evident in a more disparate network of protest in which a particular blend of social analysis and evangelical doctrine merge.

The term 'micro public sphere' emerges from Jürgen Habermas' work on the development of a distinctive public sphere in Europe from the eighteenth century onwards. In response, commentators such as Nancy Fraser and Craig Calhoun have argued that the public sphere cannot be conceived of as homogenous and allowances must be made for a multiplicity of agents within a differentiated public sphere (McCallum 2011). The concept of a network of inter-connected, sometimes competing, 'micro publics' is thus crucial for understanding the diversity of groups that comprise the public realm: the interaction of the local and national state, for example, or the diversity of civil society and the formation of public opinion. This is nowhere more relevant than a consideration of the mobilization of religious social capital (McCallum 2011 p. 177). In a post-Christian era, when Christianity is no longer the dominant force within the mainstream public sphere, the possibility of religious groups comprising one of a variety of 'micro' spheres allows for a more nuanced understanding of a variety of forms of religious social capital, some of which may represent counter-cultural or minority perspectives. Such micro spheres may be networks of different constituent groups, sometimes transnational; a coalition of interest groups intertwined with a view to exerting wider influence which 'processes, debates, and publicizes issues of mutual concern' (p. 179). McCallum argues that such a concept is especially pertinent to the representation of evangelical public opinion since historically, 'Evangelicals often feel that their concerns and opinions are not adequately represented by the discourse of a larger established church and fear that their distinctive understanding of the Christian message is not fairly heard in the public arena' (p. 184).

While McCallum is concerned for the ways evangelical public opinion has been activated over particular dimensions of Christian–Muslim

dialogue in the UK, the concept also applies to those who are mobilizing around broader questions of religious identity in the face of cultural diversity. It is possible to identify a coalition of interests, ranging from church leaders and academics, to lobbyists and lay people.

Church Leaders

The most prominent torch-bearers for the emergent conservative evangelical lobby have been Anglicans: George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury between 1991 and 2002, and Michael Nazir-Ali, who retired as Bishop of Rochester in 2009. Other prominent figures include John Azumah of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, an evangelical 'think tank' and Patrick Sookhdeo, CEO of the Barnabas Fund, which supports Christians who experience persecution around the world. The title of Nazir-Ali's recent book, *Triple Jeopardy for the West: Aggressive Secularism, Radical Islamism and Multiculturalism* (2012), sums up the essence of their stance against the cultural marginalization of Christianity in the face of 'an aggressive secularism that seeks to undermine the traditional principles because it has its own project to foster' (Beckford 2009). What is at stake, apparently, is a battle for the soul of the nation in the face of attempts to undermine Christianity as the basis of our civilization. As Patrick Sookhdeo argues:

> In the face of aggressive secularism and radical Islam, it is vital that Christians come together and speak up publicly and with confidence in Jesus Christ and the values and vision of society that issue from Him. If we fail to do so, we can expect our nation's Christian foundation to be eroded more quickly and the disappearance of the freedom, justice and compassion that so many take for granted. Our country could look very different, very quickly, if we don't stand up for Jesus Christ in public life. (http://www.notashamed.org.uk/comments-churches.php)

For George Carey, secularism and multiculturalism have 'conspired' (2012, p. 53) to marginalize Christianity in Britain, working to fill the vacuum created by the decline in church attendance. Through a process of rapidly changing social values, including religious and cultural pluralism, changing

family patterns and 'the establishment of homosexuality as a social and sexual *norm*' (p. 44), British culture 'has taken a wrong turn' (p. 151). Paradoxically, legislation to extend greater tolerance towards minorities has resulted in greater intolerance towards those who dissent from the liberal consensus, which for Nazir-Ali and Carey means those who hold 'traditional' values: 'Can they any longer *state traditional Christian views* on the uniqueness of Christ without risking the charge of being prejudiced against those of other faiths? Is it possible to defend Christian marriage without being abused as "homophobic" and worse, arrested for inciting hatred?' (Carey 2012, p. 17, my emphasis).

Legal Cases

Another manifestation of the micro-public of evangelical identity politics involves a number of individuals who have pursued high-profile legal cases that invoke equality and diversity legislation. In January 2013, the European Court of Human Rights (EHRC) released its verdict on the cases of four Christians who had all appealed against earlier verdicts of Employment Tribunals in the UK, all of which to some degree concerned the extent to which they had experienced discrimination at work because of their faith. They were appealing on the basis of Articles 9 and 14 of the European Convention of Human Rights (British Broadcasting Corporation 2013). Of the four appeals, only one – that of Nadia Eweida – was upheld. Ms Eweida, a check-in clerk for British Airways, was sent home in October 2006 after being told that her necklace cross contravened uniform regulations. BA subsequently changed the policy in 2007, but on returning to work Ms Eweida sued on the grounds of religious discrimination. She lost her case at the Employment Appeal Tribunal and the Court of Appeal, but EHRC found in her favour on the grounds that no harm was done to BA by allowing staff to wear a cross.

The other appellants all lost their cases: Lillian Ladele, a Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths for Islington Borough Council in London, took her employers to court on the grounds that they were subjecting her to direct and indirect discrimination by requiring her to conduct same-sex civil partnerships, in contravention of her conservative evangelical Christian beliefs. The Employment Tribunal found in her favour, on the

grounds of harassment in terms of religion or belief, as well as direct and indirect discrimination (Malik 2011, p. 30). This decision was overturned by the Court of Appeal, on the basis that due accommodation was available, and that Ladele could have 'contracted out' of her obligations. In a similar case to that of Ms Eweida, Shirley Chaplin, a nurse employed by the Royal Devon and Exeter Foundation National Health Service Trust, refused a request from her employer to conceal her cross beneath her uniform on grounds of health and safety. This was upheld by the EHRC. Gary McFarlane, a counsellor with the national relationship counselling charity Relate, was dismissed in 2008 for refusing to offer sex therapy guidance to same-sex couples. His views emerged in the context of a staff training event, where he stated that his Christian beliefs would not permit him to promote gay sexual activity.

At the appeals stage, and at the hearings before the European Court, the judgements reflected considerations of whether employers had attempted to reach 'reasonable accommodation' with the appellants. The verdicts also reflected the various courts' view that discrimination directly on the grounds of religious conviction was difficult to prove, given that Christians themselves vary to the extent to which aspects of external observance are a compulsory facet of their core convictions. Even in the case of Ms Eweida, the issue turned on the question of whether it was a mandatory requirement for Christians to wear a cross. Ms Eweida's counsel was unable to produce any witnesses prepared to argue that such a practice was any more than a personal preference, or that her Christian faith, no matter how profound, required it. The Tribunal also took testimonies from other practising Christians, who all affirmed – as did the claimant herself – that they did not consider visible display of the cross to be mandatory. The evidence from the British Airways Christian Fellowship put it this way:

> We consider the campaigns instigated by some Christians and churches to be disproportionate and do not conform to the principles of grace found in the Kingdom of God. It is the way of the cross, not the wearing of it, that should determine our behaviour.

> We would hold that, in Christianity, outward signs of a cross are simply an exterior representation of what should be in the heart. Outward physical expressions are not in themselves essential to demonstrate inner faith. http://www.out-law.com/page-10758 [11 June 2012]

James Eadie QC, defending at the ECHR hearing, argued that the law could not force employers to alter terms and conditions to accommodate employees' religious practices unless the burden of proof indicated otherwise. 'Individuals should be free to manifest their religion or belief unless a restriction can be justified. That does not mean, however, that states should require employers to recognize an enforceable right of employees to practise their religion or beliefs at work' (Judd 2012). Ultimately, however, the European Court verdict was not based on the question of whether it was a requirement of Christian commitment to wear a cross, merely whether British Airways had acted unreasonably in over-ruling Ms Eweida's preferences.

In some instances, Christian professionals have been censured by their own professional associations. A practising psychotherapist, Lesley Pilkington, was the subject of a ruling in January 2011 by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy that she had 'failed to exercise reasonable skill and care and was thus negligent' (Davies 2012). This followed a consultation with an investigative journalist, posing as a Christian seeking treatment for same-sex attraction. The ruling emphasized that this was not a judgement upon Mrs Pilkington's religious beliefs, but a matter of her having recommended a certain course of treatment, based, in the adjudicators' view, on over-hasty conclusions regarding her client's situation and the appropriateness of so-called 'reparative therapy' to rid him of his unwanted feelings.

Lobbyists and Campaigners

Such cases have been well-backed by independently funded conservative Christian groups that hire Christian lawyers on a pro bono basis. The main sponsoring body is Christian Concern, which used to be called Christian Concern for Our Nation, founded in 2004 by an organization called the Lawyers' Christian Fellowship (http://www.christianconcern.com). Christian Concern promotes campaigns such as 'Not Ashamed', which urges its supporters to wear crosses and other Christian symbols visibly in solidarity with those disciplined by employers for doing so. It also encourages evangelical Christians to stand up and speak out for their faith and values, and carries endorsements from Christian leaders, local churches and campaigners (http://www.notashamed.org.uk/). Its CEO is Andrea Minichiello Williams.

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Christian Concern also has links to the Conservative Christian Fellowship, a parliamentary group which claims to represent evangelical Christians in politics. One of its members, Nadine Dorries MP, sponsored a private members' bill in May 2008 to restrict the upper limit for legal abortions under the 1967 Abortion Act from 24 weeks to 20, a campaign managed on her behalf by Williams and CCFN (Hundal 2010).

Williams also heads CCFN's sister organization, the Christian Legal Centre, which has supported a number of individuals involved in legal cases claiming religious discrimination, and is linked through her to other campaigns against embryology research, access to abortion, same-sex partnerships and anti-discrimination legislation (Adams 2010; Hundal 2010; Modell 2008).

The Christian Institute ('Christian influence in a secular world') campaigns against permissive legislation on matters such as abortion, euthanasia and gay rights. It has instigated a number of campaigns opposing pieces of legislation to end discrimination against LGBTI persons, including rights of adoption and the equalization of the age of consent. It is funding the legal costs of Lillian Ladele and Peter and Hazelmary Bull, two Christian hoteliers who were prosecuted for refusing to let a double bedroom to a gay couple (Adams 2010).

One of the Christian Institute's publications, entitled *Religious Liberty in the Workplace: a Guide for Christian Employees* (Jones 2008, p.3), asks:

- Can I send Christmas cards to my colleagues?
- Should I be allowed time off because of Church Services/Christmas/ Easter?
- Can I wear a cross?
- Can I share my faith in the workplace?
- Can I give a Christian opinion on controversial topics?

The Christian Action Research and Education group began in 1971 as the Nationwide Festival of Light. CARE's eight-point doctrinal basis reflects classic evangelical doctrine, from the sovereignty of God, to the fallenness and universal sinfulness of humanity, to substitutionary atonement.

- *Our mission: to declare Christian truth and demonstrate Christ's compassion in society.*

Our goals:
- Promote Christian action, research and education to support children, single people, marriage and family life effectively.
- Encourage Christians to pray for society and to recognize the dignity and worth of every individual person from fertilization to life's natural end.
- Assist Christians to understand social and moral issues in public policy, education and the community.
- Challenge Christians to become actively involved in the democratic process, to be effective salt and light where there is a need for truth and justice.
- Equip Christians to show the love of Christ in their communities through practical caring. (http://www.care.org.uk/about/who-we-are)

The Discourse of the Evangelical Micro Sphere

These individuals and groups represent a loose coalition which is characterized by some cross-fertilization of personnel but, more significantly, shares a common language or 'discourse'. The concept of discourse, best associated with the work of Michel Foucault, is a useful theoretical framework with which to elaborate this, since it is effectively an analysis of the way language works to create a world of meaning that elicits in its audience a certain set of attitudes and responses. Discourse thus serves to order the world in particular ways that serve to convince by their seeming naturalism: in establishing the impeachability of expertise, in demarcating the boundary between truth and falsehood, normality and deviance. Inherent in any analysis of discourse are the seeds of its exposure as contingent and unstable: 'how that-which-is has not always been' (Foucault 1983, p. 206). Approaching evangelical identity politics as a discursive phenomenon, therefore, constituted through particular linguistic tropes, may enable us to examine more closely the theological world-view that is constructed and rendered axiomatic as a result.

First, we have the trope of 'aggressive' secularism, polarization and hostility: 'At times it seems a "*crusade*" is being waged by the *militant wing* of secularism to eradicate religion in general – and Christianity in particular – from any role in public life' (Carey 2012, p. 9, my emphasis). Michael

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Nazir-Ali articulates the same threat and, like Pope Benedict, links the rise of secularism – aggressive or otherwise – with the erosion of an historic Christian legacy. The Christian Institute's website couches it in highly adversarial terms:

> Never have there been more 'equality and diversity' laws. Yet the marginalization faced by Christians is increasing at an alarming rate. In many instances equality and diversity laws are actually being used as a *sword* to *attack* Christians rather than a shield to protect them. (Christian Institute 2009, p. 71, my emphasis).

Second, the vision of Christianity under attack is coupled with a narrative of persecution. Writing about the Christians who have gone to law against their employers, George Carey argues that 'it is entirely natural for them to feel that their experience is one of "persecution"' (Carey 2012, p. 16). He admits to a deep sense of unease at the 'deep malaise' regarding religion in public life. While he acknowledges that it is probably inappropriate to use terms like 'persecution' to describe what is happening, and that Christians should 'downplay the language of spiritual warfare' (p. 123), some of his own language is intemperate: employers are '*hostile* to faith claims' (p. 121); Christians who express traditional values 'have now reached the status of *social pariahs*' (p. 109). His intention is 'to salute the few brave Christian souls who have had the courage to stand up against *bullying tactics* and, as a result, have lost employment. But what they have lost exactly is even more precious than jobs – they are the *victims of injustice*, for to hold to principles central to biblical Christianity is now being increasingly seen as unacceptable' (Carey 2012, p. 9).

On one level, this prompts a renewed commitment to the public nature of Christian witness on Carey's part:

> For Christians the whole of life is indivisible. We cannot retreat to a privatized ghetto because the gospel concerns the whole of life. There is no 'privatized' morality because the whole of life is based on morality. Faith is necessarily public. The concerns of the Bible and theology through the ages have always been public and political . . . Believers cannot simply divest themselves of their faith when they enter politics or engage in public debate. (Carey 2012, p. 78)

Filtered through a conservative evangelical sensibility, however, this becomes an act of personal witness to an objective, God-given moral order that has been fatally disrupted. In the face of such 'persecution', Christians cannot remain silent; so the role of the Christian in public life in the face of the erosion of their rights and freedoms becomes essentially a moral 'crusade', premised on the objective truth of humanity's sinfulness and the saving work of Christ crucified:

> The Christian Institute wants to help Christians answer the challenges of living in an increasingly secular society. We want to help Christians understand and respond to the major moral and ethical issues of the day. The work of the Institute supports Christians in *speaking up for what they believe.*

> There is a great deal of secular research which shows the consequences of rejecting God's moral law. This ought not to be a surprise. The God who created this world knows what is best for this world. His laws are *for everybody's good at all times.* Therefore, The Christian Institute highlights the most useful research – pointing people to the wisdom of God's law.

> In a democracy we must argue the Christian case publicly. Our nation's problems are not primarily political or economic. They are *moral and spiritual.* Economic and political issues are very important and it is right for Christians to be involved in these areas. But how can our nation flourish when we are ignoring the moral basics? For too long Christians have failed to speak out. We must stand up for what we believe. (Christian Institute 2007, my emphasis).

In this context, the wearing of a cross (one of the acts which has brought some individuals into conflict with the law) is thus not simply a mark of identity but an act of evangelism:

> It may be important for an employer to understand that, for a Christian, whilst an outward expression of their faith through specific clothing or jewellery may not be prescribed in the Bible, it is a tenet of their Christian faith to share that faith with others. They may choose to do this by wearing certain jewellery, publicly displaying to their colleagues the convictions they hold . . . If the employer's stance is that no such expressions are permitted then it is important that they understand the

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disproportionate impact this will have upon Christians who may feel that it is their duty to bear Christian witness. (Christian Institute 2007)

Other studies of contemporary evangelical discourse reveal similar tropes. Anna Strhan's research tests out the opinions of ordinary members of a large metropolitan Anglican evangelical church in London and the extent to which they represent what she terms an 'instauration of secularism' (Strhan 2012, p. 200) or the representation of a general argument (to do with the encroachments of secularism in society) through concrete examples, such as personal anecdotes or media reports. By combinations of linguistic markers – secularism is always 'aggressive', Islam is always 'militant', liberalism is covertly 'totalitarian' and 'intolerant' – a Foucauldian episteme is constructed whereby such trends are inherently – ontologically – antipathetic to evangelicals' ability to live their faith freely and authentically. Strhan describes a cycle of discourse, which works as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy: once the concept of intolerant, anti-Christian secularism begins to circulate, it gathers to it concrete examples, which generate a climate of expectation – what Bivins in another context (2007) describes as a culture of fear – which then serves to reinforce the original point of view. (Strhan 2012, pp. 213–14). 'Secularism' is only ever experienced – and named – as antipathetic to genuine Christian identity, thus exercising a powerful *agency* that goes beyond words or concepts, consolidating into 'modes of relationship and constellations of practices' (p. 213) that definitively shape the everyday sensibilities of church members.

Similarly, in her analysis of the New Christian Right in the US Sara Diamond posits a strong link between the rhetoric of its proponents and its ability to campaign effectively at the grass-roots. Crucial to their effectiveness in mobilizing support is what Diamond terms 'framing processes', or the ability to construct a discourse which creates a convincing narrative of shared grievances against prevailing cultural and political norms, and a corresponding agenda for change (Diamond 1998).

Evangelical Identity Politics

Essentially, then, what is at stake are not the facts of the matter, but the construction of a particular narrative or discourse of suffering in the face of perceived persecution that serves to reinforce a particular kind of

evangelical identity. In fact, evangelicalism has always demonstrated a consistently ambivalent attitude toward its surrounding culture (Dyrness 2007, p. 145). Is it appropriate, or useful, to think of this phenomenon in terms of 'identity politics'?

The terminology of 'identity politics' emerged out of the progressive social movements of the 1960s and 1970s as a result of processes of consciousness-raising and campaigning to end exclusion, as well as the assertion of rights and recognition based on the experience of collective as well as individual subjectivity. It began to emerge in the 1970s as part of movements for minority recognition and empowerment, such as feminism, civil rights and (as it was known) 'gay liberation'. Rather than universal or generic rights, identity politics claims a political agency on the basis of difference and specificity. Its model of political mobilization is based not only on abolishing material injustices, such as economic inequalities or legal discrimination, but on articulating a distinctive set of political self-interests and alignments that went unacknowledged by liberal political understandings of the 'neutral' citizen.

As Nancy Fraser argues, alongside the traditional 'politics of redistribution', organized possibly alongside socio-economic factors such as income and equality of opportunity, this is a new phenomenon, embodying what she calls the 'politics of recognition' (1996). They correspond, broadly, to divisions within second-wave feminism between those wishing to acknowledge universalist feminist politics, or women's 'equality' with men and differentialist perspectives, wishing to celebrate women's distinctiveness from men. Such movements seek to give visibility and political agency to groups who regard the recognition of difference – expressed, perhaps in the recovery or creation of a particular culture, such as African–American women's religious and literary heritages – as an integral part of, rather than an impediment to, political empowerment. A feeling of exclusion and difference from the cultural 'mainstream' thus becomes both the source of resistance and reconstruction. Despite accusations of essentialism and the dangers of fragmenting any coalitions of progressive politics (p. 10), identity politics represents a powerful blend of the personal and the political, of regarding personal experience as the well-spring from which a more public political set of convictions can arise.

Identity politics generally connotes progressive campaigns towards a more inclusive and less monochrome account of citizenship and the body politic, although it can be claimed by those wishing to reassert a more reactionary account of political allegiance. Hence, recent years have seen

the rise of far-right political movements and parties, especially in Europe, appealing to forms of ethnic superiority and White nationalism. In the face of mass immigration and multi-cultural or integrationist policies, such groups portray migrants as 'engulfing' indigenous populations, threatening established ways of life, undermining job prospects or claiming privileges perceived as not available to the host community. While resistance to incomers – and particularly perceptions of economic, religious and cultural threat – is not new, especially among communities already under pressure, the rhetoric of identity politics becomes a new vehicle of defensive and exclusive rejection of pluralism.

As George Lipsitz comments in relation to White identity in reaction to African–American civil rights, 'successful political coalitions serving dominant political interests have often relied on exclusionary concepts of Whiteness to fuse unity among otherwise antagonistic individuals and groups' (1995, p. 370). Lipsitz's point is partly that, despite itself being highly ethnically diverse, 'White' America had to find various political, scientific and cultural reference-points – from segregation, eugenics and Western movies – from which to articulate a narrative of White superiority and solidarity. Rather than a means of securing new minorities a space within a pluralist public realm, reactionary identity politics becomes a means of inverting the values of multiculturalism and equal rights back on themselves. Race, gender, sexual orientation and other markers of identity can then be viewed belligerently as themselves assertions of bias or discrimination, rather than, as originally deployed, the sources of pride and social empowerment.

There are certainly affinities here with the way in which the New Christian Right emerged in the 1980s as a reaction to many of the liberal political movements of earlier decades, and the way in which these protagonists found it expedient to talk of 'culture wars' and to frame a discourse of struggle between 'traditional' American values and progressive forces as an epic battle for the nation's soul. This was not a polarization of the United States along traditional lines of class, race or ethnicity or region, but along an ideological divide driven by a particular conservative evangelical world-view.

However, such an analysis can be quickly refuted by considering what in anti-racist and progressive masculinist studies has sometimes been termed a 'false parallelism' (Schwalbe 1996; Hearn 2004). In responding to campaigns for equality of one group, another group claims a (spurious) equality

of disadvantage; so white people claim a parallel experience of racism and claim they have been victimized by affirmative action policies; or men report feelings of disadvantage when discouraged from pursuing careers in female dominated fields. Such charges of parallel or equivalent discrimination are deemed false, however, because they fail to take the structural, material and systematic nature of discrimination against Black and ethnic minority people, women or LGBTI individuals into account. In assuming that all injustices are equivalent to one another, it neglects any factors such as inequalities of power or material inequity, and opts for an individualistic rather than structural–systemic analysis.

> The logic of individualism has structured the approach to multiculturalism in many ways. The call for tolerance of difference is framed in terms of respect for individual characteristics and attitudes; group differences are conceived categorically and not relationally, as distinct entities rather than interconnected structures or systems created through repeated processes of the enunciation of difference. (Scott 1992, p. 17)

Drawing false parallels is a way of writing history as a kind of zero-sum game in which the gains of minority traditions must somehow inevitably mean the diminishment or disenfranchisement of the privileged 'majority'. Like Samuel Huntington's thesis purporting a 'Clash of Civilizations', there is a danger that this becomes a portrayal of cultural pluralism as a threatening incursion of difference which inevitably descends into conflict and a struggle for survival.

Evangelical Identity Politics in Historical Perspective

I have identified some of the hallmarks of contemporary evangelical identity politics as they manifest themselves in a post-secular context. These include the importance of conscience and conviction, even to the point of persecution, as well as a tendency to polarize the things of 'Christ' and the ways of 'culture' and the tendency to regard social transformation as a moral crusade. However, these traits also have continuity with an historic evangelical world-view, which has its roots in the European Reformation and in the revival and missionary movements of Europe and North

America in the eighteenth century. In his history of evangelicalism, David Bebbington locates the origins of the movement as follows: 'Evangelical religion is a popular Protestant movement that has existed in Britain since the 1730s . . . evangelicalism was a new phenomenon of the eighteenth century' (1989, p. 1). It emerged out of the 'cross-pollinating revivalistic and evangelistic atmosphere' prevailing in the 1730s across Europe, Britain and North America.

While its main genesis was in the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century, there is a continuity from the fourteenth-century legacy of John Wyclif, the Bible translators and the Reformation, with their emphasis on the preaching of the gospel, personal conscience and the authority of the Bible. Martin Luther's influence was crucial, with his emphasis on the mediation of grace through Word of God and personal relationship with the Saviour, rather than authority of Church; of justification by faith; and the essentially experiential character of religion, albeit tested through evidence.

From the Reformation, evangelicalism drew a tripartite set of influences: Luther, who located the transformative power of the gospel primarily in the human heart and individual conscience, Calvin, who believed that the word of God spoke to structures and institutions as well as individuals, and the Anabaptists, who taught that commitment to Christ entailed a decisive eschewal of worldly power. All shared the iconoclasm of the Reformation which taught that temporal powers and institutions were incapable of revealing the saving work of Christ, and that the people of God were to be shaped by the word of God as set forth in Scripture, and not reason or natural law.

In reaction to the stress on reason among Enlightenment philosophers, evangelicalism evolved as a religion of the heart, expressed in personal piety and the elevation of feeling, evident in the writings of Wesley, Edwards and Schleiermacher. Yet it shares with Enlightenment philosophy (especially Romanticism) a mistrust of authoritarian dogma at the expense of inductive, evidential truth (D. Smith 1998). Normally, Enlightenment rationality is seen as the antithesis of evangelicalism, with its Deist tendencies, an emphasis on empiricism and reason rather than experience, its opposition to revealed religion and its encouragement of textual and historical criticism of the Bible. However, early evangelicals such as John Wesley always believed reason and revelation went together. There was in fact a strong interest on empiricism and science among evangelicals, with emphasis

on 'experimental religion' as something that must be verified by personal experience rather than obedience to convention or tradition. Those empiricist tendencies are apparent in evangelicalism's view of the Bible as affording evidence of faith and corresponding to an objective, verifiable truth. However counter-intuitive it may seem, literalism towards the Bible was an outworking of modernity, with its rationality and empiricism. While early evangelicals dwelt on the homiletic and devotional uses of Scripture, the emergence of higher criticism in the early nineteenth century provoked a reaction which proclaimed the inerrancy and divine inspiration of the Bible. Such literalism was facilitated by a particular kind of pragmatism, especially strong in the United States, which argued that God had placed evidence within Scripture in such a way that human reason could apprehend it, much in the way that scientists argued that empirical investigation of nature was accessible to human understanding.

The nineteenth century saw the fragmentation of evangelicalism and increasing pressure from some quarters to establish a doctrinal test to establish a clear line between evangelicals and non-evangelicals. As historians such as Bebbington and David Smith record, there appeared a tension within the evangelical movement after around 1790 between those stressing ecclesiastical order – and priority of Anglican ecclesiology – and those seeking new avenues of evangelism beyond Established structures. Evangelicalism gradually became more respectable within the Church of England and its membership shifted from being predominantly working class in favour of more educated, wealthy groups. In order to do that, preachers had to remove fear that it was socially revolutionary and that spiritual levelling might imply social levelling. Wilberforce's *Practical View* (1797) argued that religion did make the privations of poverty more palatable to the lower orders. Methodists were less comfortable with this, however, and Methodist preaching and evangelism acknowledged the changing social circumstances of industrial society, and argued for the active evangelization of emergent working classes through the adoption of innovative patterns of preaching, worship, spirituality and church organization.

David Smith's thesis is that during the nineteenth century, evangelicalism lost sight of its original social teaching, becoming inappropriately focused on personal conversion and a spiritualized gospel, at the expense of issues of corporate, structural justice. 'The call to personal spirituality eclipsed any wider responsibility to public life, beyond evangelization' (Dyrness 2007, p. 150). There was increasing emphasis on the defence of

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the inerrancy of Scripture in face of emerging biblical scholarship in the early nineteenth century. Similarly, in social teaching, 'Optimistic post-millennialism now gave way to a new eschatology involving a far more apocalyptic view of history' (C. Smith 1998, p. 27). Rather than viewing the world as 'the theatre within which the redemptive purposes of Christ were to be increasingly realized and manifested', evangelicals saw 'dark, demonic powers at work in history and if Christ's ultimate triumph were to be assured, then it had better be relocated *outside* this world' (p. 28).

Its initial energy – in Bebbington's terms, its activism – was 'world-transformative' (C. Smith 1998, p. ix), which was not limited only to personal salvation, but extended to the restoration of God's dominion throughout all creation. Sadly, argues Smith, this tradition gradually became marginalized, and from the nineteenth century onwards, and culminating in the emergence of the New Christian Right in the 1970s in the United States, a conservative, rather than radical, evangelicalism, has come to dominate.

While evangelicals played a leading role in social reform in the nineteenth century, by the early twentieth century the trend was much more towards a withdrawal from social and cultural engagement, on the defensive in the face of higher criticism, Darwinism and industrialization. The twentieth century saw a greater polarization between the options of 'accommodation to the trends of secular society or resistance to them' (Bebbington 1989, p. 227). The former were represented by works such as T. Guy Rogers' *Liberal Evangelicalism* (1923), which acknowledged the impact of modernist thought and the extent to which 'secular' reason could offer new sources of revelation. 'For them the refashioning of the tradition was imperative if it was to survive and stand a chance of claiming the allegiance of thinking young people in the twentieth century' (C. Smith 1998, p. 80). In the US, the latter were epitomized by Fundamentalists, setting their faces against modern culture in all its forms.

There was, therefore, a growing division between conservative and liberal evangelicals by the 1920s. In the US, this was exemplified by disputes between Fundamentalists and Modernists, mainly on the question of the inerrancy of the Bible. Gradually, as Bebbington puts it, there was 'a parting of the ways', between 'those who gave a discriminating welcome to new agencies of popular culture and those who viewed them with horror' (1989, p. 209).

Up to the 1960s, American evangelicals with their populist and ameliorative views, were as likely to be Democrats as Republicans. After that,

however, evangelical political allegiance shifted radically to the right, although the common features of activism, Biblicism and populism (with increasing attention to the use of cutting-edge communications and campaigning techniques) endured. Evangelicals were drawn towards Republican values in so far as they were regarded as upholding small-town, traditional ways of life against cosmopolitan, centralized politics. Fundamentalists and Pentecostals constituted the core of the re-emergent Christian Right of the 1980s. They were not part of the political or cultural mainstream, but felt disenfranchised by the growing liberalism of America during the 1960s and 1970s. In the mid-1970s, a number of organizations were founded that articulated religious support for conservative political causes, with the explicit intention of training and organizing evangelical Christians as effective lobbyists and campaigners in mainstream politics: Focus on the Family (1977); Christian Voice (1974) and the Moral Majority (1979). Such political activity is regarded as having played a particularly influential role in the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, whose administration increasingly reflected the sensibilities of its conservative evangelical constituency on matters such as abortion, foreign policy, prayer in schools and the teaching of creationism. Despite the election of the Clinton administration, this momentum and associated organizational funding and infrastructure continued through the 1990s. Various organizations broadened the traditional concerns of the Christian Right to promote conservative approaches to matters such as healthcare, economics, education and criminal justice.

The Christian Right has been marked by its dense network of local and national organizations, and especially by its adept use of broadcast media. It has adopted many of the strategies of the civil rights movement of the 1960s in its emphasis on voter registration and education, through organizations such as the Christian Coalition (founded 1992), the Family Research Council and the Home School Legal Defense Association. Since Roe vs Wade (1973), the Christian Right has intervened actively in anti-abortion campaigns, and its stance on medical and reproductive issues has more recently encompassed opposition to stem-cell research and euthanasia.

This has proved highly successful in framing a political discourse and building a comprehensive network of lobbies, organizations and campaigns. Putnam's analysis of religion as rich in social capital – the ability to mobilize human resources, forge social networks and sustain alliances – is pertinent here. But evangelicalism's other emphases on clear belief, personal conviction, proselytizing and biblical certainty also constitute a

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strong 'elective affinity' with political activism: 'Evangelicals are encouraged to put aside their shyness when approaching newcomers with controversial ideas, and the missionary mindset encourages an attitude of tenacity in waiting for the fruits of one's labor to pay off' (Diamond 1998, p. 9).

Evangelical World-Views

> Evangelicals care deeply about the state of culture: they seek its redemption. But overall Evangelicals address culture: they do not listen to it. (Dyrness 2007, p. 157)

Bivins argues that the defining paradigm of evangelical engagement with culture is one of a 'declension narrative', which equates contemporary social ills with a nation's abandonment of Christian – defined as traditional, conservative moral – values. It is premised on 'a need for the demonic . . . other whose presence facilitates the assertion of the orthodox self' (2007, p. 100). Elements of this attitude can be seen in the pronouncements of the individuals and organizations, surveyed earlier, who lament the contemporary 'persecution' of Christianity. Is evangelical identity premised, therefore, on a need to maintain strict boundaries against prevailing culture? This is part of the construction of their identities, and 'serves as an ongoing strategy by which conservative religious groups shape their subcultures and forge the boundaries of their identity . . . That is, they thrive by keeping modernity out' (Guest 2007, pp. 7–8). There has always been a thread of resistance to the worldliness of prevailing culture within conservative evangelicalism, 'whose doctrinally conservative, vehemently defended beliefs are constructed in opposition to a vision of western culture as morally and spiritually bankrupt' (Guest 2007, p. 3).

There are a number of reasons for this ambivalence, all deeply rooted in the theology of evangelicalism. Historically, there was the influence of Romanticism – 'to flee the everyday world of strife in order to discover the secret of harmony' (Bebbington 1989, p. 170). The 1870s onwards saw ascendancy of holiness teaching, or sanctification by faith. 'The holiness movement ushered in a new phase in Evangelical history' (p. 179). Holiness,

or the distinctive life of discipleship, resulted from conversion but was the visible outworking of a spiritual power of God in human affairs. 'Holiness was so much an internal matter of personal consciousness, a trysting of the elevated soul with its God, that the practicalities of everyday living were generally passed over in silence' (p. 175).

In his history of evangelicalism in Britain, David Bebbington has advanced a 'quadrilateral' of defining and foundational traits, which has occupied centre stage in the literature ever since.[11] Each of these four themes informs the sensibilities that are shaping contemporary evangelical identity politics. First, Bebbington identifies *conversionism*, or 'the belief that lives need to be changed' (1989, p. 3). An emphasis on a religion of the heart has always been central to evangelicalism: a faith not bound by the cool empiricism of reason but warmed by the currents of feeling, of dependence, forgiveness of sins and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The consecrated self was the focus of the redemptive work of Christ, and the immediacy of experience and the life-changing crisis of conversion became touchstones for the walk of faith. If social reform was to happen, it emanated from this energy of 'the ravished individual as agent of change and focus of creativity' (Dyrness 2007, p. 149). Conversion as psychological release and sanction for withdrawal from social engagement leads not to conversion of culture but the greater assimilation of gospel with culture – by default. For many critics, then, contemporary evangelicalism has allowed its message to be privatized and domesticated, 'leaving it unable to recognize the extent to which it has become ensnared in the worship of the idols which dominate western culture, is itself in need of radical conversion' (C. Smith 1998, p. 124). That is to renege on the traditional evangelical commission by failing to take a world-transforming route in relation to surrounding culture.

In other respects, however, contemporary evangelical identity politics retains its strong sense of a mission to a failed culture in need of conversion, accompanied by adopting a highly polarized understanding of the gospel under attack. Michael Nazir-Ali reprises the discourse of 'aggressive secularism' thus:

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11 Noll offers as a version of Bebbington's quadrilateral the principles of activism, intuition, populism and biblicism (1994, p. 8). Mathew Guest defines Protestant evangelicalism in terms of the 'centrality of scripture, strict moral codes and a passion for the conversion of others' (2007, p. 1).

There are a number of dangers that are facing the Western world. We are seeing more and more examples of aggressive secularism not only in the press but actually in legislation where Christian conscience, for instance, is not being adequately recognised . . . I think what I'm after in the end is a renewal of the Judaeo-Christian tradition in the West. Not just in terms of people's personal faith. . . but in terms of public policy and in how the West sees its destiny. (http://www.christianconcern. com/our-concerns/bishop-michael-nazir-ali-launches-latest-book)

This leads into Bebbington's second motif, that of *activism*, or the expression of the gospel through personal evangelism and philanthropy. In ecclesiastical terms, it generated a renewal of the pastoral ministry, with its attention to preaching God's word, proselytization and good works, although the Lutheran themes of the priesthood of all believers and justification by faith served to energize an active laity, which continues within evangelicalism of all kinds to this day. The influence of Calvinism on evangelicals meant there was an implicit understanding of the significance of the secular calling of the believer; this also influenced the Holiness tradition, in which the distinctive behaviour and identity of the Christian comprised a worldly witness to the gospel.

Yet as all historians of evangelicalism agree, 'activism' extended far beyond personal evangelization or individual piety to embrace programmes of social reform and political vocation. While this translated powerfully into the public domain, however, there was a sense in which it remained a strongly moral imperative, which is present in much of the identity politics today. Political intervention is powerfully motivated by a concern to eradicate sin, interpreted as anything that prevented a person hearing the gospel. 'One consequence [of such hostility to sin] was that Evangelicals were committed to a negative policy of reform. Their proposals were regularly for the elimination of what was wrong, not for the achievement of some alternative goal . . . Evangelical reform movements were designed to condemn features of existing policy' (Bebbington 1989, p. 135).

This energy of moral conviction translated into social activism is apparent in Sara Diamond's study of the grass-roots political organizing of the new Christian Right. It is solidly rooted in the grass-roots of conservative evangelical Christianity and exercises its influence in the activism of publishing and broadcasting, home schooling movements, research and legal

reform. Behind that, however, is a strong theological conviction about the conversion of the world in line with biblical values. 'The motivation is to preach the Gospel and save souls, but also, with equal urgency, to remake contemporary moral culture in the image of Christian scripture,' with the aim of securing 'dominion over secular society' (Diamond 1998, p. 1). While political and legal measures may be means to an end, the vision of change is at heart one of – characteristically evangelical – moral transformation: 'best understood as a series of efforts by a religiously inspired political force to make the rest of society conform to its ideas of correct belief and behaviour' (Diamond 1998, p. 3).

Third, there is biblicism, a particular devotion to the Bible as divinely inspired. The Bible is central to evangelicals' theology: as a source of doctrine, and to their practice, in terms of daily reading, devotion, corporate study and preaching as scriptural exegesis and exposition. The stress on the primary authority of the Bible had been a feature of Protestant faith since the Reformation and contrasted with those who stressed authority of Church tradition, magisterium or reason. All this proceeds from *sola Scriptura* and a conviction that the Bible is uniquely divinely inspired and authoritative: 'there is strong, confident, uniform Evangelical consensus on the inspiration, authority, uniqueness, and sufficiency of Scripture, as well as on its complete trustworthiness in matters of Christian faith and practice' (Larsen 2007, p. 8). The publicity of the Christian Institute strongly reflects such a biblical perspective:

> *We are committed to the truths of historic, biblical Christianity including* . . . The inspiration of the Holy Scripture in its entirety by God's Spirit through the human authors, and its revelation of God's truth to humanity. The Bible is without error not only when it speaks of salvation, its own origins, values, and religious matters, but it is also without error when it speaks of history and the cosmos. Christians must, therefore, submit to its supreme authority, both individually and corporately, in every matter of belief and conduct. (Christian Institute 2012)

Finally, Bebbington highlights *crucicentrism*, stressing reconciliation with God through substitutionary atonement of Christ's crucifixion. Justification or forgiveness of sins takes place through the death of Christ, who is

understood to stand in for sinful humanity in appeasing the anger of God. At the heart of the evangelical gospel is that human beings, once sinful, have been forgiven and reconciled through the atoning work of Christ on the cross, which locates the individual believer in an autobiographical narrative of 'ruin, redemption and regeneration' (Bebbington 1989, p. 3). Evangelicalism thus stresses the renewal of fallen human nature through acceptance of Christ as personal Saviour and a strong doctrine of justi-fication by faith, but also shapes a theologically informed world-view of original sin, the degenerate nature of a fallen world and the necessity of personal (and social) renewal. As Bivins argues, then, conservative evan-gelical politics is an outworking of their theology, their mobilization a call to defend divinely revealed truths and an objective moral order as set down in the enduring authority of Scripture (2007, p. 92). How far does the con-struction of such a discourse explain the process by which another brand of political Christianity, the New Christian Right in the United States, was constructed in the 1980s? There are certainly common factors – a sense of alienation and disenfranchisement from what were regarded as invidious cultural trends; a felt need to challenge the political direction of a nation, but cast in terms of a moral campaign; a call to activism that mapped per-fectly onto an evangelical sensibility forged from the theological principles of personal conversion and transformation – that took the private convic-tions of evangelicalism and transposed them into the public realm.

The new Christian Right in the US has proved remarkably effective both at what Jason Bivins terms a 'political pedagogy': of constructing a world-view (in Bivins's view, one of fear of the Other) and channelling this into sustainable forms of public activism and political rhetoric. Based on a narrative of cultural decline and imminent threat, or 'declension narra-tive', which blends classic theological motifs of 'a stark moral universe, an enduring sense of embattlement, and a highly politicized religiosity' (p. 93), Evangelicalism is adroitly applied into creating a discourse of traditional values under siege and the urgency of moral and social redemption. Once again, therefore, we can see a dualist world-view in which the staple val-ues of traditional Christianity are ranged against a degenerate culture, and from which a political manifesto, largely based around reversing liberal or progressive social reforms, is articulated. There is an objective moral order (sanctioned by God) to which all society must conform.

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However, despite some successes within the American political system, in assessing the long-term sustainability of the New Christian Right and its political ambitions, many commentators argue that the very theological principles that provide its energy also inhibit it from moving from the margins into the mainstream – both ideologically and strategically. They are, essentially caught on the horns of the Rawlsian dilemma: what happens if they attempt to deploy religious reasoning in a secular context? Klemp's study (2007) of one campaign group, Focus on the Family, suggests that in the face of the Rawlsian 'firewall' forbidding explicit religious reasoning in the public domain, they are confronted with a crucial choice. They can 'either use esoteric religious reasons in public debates – thereby giving up all hope of mainstream influence – or they can dilute their religious message as a strategic means to forming a broader, more politically powerful, coalition' (p. 523). Yet the language involved has to be different, with one set of rhetoric directed at the faithful, and another for its public outreach. It means, however, that the wider public is not offered a fully Christian rationale; and Klemp deplores the double standard of its 'use of . . . liberal forms of discourse to advance religious and illiberal political ends' (2007, pp. 539–40).

Against all the convictions of the New Christian Right not to compromise their core principles in facing up to a degenerate public square, then, Focus on the Family is faced with no alternative but to allow itself to be accommodated to liberal democratic mores. While some Christian Right insiders can rationalize such 'camouflaging' (Klemp, 2007, p. 539), the result is the maintenance of two separate discourses, internal and external, with the latter severely attenuated and – if the sleight of hand is spotted – discredited. Yet it nevertheless represents not the abolition (through conversion) of the dualism between Christ and culture for which, ultimately, the New Christian Right is working, but its very reinforcement.

Similarly, the theological exclusivism that constitutes the firm foundation on which conservative evangelicals' political activism is founded becomes a liability when searching for campaign allies, even among other Christians. How can one judge whether other conservatives, religious or non-religious, are to be trusted? Once again there is a contradiction, unresolved, between the theological and the political:

The NCR asked them to get involved in politics to defend their religiously inspired culture and then asked that, in order to do politics, they leave behind their religion. On Sunday they believed that Catholics and Jews were not 'saved' and the Mormons were a dangerous cult; on Monday they had to work with Catholics, Jews and Mormons in defence of our 'shared Judaeo-Christian' heritage. (Bruce 1990, p. 483)[12]

Contemporary evangelicalism is divided between sophisticated critical dialogue with, and a 'parochialism' toward, culture. Paradoxically, its success in the modern era has been to harness the tools of modernity, such as media, in order to build communities founded on secure boundaries and a literalist message. If evangelicalism is perpetually identifying new challenges in the culture around it, it is also continually delineating boundaries in opposition: 'evangelicalism . . . *thrives* on distinction, engagement, tension, conflict, and threat. Without these, evangelicalism would lose its identity and purpose and grow languid and aimless' (C. Smith 1998, p. 89).

'Classically Evangelical, World-affirming'

Nevertheless, there are signs of mellowing towards contemporary culture, such as tolerance of non-Christians, more flexibility of doctrine and openness to popular entertainment. Once again, modernity itself – geographical mobility, mass education, globalization, mass communications – have expanded horizons. Indeed, some of the fastest-growing parts of evangelicalism such as Vineyard and Emerging Church, thrive through an openness to culture – or at least a willingness to harness it to their ends. This is 'a creative . . . negotiation with modernity' (Guest 2007, p. 12).

Francis Schaeffer is credited with having led a revival of evangelical cultural engagement around the middle of the twentieth century. Dyrness draws analogies between Schaeffer's call to open the windows of evangelicalism on the world with John XXIII's efforts to do the same for the Roman Catholic world via the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s.

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12 This may have had particular relevance for the 2012 Presidential Election in the US, where many conservative Evangelicals, who might be natural Republicans, baulked at supporting their party's candidate, Mitt Romney, on account of his Mormon beliefs.

Similarly, the Lausanne conference of 1974 signalled a greater seriousness towards the global diversification and multiculturalism of evangelical Christianity and a greater identification with struggles against social injustice and poverty in the two-thirds world. This in turn awakened questions of the legacy of missionary movements and the need to inculturate the gospel. The Keele National Evangelical Congress (1967) also signalled a greater openness to social activism and inaugurated a greater widening of horizons. It was succeeded by a number of initiatives that signalled a deeper and more positive engagement with popular culture such as Greenbelt (1974), TEAR fund (for aid and international development) and the Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission (Bebbington and Jones 2013).

In the twenty-first century, a new generation of evangelical leaders has emerged, especially in the United States, many of whom are associated with the 'Emergent [or Emerging] Church' movement. They are politically engaged, socially liberal and theologically progressive. Metaphors of 'pathways', 'journeying' and 'growth' rather than conversion appear to find greater resonance for these Emergents, who are also looking beyond Scripture for spiritual resources within patristic, Celtic and monastic traditions (Emergent Village 2012). A number of these leaders have courted controversy by questioning staple evangelical doctrines such as penal substitutionary atonement, while many (such as Brian McLaren in the US and Steve Chalke in the UK), have been outspoken in supporting same-sex relationships.

This represents a turn from an individualistic faith to a more corporate understanding; from a word- or logic-centred faith to one that is liturgical and sacramental; from a pragmatic, methodological faith to one based on mystery and process. 'For Jesus truth was not propositions or the property of sentences. Rather truth was what was revealed through our participation and interaction with him, others, and the world' (Sweet 2000, p. 157). Just as society is moving in late modernity from 'solid' to 'liquid' so too is much the Church – more flexible structures, informality, emphasis on networking, on 'doing' and 'being' rather than 'believing' and 'belonging' (Ward 2002). The matter of engaging with culture constructively and critically is part of the pilgrimage of faith. There is an altogether greater willingness to engage in dialogue with non-Christian sources than more conservative factions. Brian McLaren advocates a post-modern, post-colonial form of

evangelicalism that recasts Christianity as 'a way of believing' rather than a 'system of belief' (McLaren 2011, p. 8).

Typically, this wing of evangelicalism is less nostalgic for the return of Christendom, or anxious to proclaim Britain or the US as a 'Christian nation'. For the British Anabaptist Stuart Murray Williams, post-Christendom represents a challenge for the Church's mission but also an opportunity to recover 'a way of being Christian that is more authentic, is more radical, is more faithful' and of 'disconnecting from wealth, status, power and violence' associated with established or state-oriented religion (Johnson 2012).

Jim Wallis, one of the leaders of the Sojourners community, which emerged out of urban politics in Chicago, has been prominent in reconnecting evangelical politics with a more egalitarian and socially progressive agenda, openly supporting Democratic candidates for US President. He regards himself and his allies as seeking to recover the political activism of the nineteenth century by realigning evangelical politics with a form of revivalism that is social as well as spiritual: 'Politics is failing to solve the big issues. When that happens, social movements rise up to change politics. And the best social movements always have spiritual foundation. That's what revival is' (Tippett 2007).

In contrast to the more isolationist tendencies of conservative evangelicalism, epitomized in the demeanour of twentieth-century fundamentalism, then, these emergent trends point towards a new style of evangelicalism, of 'engaged orthodoxy' (Guest 2007; see also Greggs 2010, which engages with secular and non-Christian culture, albeit with a view to its reorientation). As Christian Smith and others have argued, this is particularly evident among a younger generation in the United States (1998), which has rediscovered its historic roots of cultural engagement and social activism. There is still a strong sense of distinctiveness and maintenance of strong symbolic, moral and cultural boundaries, but this is achieved not through withdrawal but engagement and thus represents a negotiated and fluid, rather than absolute and fixed, identity. Guest characterizes such an approach as 'entrepreneurial' in its openness to regarding cultural engagement as an opportunity rather than a threat. 'New-paradigm churches are not about cultural warfare; they are about religious experience, personal transformation, and community' (Shibley 1998, p. 85). Rather than precipitating decline, such engaged evangelicalism seems to draw vitality from its forays into culture – it is 'harnessing' (Guest 2007, p. 206) rather than eschewing, culture. Yet

inevitably, evangelicalism will be subtly reshaped as it absorbs – as well as resists – the prevailing *Zeitgeist* of late modernity (pp. 205–6).

I have focused on the phenomenon of conservative (theologically and politically speaking) evangelicalism since it seemed to exemplify a sharp dilemma for post-secular society, of how to balance religious voices and secular trends in an increasingly disparate and fissiparous public square. But the prospects for alternative evangelical public theologies are also worthy of consideration. Recent research by the Evangelical Alliance in the UK provides interesting insights into emergent identities and suggests that evangelical Christianity may be moving further towards the political mainstream while retaining a characteristic commitment to activism. A survey of 17,000 evangelicals, recruited through local churches, festivals and other networks, offers a picture of a culture steeped in the tropes of personal transformation and biblical authority and yet increasingly allied with socially progressive causes, especially in areas such as economic policy, poverty and world development. As the report, published in September 2011, summarizes, 'These Evangelicals are solidly committed to orthodox Christian beliefs about the Cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. These beliefs in sin forgiven and the hope of eternal life are the bedrock of their personal faith' (Clifford 2011, p. 2).

While the campaigns of Christian Concern, the Christian Institute and the discourse of a beleaguered remnant of traditional Christians may have gained prominence, this research paints a picture of an alternative kind of evangelical political identity that is more affirming of culture and less concerned to maintain distinct boundaries between itself and a hostile world of 'aggressive secularism'. However, this is not to say that such an identity is not distinctively evangelical in its theology or not rooted in a set of recognizable historic characteristics. But it does suggest that evangelical political behaviour, seen across a broader spectrum, is less predictable and less easy to pigeon-hole according to traditional left-right polarity. Theological conservatism tends to be represented in attitudes towards personal morality (such as abortion, same-sex partnerships and the family) and national identity (such as identifying the UK as a 'Christian' country), but there are signs of a greater radicalism when it comes to other questions of social justice and international affairs. Similarly, a preference for personal moral transformation at the expense of structural change, and a disinclination to work across confessional boundaries, also appear less apparent than perhaps they might a generation or so ago.

However, while views on homosexuality, marriage and abortion were in the main more conservative than the mainstream population, these evangelicals' activism was often pursued in partnership with non-evangelical churches or even non-Christian groups. The group surveyed were regular churchgoers, active in evangelical organizations, committed to the core tenets of the classical Bebbington quadrilateral: ninety per cent subscribed to the doctrine of substitutionary atonement; a similar proportion believed that Jesus was the only way to God and that the Bible was 'the inspired word of God'. Two-thirds attended church at least once a week, seven out of ten prayed every day and over half read the Bible every day. Views on abortion, women in leadership and evolution were evenly spread across a spectrum, although opinions on homosexuality tended towards the more conservative. In terms of social activism and voluntary service, however, there were no signs of an aversion to engaging in worldly politics: nearly 60 per cent volunteered at least once a week; 80 per cent recorded a community partnership with another church and 70 per cent some collaboration in the community with a group of another faith.

One of the defining characteristics of a more conservative evangelical identity politics – indeed, at times its very *raison d'être* – was a concern that Christianity was increasingly under attack in contemporary society. Among this survey, there was evidence that a broad section of the sample was exercised at the marginalization of Christianity from public life. Nevertheless, it was never articulated in terms of persecution or victimhood (Evangelical Alliance 2011, p. 16) despite being a notably more prominent preoccupation among evangelicals than the non-evangelicals in the survey. The historic stress on personal witness and distinctive identity, coupled with a more exclusivist attitude towards other faiths, is still therefore a defining mark of this community, but speaks less of an identity politics based on defensive reassertion of distinctive boundaries than of Guest's 'engaged orthodoxy', or a kind of conviction politics. It is consistent with Brian Harris's anatomy of postmodern evangelical identity, which holds fast to much of the spirit of the Bebbington quadrilateral, but is gradually embracing a more holistic and inclusivist agenda. This is particularly apparent when it comes to engaging with culture and a shift away from personal piety towards structural transformation: 'Instead of salvation from the world, we are also saved for the world, including the poor, the oppressed and the environment' (Harris 2008, p. 204). What remains constant is a characteristic commitment to a transformative encounter with Christ, but the

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sources and methods by which this is mediated are more open to question. Harris also contends that globally evangelicalism is moving more into the denominational mainstream and no longer has a self-image of itself as ghettoized, persecuted or misunderstood. 'In short, as a popular movement evangelicalism has learned to be adaptable. Thus, for example, while in modernity evangelical apologetics could deal in certainties and sure proofs, in a postmodern era, a relational apologetic has been birthed . . . Piety remains, and it is *passionate piety*' (pp. 212–13, my emphasis).

Conclusion: Christ and Culture

In considering how Christian public witness is to be conducted in relation to secular culture, George Carey invokes H. Richard Niebuhr's classic study of the relationship between Christian practice and tradition and contemporary culture, defined as 'the total process of human activity' (Niebuhr 1951, p. 32). Carey favours 'Christ the transformer of culture', in which the things of the world are affirmed as part of creation which is nevertheless in need of 'conversion'. In contrast to other models, such as 'Christ of culture', in which the gospel is the fulfilment of human achievement – a relationship of conformity or identification – this sees nature as necessarily perfected by grace. The things of the world are to be affirmed, not rejected, by means of 'a practice of responsible engagement which nevertheless recognizes that the kingdom is quite different from anything we create' (Gorringe 2004, p. 15).

Although Carey may identify this as an essentially 'conversionist' stance, however, many aspects of evangelicalism over the years appear more like another of Niebuhr's types, that of 'Christ against culture'. This places the gospel and the world in opposition and draws an absolute distinction between revelation and reason. The tradition (be that Scripture or Church teaching) is sufficient for all that is needed for salvation. Historically, the sectarianism and absolutism of fundamentalism and the withdrawal from social activism in the nineteenth century expressed the qualities of world-denial; and similarly, in its narrative of cultural declension and Christianity's dispossession in the face of an alien culture, contemporary evangelical identity politics sets its face against the kind of 'engaged orthodoxy' to which I alluded earlier.

The experience of martyrdom and persecution is a powerful aspect of the corporate memory of this part of the Church. The question is, however, whether the construction of a discourse of persecution at the hands of aggressive or militant secularism is justified; and whether the corresponding reaction, and especially recourse to the law, is the best way of upholding one's faith in public. While some individuals have suffered material and psychological disadvantage, it seems that the resulting legal actions were prompted more by the particular dynamics of evangelical theology of a persecuted remnant than by conclusive evidence of widespread discrimination.

The question is, whether such a discourse of persecution and moral crusade is actually justified. Individuals are entitled to feel threatened if they believe they are not allowed to express their faith as their conscience dictates. However, the evidence suggests that the perception among British evangelicals is largely unfounded. In 2012, a group of MPs, 'Christians in Parliament' conducted an enquiry into this very phenomenon. The report, *Clearing the Ground*, referred to a 'hierarchy' of equalities, and conceded that Christians in the UK may have grounds to feel marginalized, on the basis that 'the frequency and nature of the [legal] cases indicates a *narrowing of the space* for the articulation, expression and demonstration of Christian belief' (Christians in Parliament 2012, p. 5, my emphasis). We may regard this as broadly consistent with the ambivalent position of religion in a post-Christian, post-secular society; but despite this, the Report refuses to support anything approaching 'persecution':

> In the United Kingdom Christians do not risk their lives to meet to worship, are not prevented by the law from preaching and do not face the death penalty if they have converted from another faith. Whatever difficulties may be experienced by Christians in the UK, they are not comparable with those encountered by fellow believers in the world. (p. 10)

Indeed, by assuming a mentality of victimhood, conservative evangelicals risk a self-fulfilling prophecy by further alienating public opinion and placing themselves further to the margins of society. The publicity generated by unsuccessful legal action certainly facilitates a particular kind of Christian public witness and enables individuals to 'stand up for Jesus Christ in public life' (Not Ashamed, http://www.notashamed.org.uk/comments-churches.php). However, this perpetuates a perception that such

campaigns are more interested in defending lost privilege – to the point of deploying the very legislation that is believed to have caused the dispossession in the first place – than any agenda of social justice in the name of the common good.

> On some occasions we perceive that campaigning becomes inflammatory or even counter-productive to Christian freedoms … Making noise is not the same as having influence, and … the campaigning approach of choosing cases to lose valiantly is not conducive to affecting political and social change … We also acknowledge that through poor campaigning strategies, some Christians may be inadvertently generating and sustaining the very problems they are trying to highlight and resist. (Christians in Parliament 2012, p. 24)

The Report also commends the terminology of 'reasonable accommodation' of religious beliefs and practices as appropriate and proportional responses to the task of balancing religious freedom with public sensibility. It takes a relatively Habermasian route, in terms of advocating greater latitude for the expression of faith while still demanding conformity to the conventions of consensus and rational negotiation. As it argues, extending the measures to test whether organizations can show they have made 'reasonable' attempts to meet the needs, for example of people with disabilities, might have obviated many of the legal cases brought by Christians against their employers. However, the Report acknowledges that it is one thing to demonstrate, for example, that accessibility issues have been reasonably addressed in a listed building, and another to evaluate against norms of fair expression of religious identity. Furthermore, they do insist that any such accommodation should be mutual: 'acknowledging that certain activities might condone behaviour contrary to their beliefs, it might also be necessary for the employee to show they were willing to accommodate the values of those who disagreed with them' (p. 36).

Rather than lamenting society's indifference to 'biblical values' or Britain's descent into post-Christian multiculturalism, *Clearing the Ground* argues that Christians should place more emphasis on making a positive contribution to public life. 'It is essential', says the Report, 'that Christians once again provide hope and a vision for society that goes beyond defending their own interests and includes the good of all'(p. 45). In particular, it suggests that the root of misunderstanding between Christians and

employers or public authorities is often merely a lack of religious literacy rather than deliberate hostility: 'we see in the actions of government, public bodies and employers an inadequate grasp and inability (or unwillingness) to accommodate belief' (p. 17). Christians should express a faith that is 'neither private, nor privileged' (Spencer 2008), which contributes constructively to helping a post-secular society reach an equitable settlement for expressions of religion in public.

While coming from a perspective broadly sympathetic to evangelicalism, therefore, *Clearing the Ground* eschews narratives of persecution and highlights the self-defeating nature of a discourse of dispossession and marginalization. Instead, it begins to articulate an alternative evangelical public theology premised on a positive, if critical, embrace of cultural pluralism. A number of key points emerge from this debate, therefore. First, there needs to be a degree of realism about the end of Christendom and how best to exercise Christian discipleship in relation to the civil and legal authorities. Second, rather than seeking refuge in a 'false parallelism' of grievance, Christian public vocation can do a lot proactively to cultivate positive virtues of citizenship premised on justice, conviction and concern for the common good. Third – as *Clearing the Ground* points out – there is a deficit of religious literacy within the public at large, matched in no small degree by a lack of ability on the part of Christians themselves to 'speak truth with grace to an ailing culture' (Christians in Parliament 2012, p. 43). Christians may owe it to themselves as much as others, therefore, to foster a greater skilfulness and articulacy in public life: to earn the right to be taken seriously, and to be willing and able to justify their moral, social and political convictions in terms that speak intelligibly into the public square. The task is to nurture effective 'ambassadors for Christ' (2 Cor. 5.20) who are capable of engaging effectively in Christian *apologetics*.

I have been arguing that when it comes to a vision of 'Christ' and 'culture' conservative evangelical identity politics draws its energy from a discourse of a biblically inspired crusade against degenerate culture. By way of contrast, Niebuhr's characterization of 'Christ the transformer of culture' urges Christians not to shun the world for fear of losing their identity but to operate constructively (and incarnationally) for its redemption. This resonates with his brother Reinhold's embrace of what he called 'Christian Realism' (Lovin 1995; Niebuhr 1953), in which Christians are called to work for the transformation of society, despite its fallenness and ambiguity. Christian Realism may be contrasted with idealism (or the premise

that human nature and history are perfectible) by its acknowledgement of the ubiquity of sin, thereby tempering over-optimistic views of humanity's ability to fulfil the moral good. While Christian Realism does not give up on the possibility of social justice in this world, it also recognizes that ultimate redemption is a gift of God, and never entirely a human achievement. Nevertheless, it retains a visionary dimension and an accompanying transformative energy – what later theologians were to call a theology of hope – that with the help of God's grace, God's will may be done 'on earth as it is in heaven'.

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PART 3

Public Theology as Christian Apologetics

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Jews, Pagans, Sceptics and Emperors

Public Theology as Christian Apologetics

Travel everywhere, preach the gospel, use words if you have to.

(Attributed to St Francis of Assisi)

The time has come to explore the thesis that in a post-secular context, public theology must claim an identity as a form of *Christian apologetics*, in which the Church not only contributes critically and constructively to public debate but must make a reflexive and transparent effort to articulate the theological well-springs of its commitments. As I have already argued, what has raised the stakes is the emergence of a post-secular context characterized by a growing gulf between people of faith and others, and the concomitant deficits of religious literacy, and in the face of reasoned sceptics who question the very legitimacy of religious voices in public, let alone the benevolence of faith-based interventions.

Traditionally, apologetics has been framed as a rational defence of the Christian faith to sceptics and unbelievers, originally in the face of persecution by the Roman authorities. Apologetics is 'the attempt to defend a particular belief or system of beliefs against objections' (Beilby 2011, p. 11). The first-century epistle 1 Peter summarizes this imperative as follows: 'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have' (1 Peter 3.15, NIV). An apologia was also the summary speech for the defence in a court of law. In the New Testament, *apologia* denotes an answer or defence given in response to an accusation, such as Paul addressing a hostile crowd in Jerusalem (Acts 22.1). The appellation 'Christian' (*Christianos*) is only established around the time of Ignatius (early second century CE) and it is a Latinism transliterated into Greek. This would suggest it was coined by Roman officials in their dealings with Christians, specifically in trials and legal actions against them.

Throughout Christian history apologists have produced a range of justifications, defences and explanations for this very 'hope' that distinguishes them. So what is the value of this tradition to public theology, with its emphasis on giving an account of Christian essentials, positioned at the threshold of the sacred and secular, ecclesial body and body politic, at pains to render the fundamentals of faith accessible to those beyond the community of faith? At first glance, this seems axiomatic. As I have already argued, public theologians place a premium on their commitment to dialogue with non-theological perspectives. They acknowledge the significance of the pluralist public realm; they value collaborative partnership in practical programmes; and they recognize the necessity to make their own deliberations accessible to those beyond their own boundaries. The question is what is gained by adopting a more self-consciously 'apologetic' approach? Why use the term?

The consideration of public theology as apologetics is prompted largely by the work of the Reformed public theologian Max Stackhouse, who has consistently characterized the discipline in this way. However, this calls for further examination. Why does he not remain with the terminology of 'translation', 'mediation' and 'bilingualism'? How does the notion of *apologetics* help to resolve questions of post-secularity and the renewal of public theology? It has already been established that theology is always already 'public' in so far as it must be accessible, not esoteric, socially relevant, not individualistic or privatized. Isn't apologetics about evangelism and conversion, a form of reasoned argument in defence of the philosophical coherence of Christianity in order to convince the unbeliever? Is this not the province of the philosophy of religion, or in ecclesial terms, the task of mission and evangelism? What does this have to do with public theology?

As I shall argue, however, there is a significant tradition within the history of apologetics that pertains to a defence of the Church's relationship to public life. In his *History of Apologetics* first published in 1971, Avery Dulles groups Christian apologetics into three main genres, depending on the context and intended audience. '*Religious apologists*' argued for the superiority of the gospel over other religious or philosophical systems; '*internal apologists*' were concerned to correct error or heresy within the Christian community itself; but a third group, which Dulles terms '*political apologists*' developed their arguments in order to secure civil toleration of Christianity in the face of state persecution (1999, p. xx). From biblical and patristic times, therefore, there has been an identifiable strand of apologetic

literature which is not so much concerned with the 'truth' of the gospel in a philosophical or propositional sense, as its 'efficacy' as a form of practical wisdom that informs a Christian public witness. While these apologists are certainly concerned to defend the intellectual coherence and scriptural provenance of such witness, their arguments are directed towards offering a theologically reasoned rationale for the legitimacy of faith to speak truth to power and pursue a public vocation of active citizenship. This will help us examine Stackhouse's conjunction of public theology more closely, since this is clearly about justifying the moral and civic probity of communities of Christians as much as it is about defending the 'truth' of the gospel and paving the way to conversion.

In contemporary apologetics, the term has come to denote a justification by appeal to rational, propositional argument with a view to leading another to their own profession of faith. 'Christian apologetics is the scholarly reflection on Christian apologetic witness and dialogue as the intellectual justification of the truth and relevance of the Christian faith' (van den Toren 2011, p. 27). But one of the questions I want to explore in this chapter is how far the perception of apologetics as the debating of proofs of propositional belief might be revised. This is more than mere dialogue, as it is strongly associated with evangelical parts of the Church which would insist on apologetics as entailing persuasion, a call to faith and personal evangelism.

Similarly, while many evangelical apologists would acknowledge that Christian faith comprises more than intellectual assent to theological propositions (Beilby 2011, pp. 168–9), most of this literature assumes the primacy of belief, rather than practice, within the Christian life. Moreover, the resulting emphasis within contemporary evangelical apologetics on the rational plausibility of Christian doctrine has led to an epistemological dominance of rationalist, scientific and propositional proof-arguments, at the expense of more contextual or sacramental ways of knowing. To reconsider public theology as Christian apologetics offers the opportunity to reclaim some of these alternatives, along with notions of theology as a form of practical wisdom – theology as the discourse of faith that facilitates faithful discipleship; and public theology in particular, as articulating that in relation to the liminal space between private and public, sacred and secular, Church and world.

This reflects important epistemological issues, of course, not just about the nature of knowing but the very nature of revelation. Historically,

apologetics has assumed in some respect that human culture does possess some kind of common ground of shared norms and meanings. The emergence of neo-orthodoxy in the twentieth century posed a radical challenge to the very possibility of apologetics. As Edward Oakes remarks, 'Indeed, what is "neo" about neoorthodoxy is precisely this refusal to consider the apologetic task' (1992, p. 41). Barth's reaction against the Kantian and Schleiermacherian elevation of experience as the universal grounding of revelation and theological apprehension was absolute: by stressing the unknown ability of God independent of God's self-revelation, he was not concerned to demonstrate how, even by analogy, the world thus revealed inhabited similar space to that of other forms of knowledge. Rather, this takes the discourse of the ecclesial community as *a priori*; there is no common ground or shared rationality on which to establish an apologetics which sees itself as a bridging or mediating discourse. The only apologetic is the enunciation of a systematic theology as God's saving word to sinful humanity.

However, I am not convinced that contemporary apologetics, which is often focused around the debating of propositional and abstract doctrines concerning the existence of God and the historicity of the resurrection, does complete justice either to the historical legacy or to contemporary demands. Nor am I prepared to concede the eclipse of apologetic theology in the face of neo-orthodoxy. For example, it is clear that some of the most significant and foundational events and texts of early Christianity were apologetic in nature. But they were often also quintessentially pieces of public theology in that not only were they conducted in public assemblies, religious or civic, subjecting themselves to universal scrutiny, but they were also often petitions directed at the political authorities, and concerned the relationship of Christians to imperial and secular authority as well as matters of belief. So there is a sense in which apologetics has always been public and about more than a declaration of personal belief.

A recent collection of essays, entitled *Imaginative Apologetics*, argues that in fact it is through the media of culture, literature, art and science that Christians should be defending and justifying their faith and that these discourses represent a very different way of conceiving the nature of Christian conviction, not least that apologetics may now be framed as an invitation to participate in a community of practice and to apprehend the gospel as attractive, compelling and beautiful – and not just empirically or rationally 'true'. Unfortunately, this volume contains no reference to any kind of

Christian engagement in or commentary upon matters such as economics, civil society, media or politics. I will close, therefore, with some concluding thoughts on whether imaginative, aesthetic and performative dimensions of apologetics might have any bearing on conceptions of public theology.

Public Theology as Christian Apologetics

Max Stackhouse's work has been described as 'tradition-based apologetic public theology' (Hogue 2010, p. 362): the normative task of public theology is also one of apologetics, in so far as (especially in a religiously pluralist, global context) it is expedient to articulate (and be prepared to defend) the values that inform Christian statements about, and interventions in, the public realm. In this respect, of course, Stackhouse is reiterating a commonly held belief among public theologians of the essentially 'bilingual' nature of the discipline: 'Public theology must choose a language that can be understood by secular society without denying its theological origin' (Bedford-Strohm 2007a, p. 23).

I have already identified Max Stackhouse's understanding of public theology as representative of those who resist the privatization of belief and some churches' withdrawal from public life under secular modernity, and his insistence on the transparency of theological discourse in the face of wider scrutiny (Chapter 3). Stackhouse also distinguishes between various modes of theology, which he has described at various stages as confessional, dogmatic and apologetic (2004), dogmatic, polemic and apologetic (2006), and confessional, contextual, dogmatic and apologetic (2007b).

> Dogmatics seeks to clarify matters of faith and practice among those who already believe. Polemics attempts to unmask false teachings, to defeat opposing views, or to silence opposition. Apologetics seeks to speak in ways that can be grasped by those who doubt or do not share the faith. It thus tests the reasonability and morality of the faith and those who hold it by engaging those who are not already convinced. It acknowledges that if it is in principle impossible to make a case for the truth or justice of theology, others are under no obligation to take it seriously. (2006, p. 168)

Stackhouse refutes the claim of those theologians who deny that theology has any relationship to secular philosophy and is essentially 'an articulation of revealed faith' (p. 167) with no need to justify itself to any external authority. Public theology is dialogical in that it must subject itself to public scrutiny on the basis of a shared global public square. Stackhouse defends the intellectual substance of theology against those sceptics who argue that it cannot be conducted as an objective discipline or subjected to critical scrutiny – in other words, that it cannot be 'properly *rational*' (Ziegler 2002, p. 139). More than the legitimation of private conscience or a particular confessional tradition, theology must 'transcend' sectional ideology to address a broader realm of public concern and rational debate (p. 140) and to 'help to identify the most universal human understandings of holiness, justice, truth and creativity' (Koopman 2003, p. 4).

> Public theology . . . is one in which the motifs of theological discourse – the critical concepts that are basic to the faith – are held to be not esoteric . . . Rather, what we are talking about can be discussed with nonbelievers and believers in other faiths. (Chase 2001)

While public theology should be tradition-centred, Stackhouse rejects fideist or communitarian arguments that theological truth-claims are absolutely incommensurate with other forms of discourse. This reflects an underlying epistemology of dialogue in keeping with principles of natural law and common grace. By virtue of our common humanity, theology addresses universal issues in a spirit of shared moral reasoning (2007b, pp. 112–13).

> From very early on one of the meanings of apologetics was that you enter into another person's vocabulary and worldview as best you can, and the very fact that we can do that in some measure suggests that there is some deep contact between humans. Some profound creational theology is behind that: we are all children of God, whether everyone acknowledges it or not, and we can enter into one another's vocabulary and begin to articulate the most profound things that we think are really true. (Chase 2001).

Public theology draws upon this dimension of apologetics, thereby redressing the prevailing preference for a dogmatic mode in much contemporary theology, as well as the assumption in most non-theological circles that theology is

incapable of transcending its own particularity in the interests of wider dialogue. Stackhouse is critical of those who fail to move beyond the boundaries of their own tradition, remaining essentially within a fideist paradigm:

> They do not give a public account of their convictions because they believe that one should not; the content and quality of faith is and must be entirely self-authenticating to all because it seems so to them. (2006, p. 175)

However, while theology has a concern for the common good and for contributing towards an overarching 'metaphysical–moral vision' (Stackhouse), it remains rooted in the particularities of its tradition. The apologetic task is thus to make the case 'for the truth of what [public theologians] are talking about in a way that might convince those not already convinced' (1984, p. 54) – note, 'convince' but not 'convert'. So the outcome is not so much to prove the internal coherence or doctrinal superiority of Christian belief; but to *demonstrate* the practical utility of its theological world-view.

There are two dimensions to Stackhouse's adoption of 'apologetics', therefore: one of dialogue, and one of persuasion. The first rests on his commitment to a shared realm of communicative reason and the collaborative task of forging a cohesive civil society; the second on the concern for theology to justify its right to be part of such a collaborative enterprise. If it cannot bear the critical scrutiny of non-theological conversation partners, it cannot hope to contribute to the substantive work of public debate. However, Stackhouse is also adamant that this is a mutual accountability, since by virtue of subjecting itself to dialogue public theology is entitled to expect other disciplines to reciprocate. In the case of non-theological disciplines that do not, it may be 'doubtful about the intellectual and moral integrity of any position or discipline that does not take theology into account' (2004, pp. 191, n. 2).

Indeed, at the heart of Stackhouse's own apologetic lies a conviction that it is precisely theology's ability to transcend the immediacy of contingent existence, its orientation to a divine horizon beyond human self-interest, which constitutes its unique contribution:

> Those of us who today claim the legacy of public theology point out that the 'logos' . . . of philosophical thought, social analysis, and moral judgement is unstable by itself. It bends easily to the unscrupulous interests that lurk in the very heart of the best of us if it is not rooted in

a holy, true, just creativity that is greater than we humans can achieve in our subjectivity. Indeed, it tends always to be distorted if it is not ultimately grounded in God, for the human wisdom of philosophy, the ordering systems of societies, and the ethical judgements of individuals may express the irrational elements of human fantasy no less than does private religion, and all of them need to be seen as subject to standards, purposes, and an unconditioned reality greater than our wisdoms, systems, judgements and religions can generate or discover alone. 'Logos' requires 'theos'. Theology is required. (2006, p. 170)

Secular critics of public theology may express surprise that, for Stackhouse, it is non-theological reasoning that may fall prey to 'irrational elements of human fantasy', since that is a frequent charge directed at religious reasoning; but Stackhouse argues that it is increasingly the claims of modernity in relation to the inevitability of progress, the transparency of reason and the axiomatic nature of morality which are being called into question (pp. 170–3).

Public theology returns to the foundations of modernity and seeks to re-contextualize them; it is clear that they have religious roots, such as a belief in the innate dignity of all human beings. Certainly, globalization exposes the core convictions of Western modernity to renewed scrutiny, but what endures and continues to be upheld is a commitment to a universal humanity and objective moral laws. While this may, historically, have emerged from the particularities of Judeo-Christian culture, it can nevertheless be discerned within, and upheld by, many other global religious and philosophical systems (p. 179). Public theology in apologetic mode – for Stackhouse, its strongest and most comprehensive manifestation – thus 'claims that the most profound presumptions of the faith are, and can be shown to be, as reasonable, as ethical, and as viable for authentic, warranted commitment as any other known religion or philosophy and, indeed, *indispensable to other modes of public discourse*' (2004, pp. 191, n. 2).

The apologetic dimension of public theology for Stackhouse, then, appears to be one of defending the right of religious discourse in general, and Christian theology in particular, to be a legitimate voice in the public square. In other words, for a theology to be public, it has to go public: 'if a theology is to be trusted to participate in public discourse it ought to be able to make a plausible case for what it advocates in terms that can be comprehended by those who are not believers . . . It should be able to articulate its core convictions in comprehensible terms across many modes

of discourse, explaining its symbolic and mythical terms . . . in ways that expose their multiple levels of meaning' (2007b, p. 112).

This is the point at which public and practical theology converge, says Stackhouse. In so far as the latter focuses on 'the development of theologically based practices of ministry in the church and for the people of the faith' (2007b, p. 107), nurturing the 'habits' of discipleship, virtue and spirituality, Christian practice and discipleship is formed and fostered 'within the traditions of accepted confessional, contextual, or dogmatic theology' (p. 107). If this locates practical theology within a cluster of pedagogical disciplines directed towards formation and practice, then for Stackhouse, the emphasis of public theology within the panoply of approaches to theology, lies much closer to the discipline of apologetics. While dogmatic and practical theology (as far as Stackhouse is concerned) begin with the 'classical sources' of Christian faith, thematizing and articulating strands of the tradition and pointing towards their practical implications, in the interests of building a sustainable and broad-based civil society, public theology must step beyond the parameters of its own tradition and engage in conversations with non-Christian (religious and secular) world-views and demonstrate how and why Christian sources and norms are capable of contributing constructively to the process: 'it has to show that it can help shape viable institutions in all the spheres of complex global interactions' (p. 109).

Fundamentally, however, this is an affirmation of the enduring thread within public theology – already highlighted in Chapter 3 and clearly present in Stackhouse's work – which insists on the importance of Christian reasoning being publicly accessible to those beyond the institutional Church. Whether in the name of natural law or common grace, this represents a strong affirmation of the role of reason as well as revelation. It must test its claims against competing and complementary frameworks; but having done so, it completes its task by contributing to the shaping not just of lives of believers but the common life of all humanity.

Apologetics in Historical Perspective

To what extent can the documents of the New Testament be considered 'apologetic' texts? Avery Dulles argues that their intention was 'to tell a story rather than to prove a case' (1999, p. 16), although in so far as their

objective was to bear witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, early Christian texts were undoubtedly testimonies of faith. Dulles's point is more, however, that the Gospels did not develop with the explicit intention of persuading non-believers outside the Christian community, but rather to consolidate Christian identity and address the doubts of believers. As Christian communities became established and dispersed around the Graeco-Roman world, however, so the challenges of interpreting and commending the faith to pagan cultures became more pressing.

Apologetics is a history of the way successive Christian generations have given accounts of 'the hope that you have' (1 Peter 3.15, NIV). From the beginning, this arose in response to a variety of needs. Writing about the emergent Christian literature of the second and third centuries, commonly known as 'the Apologies', Helen Ree notes that such writings comprised the 'self-definition and self-representation' of early Christianity, in response both to the external pressures of pagan hostility and the internal challenges of heterodoxy and disunity (2005, p. 1). As Ree points out, however, in Niebuhrian terms, the 'culture' against which Christians defined themselves could be either philosophical or political; and, in confirmation of Niebuhr's fivefold typology, the extreme poles of accommodation and resistance contained a range of strategies. Furthermore, within each genre there were many different literary and rhetorical tropes through which an apologist might construct their argument, as well as a mind to a potential audience (pp. 3–4).

As a corpus, therefore, they provide definitive insight into the process of early Christian identity under construction; and they offer an opportunity to 'recontextualize' the nature of apologetics as a form of emergent public theology conducted – necessarily, as a means of engaging defensively and constructively with the surrounding culture – at the time. The very act of articulating reasons in response to opponents actually prompted the development of theology itself, either for the purposes of internal boundary-keeping, nurture of converts or for communication with pagan culture and philosophies (Graham, Walton and Ward 2005). Indeed, it is Avery Dulles's contention that the contextual history of apologetics reveals that apologetic questions actually contributed to the formation of Christian doctrine, rather than the other way around (1999, pp. 1–25).

Apologists also used a variety of reasons or evidence, as well as different methods which reveal differential approaches to the relationship between

reason and revelation. From the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and Paul's appearance in Athens (Acts 17.16–33) the effectiveness of those preaching the gospel rested on the adoption of the cultures and philosophical assumptions of their listeners. The Acts of the Apostles records how on the day of Pentecost, Peter's sermon was addressed predominantly to a Jewish audience, and proclaims the significance of Jesus as Messiah, prophet of Israel and fulfilment of the Hebrew scriptures (Acts 2.14–36). Acts 17 relates Paul's journey to Thessalonica, where he preached in a synagogue, reasoning from the Jewish scriptures and prophets. Despite not encountering any prior hostility, this is sufficient nevertheless to provoke a backlash (Acts 17.1–9). Later, in Athens, Paul visits the synagogue, but concentrates on debating with pagan philosophers at the Areopagus, where he preaches the gospel as the fulfilment of extant hidden wisdom (Acts 17.16–34). Similarly, in Acts 24.10–21, Paul has to defend himself against the charges brought against him by the orator Tertullus (Acts 24.1–8), and he does so according to the precepts of Roman legal convention, appealing not only to Jewish tradition and the scriptures but to Roman protocols of evidence. Similarly, Clement of Alexandria commends the benefits that Christian scholarship has brought to that city, as well as emphasizing the potential of all cultures to acknowledge and understand Christ as the Incarnate Word of God. Against charges of immoral conduct, other apologists such as Aristides (*Apology*, 125 CE) defend the probity of Christians, as well as contrasting their worship of the living God with that of their fellow citizens' allegiance to false idols. Continuity with Hebrew scriptures, affinity but ultimate superiority over pagan world-views, were combined with assurances of the civil and moral integrity of Christianity.

In Stackhouse's terms, therefore, the dialogical nature of apologetics, of the need to adopt the thought-forms and vernacular of one's interlocutors, has been paramount. Thus, Justin Martyr saw anticipations of the gospel in Platonic philosophy, and couched his arguments in terms his audience would understand. Immersed in his culture, Clement of Alexandria used extant philosophies and myths to communicate a new truth. Athanasius was critical of the pagan myths around him but demonstrated their inherent wisdom in pointing the way to Christianity. Thomas Aquinas argued that nothing in the world of human reason, having been created by God, would contradict the truths of revelation. In more recent times, Paul Tillich's model of 'critical correlation' was explicitly founded on a liberal

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theology in which 'secular' culture – in his case, visual arts and modern psychotherapies – posed existential questions to which Christian theology had to find answers.

But there have been tensions too, in terms of the extent to which non-Christian culture has been held to have carried the seeds of God's Logos, and there being 'some manifestation of this God-given rationality also outside the circle of those who had the knowledge of God's revelation in the Scriptures' (Skarsaune 2010, p. 129), or whether fallen humanity must await the sovereign Word of God irrespective of culture. This concerns the relationship between reason and revelation: how far God's Word is accessible to human understanding, and how far it rests exclusively on God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, who is both the fulfilment and the supersession of the Law and the Prophets.

Exemplary Holiness in the Face of Suffering: 1 Peter 3.15

> Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened. But in your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord. *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.* But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. (1 Peter 3.13–17 NIV)

The first letter of Peter is frequently quoted in discussions of apologetics. In particular, it provides a good example of how Christian identity was shaped, first in relation to reading of Hebrew scriptures; and second, in terms of confronting opposition and hostility from the outside world. In other words, in dialogue with Jewish sources and Imperial power. However, given that the letter as a whole contains advice that advocates conformity with the ruling powers, obedience of wives to husbands and slaves to masters, so is this epistle evidence of 'indifference to secular culture' (Achtemeier 1996, p. 65), and thus of little use to Christians today looking for a public theology of active citizenship and social engagement? David

Horrell concedes that 1 Peter 'leaves an ambivalent legacy, offering positive resources to contemporary theology and ethics, but also requiring nuanced and critical appropriation' (Horrell 2008, p. 112). Any reading of the text will need a recontextualization to understand both the overall tenor of the epistle and the implications of the imperative to 'give an answer'.

As we will see, however, while it may seem to speak from a very different world to that of many Christians, what stands at the heart of this text is the question of witnessing to Christ amidst a hostile world. If it is ambivalent, that is because it is grappling with the complexities of Christian identity. In its attempts to steer a path between conformity and resistance, or, indeed, how to manage the demands of 'Christ' and 'culture', it provides a case study in contextual theology as we see the writer struggling with the challenges of Christian identity in a complex world. It also offers glimpses into the nascent Christology of the first-century Church and how it engenders a practical theology of discipleship from the sources of its Jewish heritage and in interaction with Imperial powers.

The text can be dated to the end of the first century (c. 70–95 CE), possibly after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Hence the reference to 'Babylon' as referring to Rome, denoting two imperial centres that overthrew Jerusalem. 1 Clement (96 CE), Polycarp (mid-second century) and Irenaeus (late second century CE) all seem aware of it. While there has been some support for apostolic authorship, the most likely conclusion appears to be that the text is pseudonymous, taking the name of Peter in order to establish legitimacy for its teaching. It was addressed to a mixed Jewish and Gentile audience in Asia Minor, comprising a range of social classes. This is reflected in the allusions to the Hebrew scriptures and the history of Israel as a nation in diaspora and exile. Connections are also drawn between Christ as the sacrificial lamb and Exodus accounts of Passover. This suggests that many readers would have been familiar with the Hebrew scriptures, and that references to Israel as a covenant people, faced with recurrent temptations to assimilate, resonated with this particular community (Achtemeier 1996, p. 69). Notwithstanding, however, 1 Peter also addressed itself to a community that contained a substantial proportion of Gentile converts, who may formerly have been 'God-fearers' or Jewish-identified synagogue-goers. Note references to their 'former ignorance' (1.14) and 'not a people . . . now God's people' (2.10), and the

significance of taking on a distinctive lifestyle (which would have been a novel idea for Gentiles but not for Jews).

The main preoccupation of the epistle is the question of suffering, and its providential and salvific nature. 1 Peter argues that salvation is brought through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, and discusses how this sets the pattern for God's suffering and persecuted Church today. The crisis or hardship afflicting the community in the present is contrasted with the promise of redemption in the future; but in the interim, Christians are called to demonstrate lives of discipline and obedience, marked by outward signs of holiness.

It is clear from the New Testament and other early Christian literature that the first generations of Christians experienced hostility from their neighbours. While for some this would take the form of state-sanctioned persecution, such as unjust charges of sedition leading to criminal prosecution, for the audience of 1 Peter it appears to have been negative attitudes and everyday gossip within the wider community. While there may have been formal opposition from the authorities, these Christians also seem to have been ostracized socially and possibly suffered loss of business. For those who were slaves, they had the added difficulty of conforming with their household's codes of conduct, which may have included veneration of civic deities, which would have risked arousing suspicion (Achtemeier 1996, pp. 34–6). It appears, therefore to have been a combination of their treatment by neighbours and imperial authorities, sometimes resulting in formal sanctions, other times simply sharp words or punishments. But overall, the situation of these readers is one of encountering privation in their domestic, economic, religious and civic lives. Their personal conviction was bound to have ramifications for their 'public' activities – and arguably, the less power they had, the worse it could, potentially, be for them.

How, then, did the author of 1 Peter expect their readers to manage hostility and persecution? Is the stance one of compliance or resistance? What might that tell us about the text's understanding of Christian public identity? 1 Peter offers an elaboration of Christians as 'resident aliens' (*paroikoi*), exemplified by a holiness of lifestyle, both personal (in behaviour) and social (in terms of relationships to secular powers). The epistle thus offers advice to believers on conducting their relationships to family, household (including between masters and slaves) and the civil authorities. The basis of such hope is the resurrection, since it shows that redemption

was achieved through the cross. Christ's suffering ensures humanity's salvation, and the Church is encouraged to hold with confidence to the promises of the resurrection in the face of persecution – indeed, to see suffering as the very essence of God's saving activity. Steadfastness and hope in the face of adversity nurtures a distinctive Christian identity from which stems a spirit of endurance. Thus, the Church must cultivate a collective lifestyle that strengthens community (1 Peter 2.10), such as generosity of spirit (4.8–11) and good leadership (5.1–4). This is individual and collective: the disciplined life is an outward sign of holiness and an expression of solidarity with the suffering community. By living distinctive and exemplary lives, refusing either to succumb to persecution or conform to ungodly cultural ways, Christians are declaring their allegiance to Christ's salvific suffering and pledging their hope in the ultimate victory of the cross.

So does 1 Peter commend conformity and convergence with pagan/secular lifestyles; or resistance to the temptations of assimilation? To contemporary eyes, some of the detailed advice seems remarkably quietist. Believers are encouraged to 'do good' in order to answer their critics. This means to be subject to temporal authorities of state and household: paying honour to the emperor, obeying one's husband and showing respect to one's master.

'. . . what 1 Peter means by "good" conduct is, to a considerable extent, behaviour which is socially respectable: honouring the emperor, submitting to masters and husbands, not provoking trouble or conflict' (Horrell 2008, p. 83). Such external conformity would, however, cloak an inner, alternative loyalty to Christ. Yet by referring to Rome as 'Babylon', the writer reminds readers of Israel's time in exile; and the language of 'resident alien', similarly assures Christians that their current situation was not permanent. In continuity with the other covenant people of Israel, the Church endures its time of exile by reasserting its distinctiveness; it will not assimilate. Just as the Jews in exile observed the practices, customs and laws that kept them a holy people, so too the Church will by its outward character declare its identification with the suffering Christ.

'The call is thus not to reform the social order but to exhibit true goodness within it, in the conviction that such behaviour will then be recognized as positive rather than threatening to the best of pagan values' (Achtemeier 1996, p. 38). Note the significance of Christian character as constituting its own apologetics. It was important to uphold exemplary behaviour that

was pleasing to the authorities on the basis that such goodness would draw approval rather than opprobrium.

There is notional loyalty to the institution of Empire, but this is conditioned by the infinitely more binding claims of faith. This 'critical distance' is evident in 1 Peter 2.13–17: urging loyalty to 'human institutions' – scotching any ideology of the emperor as divine; calling Christians 'free people' – rather than subjects of Empire; exhortation to 'honour' temporal powers but to 'fear' God – all suggest where true priorities lie, and which of the temporal or heavenly powers are deemed the true objects of worship. The superficial impression of quietism is subverted. It all suggests that 1 Peter is advancing 'a measured but conscious resistance to imperial demands' (Horrell 2008, p. 88).

So while Christians are exhorted not to be the cause of slander or hostility on the grounds of committing crime or moral misconduct, equally they should not be ashamed to profess their faith. If to be a 'Christian' is thought a crime, it is one that the Church confesses with pride, thereby turning the normal processes of justice on their head, since in a normal trial one pleads innocent in the face of pressure to confess. Despite the ethic of suffering and resilience, however, the strategy is not one of withdrawal or capitulation but robust self-justification. Hope is the foundation of Christian behaviour as the eschatological fulfilment of the world to come, but it is that vision which serves as the well-spring of alternative values that surpass and relativize any current sufferings:

> But in your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. (1 Peter 3.15, NIV).

Truth to Power: Apologetics in the Patristic Era

The designation 'apologists' is a recent one, dating from the nineteenth century (Skarsaune 2010, p. 121). The term refers to those Christian writers of second century who wrote treatises defending the faith from detractors. The most prominent of these were Aristedes of Athens (*Apology*,

c. 125–150 CE), Athenagorus of Athens (*Plea on Behalf of Christians*, c. 177 CE), Justin Martyr (*1 and 2 Apology*, c. 150–155 CE), Tatian of Syria (*Oration to the Greeks*, c. 170) and Tertullian (*Apology*, c. 198–217 CE). Taken together as a corpus, such literature originated from the Greek-speaking regions of Greece, Asia Minor, Egypt and Syria and Latin-speaking regions of North Africa.

There was also an apologetic purpose to many Christian martyriological texts, dating from the same period and including such works as *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, *The Martyrdom of Carpus, Papylus and Agathonicê*, *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, *The Acts of Justin and Companions* and *The Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne*. Such literature would have had a significant 'public' dimension since they often contained accounts of the martyrs' trials, thereby portraying accounts of exemplary Christian behaviour in the face of persecution. Such literature maintains themes in the first letter of Peter, striking a continuity between the passion of Christ and the public demeanour of the faithful, in portraying a world in which 'the blood of martyrs watered the seeds of hope implanted in the world by Christ's rising from the dead' (Dulles 1999, p. 80).

While 'apologist' may be of modern provenance, the term 'apology' appears to have originated with the early fourth-century writer Eusebius of Caesarea, to denote works addressed to the Roman Emperor. By this definition, that means Tertullian, Athenagoras, Quadratus, Aristedes and Justin, all from this period, qualify as 'apologists' or writers of apologies that were not addressed to fellow Christians (such as 1 Peter) or simply to peers, such as philosophers or pagan believers, but were directed at the public authorities. Skarsaune (2010) argues that this tradition is pioneered by Justin Martyr's first and second *Apology*, dating from the mid second century, and effectively comes to an end with Tertullian. As Skarsaune notes, these were therefore justifications for the Christian faith that reached beyond the Church itself to the wider society – furthermore, to the highest Imperial powers of all.

Unlike the message of 1 Peter, therefore, which taught endurance in the face of secular opposition – albeit as an outworking of the Church's identification with Christ's passion – and which saw it as incumbent upon a Christian to endure, but never challenge, civil and domestic authority, this later generation of writing was prepared to speak up. The basis of the argument was philosophical in nature, as a defence of the logical coherence

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of the faith.[13] Nevertheless, the substance of the apology concerned the public position of Christians, protesting against the injustice of the legal charges levelled against them. Justin pleads for an end to the prosecution of Christians who, it would seem, are being indicted simply for their beliefs, and not for any legal offence or political disloyalty. As Skarsaune argues, therefore, such apologies were effectively a 'petition' to the Emperor (2010, p. 123). The opening paragraph of Justin's first Apology illustrates this well: the imperial leadership are addressed as men of learning, certainly; but in appealing to them in concert with other civil powers, and in introducing his own patrimony and citizenship as a representative of all the 'nations' who suffer persecution, Justin cements together the political and philosophical dimensions of his defence:

> To the Emperor Titus Aelius Adrianus Antoninus Pius Augustus Caesar, and to his son Verissimus the philosopher, and to Lucius the philosopher, the natural son of Caesar, and the adopted son of Pius, a lover of learning, and to the sacred senate, with the whole people of the Romans, I, Justin, son of Priscus and grandson of Bacchius, natives of Flavia Neopolis in Palestine, present this address and petition in [sic] behalf of those of all nations who are unjustly hated and wantonly abused, myself being one of them. (Bush 1983, p. 5)[14]

Similarly, the persecution of Christians often arose because they refused to take part in the public acts of veneration to the Emperor – arising, naturally, from their allegiance to the Christian God – but nevertheless the accusation is levelled in terms of their refusal to participate in the Imperial cult; and this is what Justin is concerned to argue. Christians cannot be accused of irrationality in their preference for God over the emperor, and here, Justin advances arguments from the scriptures and pagan philosophers – especially injunctions against idolatry – to make his point. So, in effect, Justin was defending his fellow-believers both on political and philosophical grounds: they were the victims of legal malpractice and misinterpretation; and they were not as out of step with ancient teaching as their

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13 Skarsaune argues that this was conditioned by the emergence of a new generation of rulers who prided themselves on their philosophical credentials, as well as their political position (2010, p. 123).

14 See also the opening citation of the apology of Athenagoras, c. 177 CE (Athenagoras, 1983, p. 35).

detractors might suggest (Skarsaune 2010, pp. 125–9). Why would Justin do this if he were simply concerned to prove the logic of Christian belief, or merely preoccupied with the ordering of a holy people as disciples first and foremost, without some interest in the public standing of the Church and the legal fate of his fellow-Christians?

In his apology, Athenagoras (c. 177 CE) appeals to the Emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Aurelius ('conquerors . . . and more than all, philosophers', Bush 1983, p. 35) for the civil liberties of Christians, reminding them of the pluralism of the Empire and the practice of freedom of religion granted to its many peoples (Chapter 1, pp. 35–6). He pleads that such consideration be extended to Christians, who are suffering public harassment. Like Justin, Athenagoras asks that Christians be given a fair hearing, one based not on hearsay but on fact:

> If I go minutely into the particulars of our doctrine, let it not surprise you. It is that you may not be carried away by the popular and irrational opinion, but may have the truth clearly before you. For presenting the opinions themselves to which we adhere, as being not human, but uttered and taught by God, we shall be able to persuade you not to think of us as atheists. (Bush 1983, p. 43)

Athenagorus offers testimony to Christians' worship of God as Trinity, arguing (like Justin) that this is consistent with the insights of the ancients. Charges of atheism are groundless, therefore; but so are those of immorality and sedition. He therefore petitions the authorities to relieve his community of such slander and, as a result, grant them relief from persecution (Chapter II). However, if Athenagorus and theology fail to convince, then let the humble integrity of the community of the Church speak for itself:

> But among us you will find uneducated persons, and artisans, and old women, who, if they are unable in words to prove the benefit of our doctrine, yet by their deeds exhibit the benefit arising from the persuasion of its truth: they do not rehearse speeches, but exhibit good works; when struck, they do not strike again; when robbed, they do not go to law; they give to those that ask of them, and love their neighbours as themselves. (Bush 1983, p. 44)

So Athenagorus is confident that by making the theological and philosophical case to such learned (and benevolent) rulers, he can be assured of a fair hearing:

> But as they [Pythagorus, Socrates and other philosophers] were none the worse in respect of virtue because of the opinion of the multitude, so neither does the undiscriminating calumny of some persons cast any shade upon us as regards rectitude of life, for with God we stand in good repute. Nevertheless, I will meet these charges also, although I am well assured that by what has already been said I have cleared myself to you. For as you excel all men in intelligence, you know that those whose life is directed towards God as its rule, so that each one among us may be blameless and irreproachable before Him, will not entertain even the thought of the slightest sin. (Bush 1983, p. 57)

Similarly, Tertullian (197 CE) rebuts the charges of atheism, immorality and treachery against Christians, and rejects the claim that their refusal to observe the public cult of the Emperor has destabilized the State. He points out that no other group apart from Christians is singled out for such harassment. So he, too, appeals to the State to extend justice to Christians and develops his philosophical defence accordingly. In distancing themselves from the excesses of Emperor worship, he argues, Christians actually protect the equilibrium of the Empire. But if they are called to martyrdom, then they do so voluntarily out of their love for God, and their virtue is a living testimony to their very persecutors (Dulles 1999, pp. 49–53).

The logical coherence of Christianity is argued lucidly and at length by apologists who assume that, by virtue of their higher learning, their Imperial addressees will appreciate its authenticity. Yet they are making these pleas to effect a greater freedom of thought and practice for their fellow-believers: to achieve some civil liberties which they see as being frequently withheld or breached. Yet their argument is that on philosophical grounds this is unreasonable. But the point is, the justifications for faith are advanced in order that public disapproval may be quashed – so the apologetic literature of this era assumes a number of things: first, that the Christian faith can be defended by use of appeals to non-Christian sources, second, by appeal to natural justice in the style with which Imperial power is exercised, and third, that the public demeanour of the Church is beyond

reproach. The apologies are therefore a form of public theology, in so far as they advance a theological argument in public for the right of Christians to live as citizens within the body politic without fear or hindrance.

While not addressed directly to Imperial powers, Augustine's *City of God* (413–27 CE) was certainly prompted by the political situation. When Rome fell to the Goths in 410, recrimination turned to the Christians, who were held responsible for the Empire turning its back on the old faith. Quite the contrary, argued Augustine: during the fighting, the Barbarians respected the churches which provided sanctuary (Chapter VII). While the suffering of pagans caused them to doubt their faith, Christians displayed a greater resilience through their trust in the cross and resurrection (Chapter XXIX). All of this is informed by a belief in God's providence which will sustain the Church in suffering 'until the world which had persecuted in frenzy now followed in faith' (Augustine 1984, p. 1033). Augustine is therefore able to use a political crisis to set out a sophisticated Christian theology of public life and to commend the superiority of a social order sustained by divine providence. More than any of his predecessors, Augustine integrates his response to particular events or detractors (in his case, the account of the fate of Rome) into a comprehensive theology of history.

In terms of their cultural contexts and their intended audience(s), the 'apologies' of the pre-Constantinian period were unabashedly addressed to temporal authorities and were couched in forms of reasoning that would have been familiar to their interlocuters. They were always conditioned by questions of the relationship between Christian identity and civic loyalty, whether that was one of opposition or agreement. Apologetics begins as personal testimony and ends in theology. Such utterances 'speak truth to power', aware both of the significance and reality of such powers for the everyday welfare of the world, and yet, in mounting a defence, point to a higher or alternative power. Whether Christianity was to be commended for its philosophical coherence, its moral probity or its political impact, whether it resulted in Christians portraying themselves as exemplary citizens of this world or one to come, within the diversity of forms and genres, the public and political nature of the literature cannot be denied, 'prompted by the need to define and defend their own understanding of Christianity in the given harsh historical and culture [sic] reality' (Ree 2005, p. 8).

Later Apologists

During the medieval period in Europe, there was less imperative to defend the status of Christianity against civic opposition, since in many respects Church and State were one. After Aquinas, the continuity of classical culture and Christian theology was axiomatic. The focus of apologetic writing was therefore not philosophical doubters or legal sanctions, but the challenges of unbelievers such as Jews and Muslims. Yet many apologists, such as Anselm, Nicholas of Cusa, Bonaventure, Abelard and Aquinas himself found wisdom in these traditions, such as the recovery of the lost heritage of Aristotelian thought through interaction with Arab philosophers.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were dominated by the religious disputes of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Dulles does not regard this period as particularly outstanding for the history of apologetics (1999, p. 145). Despite controversies regarding the relationship between Church and State and the role of Protestant dissenters within the political order, few theologians used directly apologetic arguments to defend their allegiances, although some Catholic polemicists of the Counter-Reformation were concerned to defend papal authority. In their theological treatises, many Protestant reformers emphasized human sinfulness and the importance of Scripture as the living revelation of God. Calvin's notion of 'common grace', held that human reason was potentially capable of apprehending the truth, but demonstrating the truth through apologetics alone was impossible without the aid of Scripture as transcending and correcting the limitations of human finitude.

The Enlightenment

Apologists from the eighteenth century faced challenges to the magisterial authority of the Church and to the literalism of a biblical world-view from a rising tide of scepticism which rallied around humanist principles of reason, critical enquiry and empiricism. Apologists sought to reconcile faith and reason and looked increasingly to natural theology. Friedrich Schleiermacher stood between the Pietism of his upbringing and a more cosmopolitan society of Berlin (1996). He accepted criticisms of the outward

ephemera of religious dogmas but defended the reality of religion as the expression of an enduring, universal feeling of absolute dependence. The impact of the Enlightenment may have caused apologetics to concentrate on debating the truth of Christianity as rational belief and existential feeling at the expense of defending the practical virtues of Christianity. While apologetics is primarily a defence of the faith, the question becomes, of what kind of faith and what weight is given to public, pluralist discourse; and how far non-Christian world-views are seen as potential bearers of truth and thus apologetics a shared journey or conversation.

Contemporary Apologetics

By the twentieth century, the fault-lines widened between styles of apologetics that emphasized the discipline as a defence of received tradition and evidence as argument to prove its truth, and more revisionist approaches that stressed the commonality of human experience and the religious quest and sought to mediate between the metaphors and thought-forms of different traditions in order to find points of correspondence and analogy (Dulles 1971, p. 371). Apologetic literature from this period nevertheless had to struggle to maintain its place in contemporary theology, due largely to the influence of neo-orthodoxy from the middle of the twentieth century. The influence of Barthian theology made itself felt in arguing that apologetics is impossible, since God is not susceptible to human reason, but apprehended through God's self-revelation in Jesus. There is no common ground or shared rationality on which to establish an apologetics which sees itself as a bridging or mediating discourse. The only apologetic is the enunciation of a systematic theology as God's saving word to sinful humanity. Earlier, I stressed traditions that based Christian apologetics in an appeal to universal religious experience; contemporary evangelical writers tend to look more to the historical facticity of Scripture and the life of Jesus. Some of the language of contemporary apologetics signals the eclipse of universalist or eirenic perspectives in favour of more adversarial approaches. In the face of new cultural opponents, Christians need 'upgraded apologetic weaponry' (Milbank 2011, p. xiii); Tacelli and Kreeft talk about 'the battle of arguments' (2003, pp. 10, 139); and William Lane

Craig claims, 'We've got to train our kids for war. How dare we send them unarmed into an intellectual war zone?' (2010, p. 20).

The emphasis on working out of doctrinal tradition into practice is also apparent. Bush (1983) characterizes a number of types of contemporary apologetics: rationalism, or arguments from the laws of logic; empiricism or experientialism, which finds evidence in nature or religious experience; fideism or presuppositionalism which argues that the nature of revelation is such that it can only be self-authenticating within an a priori commitment to the paradigm of faith; and evidentialism, which looks for historical or scientific proofs. 'Apologetics, in the broad sense, is what all theologians use when they commend their views to those unbelievers who might listen to them' (1983, p. 375). Another leading contemporary writer in apologetics is William Lane Craig (2008), who argues that apologetics is essentially a rational justification or exposition of the truth-claims of Christianity. It is distinct from evangelism, in that apologetics is 'a theoretical discipline that tries to answer the question, "What rational warrant can be given for the Christian faith?"' (p. 15).

Apologetics may have a number of functions, from helping to shape culture, to building up the faithful and the evangelization of unbelievers (Craig 2008, p. 23). The first of these options appears to connect with my earlier discussion of apologetics intra- and extra-ecclesia, and potentially speaks of a public dimension. It may also relate to the approach of liberal theologians of the twentieth century such as Paul Tillich, who argued that the apologist should listen to contemporary culture for what it reveals about our desires and preoccupations – this is what Tillich did with visual arts and the modern psychotherapies. However, when Craig speaks of engaging with culture, this does seem to be as a prelude to evangelism, rather than, for example, a justification of the civil or moral credentials of Christianity with concomitant implications for the public contribution of the Church. Engagement with culture for Craig is directed towards giving people 'the intellectual permission to believe' (2008, p. 19), rather than to establish a common dialogue. Culture is the strategic vehicle of proclamation but not a site of revelation. 'It is the broader task of Christian apologetics to help create and sustain a cultural milieu in which the gospel can be heard as an intellectually viable option for thinking men and women' (2008, p. 17).

Emergent Voices: Contextual, Imaginative, Cross-Cultural

While apologetic literature tends to be dominated by evangelical writers who stick with a traditional defence of propositional truth, there are signs of new trends among evangelicals as well as good examples of robust debate within wider public forums. There is a shift away from a reliance on pure reason towards an engagement with cultural forms as the spaces of shared meaning – with motifs such as narrative, imagination and performativity taking the place of rationalist, propositional methods. An examination of such trends may give us clues for the shape of an apologetic public theology, and how opportunities for this to take place might be created.

Writers such as Benno van den Toren (2011) are moving to embrace a wider cross-cultural approach, prompted by the emergence of postmodernity. He sees the limitations of contemporary Christian apologetics, especially in evangelical mode, in having been directed towards relating Christianity to the *modern* mindset, through its emphasis on empiricism and rationalism. Postmodernism exposes Christian apologetics to religious, spiritual and philosophical pluralism, but eschews any notion of objective, universal truth. The 'project of trying to "prove" God's existence and the truth of the Christian faith, according to supposedly "pure" reason' (Hughes 2011, p. 5) is exposed as an accommodation to modernism. Instead, van den Toren discards evidentialist, propositionalist and rationalist arguments in favour of cross-cultural dialogue and 'dialogue aimed at persuasion' (van den Toren 2011, p. xi). Echoing movements in missiology which turned to the language of 'inculturation', he concedes that cultural context conditions the way in which the Christian gospel must be presented. 'Christian apologetic dialogue and witness should address people not as free-floating individuals but as members of a community and embedded in a tradition' (p. 211). Any commendation of Christianity must be contextual and speak to the conditions of its audience:

> In terms of this model, the basic task of the apologist is no longer to provide a supposedly universal and cultural-independent foundation of knowledge. His [sic] task is to compare different ways of reading reality and to defend the adequacy and relevance of the Christian *reading* in relation to the specific alternative readings offered. (pp. 45–46, my emphasis)

Note the emphasis on *reading*: the text of the world in the light of the text of Christian tradition, such that the Church is cast as 'a hermeneutic of the Gospel' (p. 33). The question is whether the privileged reading is Christian and biblical, and the extent to which non-theological texts and contexts are included in interpretative process. Nevertheless, this is a model of apologetics that commends the 'truth' not as correspondence with propositional knowledge but as exemplary lifestyle, as a world into which another is invited, in the understanding that cultural context conditions a response. As van den Toren argues, apologetics cannot be judged by universal, abstract criteria of correspondence to idealist truth. It requires attention to the cultural and philosophical context in which all participants in the conversation are immersed. Such an understanding of apologia roots it firmly in its context and in the immediacy of experience and narrative. 'The reasonableness of the recommendation for a life well lived must be assessed in light of the necessarily temporal and circumstantial character of that sort of human life' (Werpehowski 1986, p. 287). Apologetics, historically, has never proceeded from abstraction or from a neutral place, since – whether in the legal or theological sense – it is first and foremost a testimony: '. . . any successful exercise of apologetics . . . must contain a strong confessional element which convinces precisely because it persuades through the force of an imaginative presentation of belief' (Milbank 2011, p. xiv).

Contrast van den Toren's attempt to shift the ground of evangelical apologetics, however, with another contemporary contribution to 'postmodern' apologetics, which resolutely sticks with the doctrines of propositional truth and universal rationality:

> How *do* we convince postmodernists of the truth of the gospel? Is apologetics still *possible* in a society that no longer believes in objective truth as demonstrable by a predefined standard of rationality? How do we persuade others of the truth of the gospel in a culture where a variety of rationalities co-exist? (Phillips and Oakholm 1995, p. 11)

Phillips and Oakholm also criticize those who 'are more concerned to convince "cultured despisers" of the *relevance* of the church than the *truth* of the gospel' (p. 11).

'Imaginative Apologetics'

The very epistemology of apologetics, and the inadequacy of pure reason to communicate the nature of faith, is increasingly coming under scrutiny. A collection of essays, *Imaginative Apologetics*, is attempting to move beyond the rationalist, modernist paradigm which insists that:

> . . . the only 'reason' which discloses truth is a cold, detached reason that is isolated from both feeling and imagination, as likewise from both narrative and ethical evaluation. Christian apologetics now needs rather to embrace the opposite assumption that our most visionary and ideal insights can most disclose the real, provided that this is accompanied by a widening in democratic scope of our sympathies for the ordinary, and the capacities and vast implications of the quotidian . . . (Milbank 2011, p. xxii)

The premise behind *Imaginative Apologetics*, therefore, is partly that the kind of apologetics familiar to Irenaeus, Schleiermacher or Bishop Berkeley is not appropriate for the contemporary world. As well as facing new kinds of scepticism and pluralism, apologetics may need to reconsider adopting new strategies and forms of discourse, which shift the focus away from a particular kind of abstract, propositional argumentation and concentrate on harnessing the imagination in pursuit of its aims. The editor himself argues that, 'Throughout this collection there is an enquiry into the nature of reason and the role, within it, of the imagination' (Davison 2011, p. xxv). Similarly, in his Foreword, John Milbank maintains that 'it is the true exercise of the imagination which . . . guides and cautions our discursive judgement' (p. xxiii). Apologetics is presented as kind of contextual theology, entailing a reading of the signs of the times as revealed through popular culture, the arts and humanities:

> It is not possible to discover how the Christian faith, and the Church, can speak meaningfully into a secular world unless efforts have first been made to understand the shape of this world itself: its values, assumptions, prejudices, cravings; especially as these reveal where the veil is thinnest between secular and religious concerns, and where, in fact, the Spirit may be going before those who already belong to faith, made manifest in places beyond the confines of the institutional Church. (Lazenby 2011, p. 46)

This, of course, is entirely consistent with the sensibilities of the earliest evangelists for the gospel, who knew well the importance of addressing their audiences on their own terms, using concepts and arguments that would connect directly with their concerns, in terms familiar to their indigenous world-view. Another contributor, similarly, speaks of making Christianity attractive and compelling by virtue of its '*inherent* beauty and goodness' (Hughes 2011, p. 9). According to this model, then, apologetics is not interested in propositional truth (although any representation of faith will be intellectually robust), so much as something that excites our desires. By the same token, an engagement with things like visual arts, literature, film and material cultures constitutes a significant arena for apologetics, since these are the places where questions of truth, beauty, goodness are encountered; they are '"diagnostic spaces": places where the relationship between religion and the wider world is being clearly played out' (Lazenby 2011).

Such an understanding of apologetic discourse sees it as the articulation of something that necessarily defies conceptualization; as a journey from religious experience into public proclamation. Karen Armstrong frames this in terms of the tension between *logos* and *mythos*: the former as pragmatic, rational and instrumental, and the latter pertaining to experience that is altogether more ineffable and mysterious (2009, pp. 2–3). That translation, from mythos to logos, describes the passage of apologia: the immediacy of conviction must be in some way systematized, and cannot remain at the level of feeling but must be put into words. This does beg the question whether the experience of the divine and God's own nature, necessarily exceeds any attempt to put it into language – which may put some elements of apologetics into perspective, and invites apologists to consider alternative modes of knowing which are not straight-jacketed by rationalism and positivism but attempt to do justice to 'the more elusive, puzzling and tragic aspects of the human predicament that lay outside the remit of *logos*' (Dulles 1971).

Similarly, Edward T. Oakes surveys the popularity of narrative as a 'privileged locus for doing theology', lamenting the way in which theology has been 'robbed of its rich and storied character by the too ready assumption . . . that [it] must work in the manner, if not of science, at least in that Cartesian style characterized by rigor and the search for self-evident principles – that is, propositionally' (1992, p. 57). Narrative renders theological discourse 'public' and plausible in the face of Enlightenment challenges to the cognitive plausibility of Christian doctrine and its retreat

into privatized, subjective belief. It no longer claims universal, objective status but as one way (among many) of rendering reality. Narrative enables theology to connect with literary and other imaginative genres, and relates to lived experience in ways that enable it to respond to pastoral and existential issues. Narrative also reminds us of the narrative nature of biblical literature and provides alternative to propositional, doctrinal approaches to theology. Narrative is not merely a dramatization of Christian doctrine but the very essence of its structure. This makes it easier to contextualize the history of doctrine and characterizes revelation not as 'a surprising, heteronomous "deposit" that landed on the human scene more or less literally out of the blue', but as something 'more easily seen as simply a more intense and clarifying narrative, one that structures and gives meaning to all the other narrative lines that make up a human life' (p. 38).

We may belong to our particular narratives and world-views, but our inhabitation of these stories is what qualifies us to belong to a broader, more universal history as well. As *homo narrans* we find our place in the world through the specificity of language and context that constitute the ways in which we participate in what Paul Ricœur terms 'the game of telling' (Ricœur, 1981, p. 294). Our very historicity comes to us by means of telling stories, and this is the way we gain access to that deeper experience of our own historicity. If 'narrative is genuinely indicative of the world', says Edward Oakes, 'then that implies that we are indeed all linked by the horizon *of* that world' (1992, p. 51). The relating and sharing of narrative, then, may be a device by which different participants can converge within a pluralistic public realm in order to engage in dialogue and apologetics, similar to Tracy's 'analogical' approach.

There is still an echo of van den Toren's characterization of the Christian community as the 'hermeneutic' of the gospel, but here is also a performative element – a *habitus* of faith that is the 'living human testimony' to a particular world-view. To translate that into Stackhouse's terms, that could take the form of a witness to the difference it makes to the civil responsibilities of the Christian – in providing an explanation to other citizens of the reasons behind a particular public stance. None of this discounts the significance of normative, theologically grounded principles, but simply underlines that the arena of apologetics may best be exercised not in the adversarial combat of rational proof but the incarnational, sacramental spaces of artful, purposeful action. This is an epistemology of Christian reasoning that embraces both intellect and desire, truth and beauty:

It is the work of the apologist to suggest that only in God does our wonder reach its zenith, and only in God do our deepest desires find their fulfilment. The apologist may labour to show that the Christian theological vision is *true*, but that will fall flat unless he or she has an equal confidence that it is supremely *attractive and engaging*. (Davison 2011, p. xxvi, my emphasis)

Notwithstanding, there is a clear gap in this collection, and that is any kind of engagement with apologetics in the public realm beyond literature and the arts and science. Astonishingly, there is no discussion of the role of media; and nothing about public theology at all, as one of the most significant places in which the teachings of the Christian tradition engage with the everyday worlds of politics, economics or civil society. What is the reason for this omission? That we cannot exercise our imaginations in these areas of life? That Christian engagement in these fields to defend and commend the grounds for theological and ethical intervention – say in the area of poverty, or a discussion of how to cast one's vote or the nature of urban life and faith (all familiar areas of discourse within public theology) – might not benefit from the use of imaginative apologetics?

In fact, popular culture and media output of all kinds are some of the most innovative and creative arenas within which people explore questions of truth and meaning: what it means to be human, the beginnings and endings of life, the nature of difference, the future of the planet – and these are not simply aesthetic but political and moral issues too (Lynch 2005; Graham and Poling 2000). Similarly, performative and aesthetic forms of political or public protest could serve as alternative forms of theological expression, more engaging than official reports or the conventions of debating-chambers and political assemblies. Not to say that these dimensions of public life do not matter, but suggesting that there are alternative ways to shape civil society and public debate.

While this collection on imaginative apologetics promises an exciting alternative epistemology, then none of the contributions is concerned with anything to do with public issues, social ethics or practical theology. This is an unfortunate omission, which fails to do full justice to the biblical and historical traditions of apologetics which framed themselves as defences of faith precisely within the realm of citizenship as one of the proper outworkings of the Christian calling. Yet it is impossible to believe that the commons of civil society would not also constitute the kind of shared

space in which the kind of apologetic encounters commended by Davison and co. might take place. Nevertheless, is it possible to extrapolate and find points of connection between this vision and the claims of Stackhouse? For the work of the imagination in culture, literature and the arts, we might substitute opportunities to articulate the theologies of the 'action-guiding world-views' which inform the churches' and individuals' public vocation of seeking the common good. It is to this task that I now turn.

7

The Apologetics of Presence

Public Theology after Christendom and Secularism

> Public theology needs institutional liberty over against the church, and a place in the open house of scholarship and the sciences. Today this liberty has to be defended against both atheists and fundamentalists. (Moltmann 1999, p. 5)

> In Christ we are offered the possibility of partaking in the reality of God and in the reality of the world, but not in the one without the other. The reality of God discloses itself only by setting me entirely in the reality of the world . . . (Bonhoeffer 1995, p. 193)

Introduction

William Temple's book *Christianity and Social Order* (1942) is a classic of public theology. In Britain, it fed into a national debate about social and economic reconstruction after the 1939–45 war, and was influential in forging, along with William Beveridge's report on welfare, the policies of the reforming Labour Government of 1945–51. Together with *Faith in the City* (1985) it is one of the high watermarks of modern Anglican social thought. Despite his public prominence, however, as leader of the Established Church of England at a time of strong Christian observance, Temple never presumed that the Church could claim an automatic or privileged voice. The chapter titles of *Christianity and Social Order* reveal his circumspection: 'What Right has the Church to Interfere?' he asks. 'How Should the Church Interfere?' and 'Has the Church Claimed to Intervene Before?' He was well aware that the Church might be accused of straying beyond its proper jurisdiction if it was seen to 'interfere' in public life. Even so, without seeking to compromise the autonomy of the secular, Temple affirmed the necessity of the Christian community to contribute to the future direction of society. Yet it does so, he argued, from the well-springs of its own life, as an incarnational and sacramental entity, whose identity is shaped by

the historical reality of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. From its eucha-ristic calling to be the Body of Christ, broken and offered to the world, the Church is commissioned to 'announce Christian principles' and relate them to the social order critically and constructively. But in addition, the Church must then 'pass on to Christian citizens, acting in their civic capac-ity, the task of re-shaping the existing order' (Temple 1942, p. 58). So the public role of the Church is to equip those called by virtue of the citizen-ship bestowed on them by a secular (as in neutral) democracy to exercise a public vocation.

In many respects my attempts to articulate anew the contours of a post-secular public theology lead me back to the spirit of Temple's remarks. Reli-gious voices today have no automatic or authoritative right to speak, given the nature of the secular, pluralist public realm. Public theology speaks into an increasingly contested and fragmented context, and is divided as to the nature of its address to the world: with what voice, from what sources, might the Church speak: how authoritative and binding are its own traditions and practices, and how far does that need to accommodate to a wider audience? Public theologians now find themselves in the kind of position that prompts Marion Maddox to ask, 'What legitimacy can a theologically-based contribution claim where Christianity commands no automatic attention?' (2007, p. 82).

Faced with the paradoxical and unprecedented challenge of a post-secular society, then, I have continued to uphold the public vocation of the Church in a way which affirms its concern for the common good of soci-ety, and the individual calling of Christians to be faithful citizens as well as good disciples. I have drawn on Max Stackhouse's insistence that public theology necessarily involves an apologetic function, in that it must always be prepared to 'give an account' of its motives and values in a way that is accessible to its interlocutors. It is believed that this will afford Chris-tians and the Church the best opportunity to make its influence felt, by engendering:

a public theology that does not separate itself from the world into a self-sufficient counter-community with its own religious language, but knows how to speak the language of the world and how to be in dia-logue with the world; a public theology that . . . is grounded in Christ and therefore challenges the world to make God's way for the world

visible, a prophetic theology that leads the world beyond its worldly ways. (Bedford-Strohm 2007b, p. 36).

In the rest of this chapter, then, I want to pursue a number of themes I hope will be indicative of the tasks and scope of a post-secular public theology. I want to think first about the further ramifications of a public theology in which the praxis of discipleship is its own apologetic. The post-liberal theology of George Lindbeck reminds us that the test of faith is not its correspondence with propositional truth but its capacity to facilitate Christian performance. This is a valuable lesson about the community of faith as an 'apologetics of presence' (Murphy-O'Connor 2009), and the Church as a sign and sacrament of God's redemptive presence in the world. I want to relate this to the insights of Latin American liberation theology, and the work of Gustavo Gutiérrez in particular, which also reminds us that an apologetic public theology is concerned less with words than actions, and that a defence of faith is to be found in its power to liberate and transform situations of injustice and human suffering. As Gutiérrez has argued, theology as orthopraxy is called to identify not so much with the 'non-believer' but the 'non-person' on the periphery of the powers that be.

This begins to point me towards further consideration of the nature of the 'publics' to whom public theology might be accountable. In Chapter 3, I discussed the various ways in which public theologians have defined the nature of the public, and I highlighted the fragmented nature of public life in the West. Gutiérrez's commitment to a theology that proclaims good news to the poor in the shape of its practices of solidarity and liberation immediately locates public theology's accountability not in a generic public but preferentially towards those who have been marginalized and disempowered by global economic and political forces. This is given further theological weight by Jürgen Moltmann in his book *The Crucified God*, where he interprets the death of Jesus as an act which reveals the true nature of God, as one who humbles himself in order that 'all the *godless and godforsaken* can experience communion with him' (1974, p. 286, my emphasis). These categories of society denote respectively an existential separation from God and a material abandonment, or lack of hope. They resonate powerfully today with our contemporary situation, in which public theology has to make the case for the merits of religious contributions to its 'cultured despisers' in a society that is comfortably functionally

secular, but also stands in solidarity with the crucified God who identifies with the privations of all those who suffer.

Finally, I will develop three motifs of post-secular public theology which have already appeared in my discussion, but which seem to gain new currency in the light of what I have argued so far. First, public theology as Christian apologetics, above all, is concerned primarily with 'the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare' (Jeremiah 29.7 NRSV). It is something conducted in solidarity with the secular, and concerned above all with the common good beyond the confines of the institutional Church. Indeed, part of the Christian public vocation should be to nurture a pluralist, deliberative space of civil discourse in the interests of a healthy body politic.

Second, in keeping with the early Christian apologists who regarded their defences of faith as petitions to the rulers, I consider what it means to promote public theology as 'speaking truth to power'. This renews the historic commitment of public theologians to serve as advocates and speak prophetically into structures and institutions in the name of justice. Lindbeck's emphasis on the formation of the 'skills' of the Christian community brings to the forefront the importance of a theologically literate and confident laity as 'Ambassadors for Christ' (2 Cor. 5.20). As my third motif, then, continuing that of an apologetics of praxis and presence, I want to advance a plea for greater attention to a neglected aspect of public theology: the secular vocation and formation of the laity. It summons the institutional Church to take very seriously the business of fostering a deeper and more extensive theological literacy among the laity. This returns us to the relationship between words and actions in apologetics: while the practices of faithful citizenship constitute a kind of first-order public theology, they may still need justification. 'Giving an account of oneself' may be expressed in the praxis of care, social activism and active citizenship, but it must also mean being able to speak with conviction into a reasoned public debate.

Praxis and Performance: Public Theology in Deed and Word

In Chapter 6, I traced how new understandings of apologetics are displacing a modernist cognitive model that emphasizes the priority of assent to

propositional truths, and positing the object of apologetics as an invitation to participate in a way of life. This epistemology of apologetics assumes faith as '*habitus*': a practical wisdom that gives shape to the world and orientates Christians in their actions and behaviours. So apologetics points not to propositional, but transformational truth; the invitation is not to 'believe' but to embrace a world-view which 'unless it is also shown in action it is not adequately shown at all' (Davison 2011, p. 26). This takes us back to 1 Peter, in which the *habitus* of the community is a sacramental, embodied imitation of Christ, a 'living human document' of Christ's passion, death and resurrection. Apologetics is at once a narrative of Christian imagination and a discourse of exemplary virtue. It does not so much require its hearers to think and believe in certain propositional truths – in the style of what has come to dominate contemporary apologetic literature – but to imagine and live according to a different kind of reality.

This raises a question about the relationship of words and deeds in apologetics, and indeed in public theology. One of the most significant insights of post-liberal theology was its emphasis on the praxis of the Christian community as its own (self-authenticated) apologetics. George Lindbeck's distinction between 'knowing that' and 'knowing how' in the life of faith, draws a similar distinction between cognitive manifestations of Christian belief and a more 'performative' dimension. The test of faith is not its correspondence with propositional truth (or, indeed, with putatively universal, religious experience), but its facilitation of the practices of discipleship. 'In short, intelligibility comes from skill, not theory, and credibility comes from good performance, not adherence to independently formulated criteria' (Lindbeck 1984, p. 131). In terms of the apologetic task of theology, then, Lindbeck's emphasis on nurturing 'skilful' practitioners takes us, once again, into a realm where actions, not words, constitute the chief credentials of the gospel in the public square.

This is similar to what Hogue (2010) characterizes as 'pragmatic' public theology. It engages with pluralism by starting from its own traditions and starting-points. It locates itself within fluid boundaries and identities and concentrates on building common spaces and projects as a means of facilitating dialogue. It seeks collaboration and solidarity as its core objectives: the achievement of shared goals and values, even amidst pluralism, is preferable to rational debate. Thus it takes seriously Charles Taylor's characterization of modern consciousness as framed by reflexivity in the face of

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pluralism; but works actively and constructively within such a context as a site of religious exchange:

> The purpose of a pragmatic public theology . . . is not to galvanize a singular metaphysical moral vision or to reinforce a singular norma-tive worldview, but to facilitate and to nourish collaborative strategies around common moral tasks. (Hogue 2010, p. 366)

Such an approach is inductive, because it begins with a concrete task, seek-ing to articulate 'the practically praise-worthy rather than a defense [sic] of beliefs' (Hogue 2010, p. 367). This does not discount the significance of normative, theologically grounded principles, but simply underlines that the arena of apologetics is not to be found in the adversarial combat of ratio-nal proof but in the incarnational, performative space of purposeful action. Davison and others pursue this point by associating apologetics with virtue ethics. 'Apologetics is not an instrument to be deployed upon the person with whom we are speaking, not least because that fails to take each per-son's particular personhood sufficiently seriously. Rather, authentic Chris-tian apologetics should resemble authentic Christian morality as portrayed within the 'virtue' tradition of ethics: the best Christian apologetics is the product of a thorough immersion in the Christian tradition combined with careful attention to the person with whom we are speaking and the context in which we find ourselves' (Davison 2011, p. xxvi). This means that good apologetics involves learning how to live well as well as being able to reason convincingly. The true witness of the Church is 'through its existence as a people formed by the gospel . . . [The Church] will never be able to say any-thing more true than the claims our living make' (Hovey 2011, pp. 109–10). The primary expression of public theology, then, will be in practical dem-onstrations that authentic faith leads to transformation, as a matter not just of interpreting the world but changing it. This shifts the centre of gravity for public theology as Christian apologetics in the direction of theologies of liberation which, similarly, privilege orthopraxy over orthodoxy.

Public Theology for the 'Non-Person'

Gustavo Gutiérrez reminds us that for theologies of liberation the chal-lenge is not a matter of belief but one of justice. Gutiérrez's indictment

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of first-world theology is that its attention to debating with the 'cultured despisers' of religion has been at the neglect of attention to the suffering of the poor, oppressed and dehumanized. Gutiérrez argues that the missionary and apologetic task of the Church is not to convince the non-believer but to liberate the non-person. For Gutiérrez, the task of apologetics is not to convince the sceptic, but to make the case for the right of theology to contribute to the quest for justice, to speak of God's preferential option as a matter of human, and not simply ecclesial, concern.

> A good part of contemporary theology seems to have arisen from the challenge of the nonbeliever. The nonbeliever questions our religious world, and demands a purification and profound renewal. Dietrich Bonhoeffer took up that challenge and formulated the incisive question we find at the origin of so many of the theological efforts of our day: How can one proclaim God in a world become adult, a world grown up, a world come of age? In Latin America, however, the challenge does not come first and foremost from the nonbeliever. It comes from the nonperson. It comes from the person whom the prevailing social order fails to recognize as a person – the poor, the exploited, the ones systematically and legally despoiled of their humanness, the ones who scarcely know they are persons at all . . . Hence the question here will not be how to speak of God in a world come of age, but rather how to proclaim God as Father in a world that is inhumane. What can it mean to tell a nonperson that he or she is God's child? (1983, p. 57)

Historically, Latin American liberation theology may have privileged economic marginalization, the impact of global dependency on the economies of the two-thirds world and the emergent revolutionary consciousness of class, but Gutiérrez would now argue that the poor are essentially those who are 'the insignificant, that is considered a "non-person", someone that is not fully acknowledged his/her rights as a human being' (1983, p. 15). This may be due to lack of economic means, but also on account of skin colour, gender or belonging to a despised culture. The task of the apologist who preaches Christ crucified is to make the case for the gospel in such a way that the *nonperson* is able to take possession of his or her very humanity.

This insight is fundamental in order to understand the development of liberation theology. Liberation theology is not just the political outworking of a moral principle, but is essentially a theological response to the

Christian faith, which developed among the poor and constituted a profound challenge to the more traditional teachings of a hierarchical Church. The encounter with Christ takes place in an encounter with the poor, and thus solidarity with them is a gospel imperative (1983, p. xiv). It is impossible to understand liberation theology without taking notice to this 'irruption of the poor' (1983, p. 11). The poor now become agents of their own destiny and the subjects, not the objects, of theological reflection.

What would it mean for Christian apologetics to address the non-person, to join the challenge of convicting them of their own humanity; and of public theology to articulate this as the core task of the Church's public role? If public theology is to recover a purpose as a form of Christian apologetics, and if theological justifications are embodied in orthopraxy as much as orthodoxy – demonstrating through faithful practice as well as justifying in reasoned debate – then the Church's commitment to the poor becomes a vital test of any credible apology for Christianity. The Church is called to be in solidarity with the poor in that search for God's justice. The measure of its theology rests in its facilitation of transformative praxis. An apologetics of liberation involves enacting the Good News to the poor in a praxis of solidarity, and in speaking truth to power – a public theology validated through the exercise of solidarity, advocacy and prophecy.

Public Theology for 'the Godless and the Godforsaken'

How else might we conceive of the 'public' with whom Christian apologetics might engage? For Gutiérrez, the Church's solidarity with the poor comes from its participation in the life of Christ crucified and risen. A similar emphasis on the Christological nature of the Church's praxis in the world comes from Jürgen Moltmann. Here, the kenosis or self-emptying of Christ is to be primarily understood neither as expiation for sins by which Jesus placates an angry God, nor as some temporary assumption of vulnerability which is then cancelled out by the victory of the resurrection. Rather, Moltmann argues that cross and resurrection are indivisible, since the suffering of the world is taken up into the very same God who acts redemptively through the resurrection. God on the cross enters into the condition of humanity that has become separated from God: 'the sinners, the godless and those forsaken by God' (1974, p. 285).

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In Christ, God willingly enters into the finitude of the world; in Jesus' cry of despair and desolation on the cross, humanity bears witness to the extent to which he assumes these qualities of 'godforsakenness': abandonment, hopelessness and suffering. The isolation and despair of Jesus at the point of crucifixion requires humanity to consider what the Cross means not only for their own destiny, but what it reveals about the very nature of God. It changes how humanity thinks of God – as the crucified one, who 'is found most deeply and evidently to be with us, the godless and the godforsaken' (Bauckham 2001, p. x). The promise of the resurrection is that the God who brings redemption, who repairs the separation between God and creation, is the same one who is in solidarity all along with the 'godless and godforsaken'.

In so far as the cross and resurrection defies worldly enthusiasms and ideologies, it confounds conventional trajectories of progress to reveal God's promise for the future. But this is complemented by a praxis of loving solidarity with the godless and godforsaken on the part of the Church. Moltmann speaks in *The Crucified God* of the cross and resurrection as 'the ground for living with the terror of history and the end of history' (1974, p. 278). Like other German political theologians of his generation, Moltmann was confronting the false gods of materialism, complacency and affluence with the vision of the crucified God. However, these sentiments have very contemporary resonances. At the beginning of the twenty-first century we are familiar with a world dominated by terror and the 'war on terror': of the kind of fear which pathologizes religion and cultural difference, but also an awareness of the pressing scale of human want and oppression. On the other hand, the 'end of history' after the work of the political theorist Francis Fukuyama, which he meant as signalling an end to ideology, and a stripping out of narratives of meaning, might also speak to a contemporary condition of the loss of the ability to identify a purpose or soteriological end to human affairs. Moltmann identifies those with the 'godless', those who are led to reject God in the face of the seemingly insuperable suffering of the world (2000, pp. 14–15). They are like Nietzsche's mad man, who rushes into the market place to announce the death of God to humanity, whom the forces of reason and enlightenment have liberated from bondage to irrational belief. Yet the messenger also bears a terrible burden, to the detriment of his sanity: the prospect that, as traditional sources of authority and cohesion dissolved, humanity would be left fatally adrift. This, for Moltmann, represents what he calls 'protest atheism' (2000, p. 15): the

sceptic who sees no use for religion, or the one who sees in religion only violence and dogmatism. In that respect, the cross confronts a post-secular world that finds itself no longer in need of the divine, yet nevertheless struggles to invest its public life with meaning and value. The old morality, based on subservience to an imagined higher power, is obsolete, but what will replace it?

In Moltmann's opinion, to withdraw into a privatized spirituality or downplay the public nature of the gospel in the face of the absence of God is simply to collude with the world's godlessness. Nor is it appropriate to try and turn the Church into an enclave or remnant that 'abandon[s] "the wicked world" to its godlessness . . . The withdrawal of Christian presence and theology from society's public institutions may – as it claims to do – preserve the purity of Christian identity, but it surrenders the relevance of the Christian message' (p. 15). If the work of Christ is salvation for the 'godless and godforsaken', then this is an account of the self-emptying, suffering God (in Christ), as the one who effects the reconciliation between God and a fallen world. This is essentially a dynamic of grace, not undertaken for those able to save themselves by their own efforts, since all humanity shares in the condition of sin, godlessness and godforsakenness. All Christians who are honest, argues Moltmann, will see in the 'protest atheism' of the godless world a reflection of their own doubts in the face of suffering and evil, even though they may believe that the crucified Christ is the solution to such injustice. In a post-secular society, then, to assume solidarity with the godless does not mean a denunciation of those who declare themselves as having 'no religion' and a determination to win them back to orthodoxy. It rests more in a realism towards the pluralism of the post-secular condition, which shares the doubts of those who reject a God who appears to condone suffering. In solidarity with this 'public' of the godless rest the beginnings, perhaps, of an apologetics that proceeds from the common purpose of overcoming injustice and realizing the opportunities (as well as the challenges) of a 'world come of age':

Those who recognize God's presence in the face of the Godforsaken Christ have protest atheism within themselves – but as something they can overcome . . . So Christian theology does not belong solely in the circle of people who are 'insiders'. It belongs just as much to the people who feel that they are 'outside the gate' . . . A Christian theologian must

not just get to know the devout and religious. He [sic] must know the godless too, for he belongs to them as well. (p. 17)

In Gutierrez's terms, the non-believer requires a particular kind of proclamation about the possibility of God in a world that appears to have outgrown faith. This can be seen as the equivalent of the address to Moltmann's 'godless' world. In his category of the 'godforsaken', however, we might be encouraged to see the gospel in its address to the non-person: the solidarity of the crucified God with the privations of all those who suffer, due to oppression, famine, war, abuse or deprivation. When he was writing *The Crucified God* Moltmann's work connected powerfully, of course, with Latin American liberation theology, which equally saw the face of the suffering Jesus in the face of the dispossessed of its own context. Yet we cannot separate a crisis of meaning or morality from questions of material well-being (Sandel 2010). The promise of human flourishing is both a restoration of meaning and hope as an existential reality, and a fundamental repair to the ordering of God's world in terms of its economic and social organization. This is not primarily a message for the comfortable or the secure, but for those who are alienated and abandoned; and so the Church, as the Body of Christ, continues to embody that preferential identification with the lost and marginalized. The solidarity of God in Christ with those whom human systems have abandoned or squandered prompts the Church to appreciate a praxis of faith that seeks not only to explain itself to a world without faith, but a world that seeks justice and right relation. This is a gospel that represents both a restoration of meaning and hope as an existential reality, and the promise of hope and justice for God's world in the name of our common humanity.

'Seek the Welfare of the City': Public Theology in Solidarity with the Secular

Public theology, as I understand it, is not primarily and directly evangelical theology which addresses the Gospel to the world in the hope of repentance and conversion. Rather, it is theology which seeks the

welfare of the city before protecting the interests of the Church . . . (Forrester 2004, p. 6)

As I have argued, one of the charges levelled against public theology has been that its commitment to dialogue and apologetics represents a capitulation to human autonomy, rather than authentic obedience to God. While I have defended the bilingual and apologetic nature of public theology, I have also wanted to learn from these critics. For example, the differences between liberal and post-liberal theologies may simply be one of emphasis, reflecting the pluralism of relationships between 'Christ' and 'culture' (Niebuhr 1951) that have always existed within theology. The two positions are thus not antipathetic but complementary, in terms of 'their different understandings of faithfully taking theology public – for one the task entails describing and living the Scriptural narrative authentically, and for the other it demands continually attempting to explain that narrative and its implications and relate them to experience and other knowledge' (Heyer 2004, p. 325). Post-liberals are concerned with a 'normative redescription of Christian communal beliefs'; revisionists set out their stall according to a 'fully critical theological reflection' and the apologetic exercise of defending Christianity's intellectual and rational credibility; liberationists judge theology by the standards of 'solidarity with the oppressed' (Kamitsuka 1999, p. 14). This returns us to questions about where to locate the weight of authority between competing sources and norms, and the criteria by which the authenticity of theology is to be measured. What is theology for; from where and to whom should it speak? How are the competing demands of Church and world, tradition and experience, margins and centre to be resolved?

Another way of thinking about this debate is to see it as caught between the perennial tension between what I might call 'authenticity' (to tradition) and 'participation' (in the context of the 'public' in which one finds oneself). Tony Harkness, writing from an Australian context about the theological foundations of Roman Catholic schools, talks about the tension between *authenticity* and *inclusion*: how the Church's education policy and provision can be true to tradition and the core values of the Church ('Have a strong Catholic identity and Give witness to Christian values') yet reach out to wider constituencies ('Be open and accessible to those who seek its values') (2003, p. 2). This will best be achieved, he argues, through a 'God-centred rather than Church-centred theology of mission'. Mission, or involvement of Church in public policy, is not about 'the work of the

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Church alone, exercised and directed through the powers and structures of the Church', but is driven by an understanding of 'the work of the Holy Spirit calling forth all of creation' (2003, p. 4).

Harkness here draws on the work of Peter Phan, who has argued that the theology of mission in the Roman Catholic tradition since Vatican II represented a decisive shift away from a church-centred model towards one of God at work in the world, and a focus on the Church in the world as an instrument or sacrament of God's mission. The Church is not an end in itself but a pointer to the way God acts in the world (Bosch 1991, p. 2). Phan criticizes pre-conciliar Catholic missiology in which 'the center and heart of the missionary project is the church, and church understood primary in the institutional model' (2002), understood as 'unique, exclusive, superior, definitive, normative and absolute' (Knitter 1985, p. 18). Hence the emphasis in post-conciliar Catholic theology (especially theologies of mission and contextual theologies of inculturation) about mission as involving the humanization of society as much as expansion of the Church. Crucially, also, it asks missiology to locate itself from a theological and apologetic vantage point, rather than an ecclesiological (and ecclesiastical) one. For Phan, post-Vatican II missiology has restored the four elements of mission to their right order: 'reign of God, mission, proclamation, and church' (2002).

It is right, in one sense, for our theological reflection on such a matter to turn to the nature and calling of the Church, as exemplary 'communities of trust and love and support' (Wells 2005, p. 30), whose distinctive practices of faith show forth the kind of human lives that are possible under God. It values and emphasizes the historic tradition of Church life as definitively the means by which the present witness of that Church continues to be shaped; and it is a shaping of dispositions, of virtues, of *habitus*. It is also a performative theology, in which the language of the Church's proclamation to the world is embedded and embodied in its actions. The praxis of the Church is its own first-order apologetic. Yet what disconcerts me about the post-liberal and radically orthodox stances, as discussed in Chapter 4, is the exclusiveness placed upon the Church and the imputation that the salvation of the world is dependent upon the integrity of the Church. So, as Sam Wells argues, 'the central question in Christian ethics . . . is simply put: does it build up the Church? . . . does it build up the common life of the body of Christ, fostering conditions in which trust, peace and reconciliation may grow? And: does it appropriately display the common life of

the Church in such a way as to demonstrate how that life is made possible by the servant lordship of Christ, and thus commend that life to those who do not yet share it?' (2005, p. 30). Is it really valid to suggest that the state of the Church is the *central* concern of Christian ethics or public theology? On the one hand, we are told that such a theology should not be interpreted as proposing ecclesial isolationism or triumphalism. The welfare of the world and the search for social justice are still to be honoured, but from a position of counter-cultural engagement rather than compliance with secular powers. Since nothing can and should replicate the sovereignty of Christ, then the last thing the Church should do is seek its own version of that in temporal terms, or to 'impress upon those who do not share its faith an ersatz version of its life' (p. 30).

On the other hand, such an insistence on the self-sufficiency and primacy of ecclesial identity fails to convince in the face of the pressing needs of the world. Instead, I have been arguing that public theology is right not to lose its nerve in continuing to insist on the primacy of creation, incarnation and common grace, and look for signs of the Kingdom in an era after Christendom. The Church cannot be assumed to be immune from the considerations of religious freedom and pluralism, just as a secular humanity come of age is not indifferent to questions of morality, justice and truth. The salvation of the world, and not the survival of the Church, is and should be the guiding principle of public theology. Against the contention that any autonomous human reason capable of discerning God renders revelation redundant, we have the alternative view that human reason and culture, however flawed, are occasions of grace through which revelation is mediated. To look for God's becoming amidst the human and material is quintessentially an affirmation of the incarnational and sacramental nature of reality. Reason is fulfilled by faith, nature by grace: not in negation or antithesis (as if indeed they were ever capable of separation) but in an unfolding process of repair and transformation.

> Mediation on the part of theology is often suspected from a post-liberal or radically orthodox perspective of being a compromising capitulation to culture. However, genuine mediation does not mean compromise and capitulation but balance and insight. By refusing mediation theologians cut off the possibility of prophetic wisdom arising from culture, and they are blind to the tyranny that is often still alive and well in the church. (Hodgson 2010, p. 9)

I wonder, therefore, whether post-liberal theologies have succumbed to the temptation of privileging the work of the Church over the reign of God. Have they allowed their suspicion of secular liberal humanism in the name of authenticity to push them into a latter-day doctrine of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*? It is one thing to acknowledge the ideological biases of secular reason (such as social sciences), but another to deny such disciplines or perspectives any legitimacy whatsoever. But in their quest for authenticity via rootedness in the specificities of Christian community, post-liberals drift further away from the lived reality of the public square. If they stick too closely to their principles, they may overlook the necessary compromises of Christian Realism. As Malcolm Brown argues,

> the problem of negotiating between radically different conceptions of justice is avoided by sidestepping the necessity for such trans-traditional encounter. Yet this is to see theology's task as concerned only with shaping ideals [of the ideal rather than the empirical church] and not with the ethical spadework of addressing the complex confusions of a world in which, despite the inauguration of the Kingdom of God, the impact of the Fall continues to undo the best intentions of human endeavour. Even in closed Christian communities such as the Amish of Pennsylvania, the necessity of engagement with the wider economy is inescapable. (2007, pp. 54–5)

Any theology of public life must begin with a recognition that the interaction between Church and world, or Christ and culture, is always one of 'blurred encounters' (Reader 2005). First, this is because it is an encounter with the diversity of the public square itself. It is hopeless to expect an imminent return to Christendom, so theology must learn to respect difference, hear the objections of the cultured despisers and learn to regard secular wisdom as more than its degenerate Other:

> It is true, of course, that engaging with public policy is not the only way of causing Christian faith to shape the world for good. Arguably, it is more important to foster an alternative ethos within the churches, which can show forth what salutary social and political life looks like. Nevertheless, the rest of the world is being daily misshapen by decisions about public policy, and Christian ethics should care to reserve some of its energy for engaging critically and constructively with those, too. (Biggar 2011, p. xvi)

Second, following David Tracy, a concern with the pluralist, open character of theological discourse is held to protect theology from ecclesiastical control that limits freedom of enquiry or atrophies the evolution of tradition. It protects the very diversity within the Christian community, especially in terms of incorporating the voices of the marginalized and the excluded. Such a public theology is built on the reality of common grace and our shared humanity by virtue of bearing the imago Dei, the possibility of reason as well as revelation as revealing the truth, and redemption being about transformation and renewal of creation rather than its being sanctified by a remnant. 'The church is holy, but holiness is not separation from the world. Instead, the church's holiness is that of Jesus Christ himself, in its risky interaction with that world' (Dackson 2006, p. 246). Fundamentally, it testifies to 'the idea that God's truth – which of course, is absolute truth – is approachable by all human beings', as well as suggesting 'that Christians should be looking for their God to be discovered in other people' (Brown 2007, p. 63).

Indeed, such participation in the movement of the Spirit in the realm of reason as well as revelation is not a betrayal but a full expression of theological orthodoxy. It is not a matter of demonstrating Christian virtues that are distinctive (in that they are exclusively the property of Christians, or set those who practise them apart from the rest of the world), but Christian practice and character that is authentic and faithful to the gospel. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility, however, that similar values may not be present in other traditions, something which apologists from the apostle Paul have been quite prepared to acknowledge (see Chapter 6). In dialogue or collaborative action, then, Christians may look for moral consensus which extends beyond the boundaries of their own tradition without compromising the integrity of their core convictions. As I argued in Chapter 4 in conversation with the work of Luke Bretherton, it is in pragmatic pursuit of shared social goods – the common purpose found in seeking the welfare of the city – that people of different outlooks converge.

'Truth to Power': Public Theology as prophetic advocacy

In retrieving an historic apologetic strand to public theology, I have traced how early apologists were concerned to render Christianity philosophically coherent and spiritually compelling, but how they also 'spoke truth

to power' in the name of a gospel that was radically world transforming. Apologetics was often a plea for tolerance in the face of persecution but also a demonstration of Christ's Lordship in all walks of life, including the civil, legal and political. In contemporary public theology, this imperative continues, whether it is in prophetic witness against injustice or constructive guidance to policy-makers.

'The 96'

A vivid example of 'speaking truth to power' is that of the Church of England's involvement in a public enquiry, in which the synthesis of local presence and national influence worked powerfully to facilitate an important process of social justice. On 15 April 1989, a soccer cup-tie between the teams of Liverpool and Nottingham Forest at Hillsborough stadium in Sheffield, South Yorkshire, ended in tragedy when ninety-six Liverpool fans were crushed to death. Official reports subsequently blamed the fans themselves, but sustained campaigning on behalf of the victims' families eventually led to the appointment of a Hillsborough Independent Panel (HIP) in 2009, chaired by the Bishop of Liverpool, James Jones. The Panel read 400,000 documents and concluded that South Yorkshire police had conspired with other public officials and sections of the media to distort the official account of what happened (Conn 2012; Machray 2012).

The release of HIP's report on 12 September 2012 was a moment of huge catharsis for the families of the dead and the entire city of Liverpool. For a church leader to have been so closely involved surprised many, but it is actually a vivid expression of the Church acting in public life from a position of first-hand engagement in order to pursue the common interests of a community. Jones was closely involved in the pastoral care of the families and in anniversary memorial services for 'the 96', but he was also active in lobbying government to support the Panel in its work. It was decided to hold the press conference to release the report in Liverpool Anglican Cathedral, and the chapter house was set aside as a chapel for the families of the ninety-six. Once Jones' duties as Panel chair were completed, he accompanied the families to the chapel. 'I went to remember the 96, and to pray for truth and justice to prevail in God's world . . . I strayed from my brief as chairman in that moment – but it was the end of the day' (Conn 2012).

This was a piece of public theology in action which willed 'the welfare of the city' – a particular city whose people had been defamed, and who felt the slurs and injustices deeply. But it also exposed the scandal of police misconduct and delivered hard truths about corruption in high places – an insistence upon 'speaking truth to power' in order to clear the names of ninety-six fans but also to hold the public authorities to account. The Hillsborough Independent Panel assumed an important symbolic role, as the guardians of trust in a context in which other parts of society had betrayed public expectations of transparency and the duty of care. To no small extent, the Panel restored people's faith that some of those in authority would act in something approaching 'the public interest'. Similarly, in his attention to the needs of the bereaved families, James Jones demonstrated a solidarity with the 'godforsaken' at the heart of the process. In an interview, the Bishop commented, '"The church sometimes colludes with a very parochial approach, that it should not stray outside its walls . . . It takes us away from engagement with society which I believe is our calling. I absolutely believe the church should take an active role in helping to frame a just society' (Conn 2012).

As an historic Established Church, the Church of England may look increasingly anachronistic, but it is on these sorts of occasions that its actions and representatives show their worth. The combination of local presence in every neighborhood (the 'parochial' dimension of a national church in the best sense of the word) and the constitutional access to government granted by Establishment has, since *Faith in the City*, been one of the most powerful examples of contemporary public theology. It was embodied here in the blend of Jones's natural pastoral instincts for the Liverpool families with his determination to call the authorities to account. Like the original Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, the Church brought a unique combination of attention to the deepest emotional and interpersonal processes of grief and forgiveness, and a resolute commitment that truth and justice should have their day.

'Ambassadors for Christ': Christian Vocation and Public Theology

I have been arguing that at the heart of Max Stackhouse's advocacy of the necessity of public theology is an apologetic defence of its potential for

the common good, in terms of helping to articulate the values that under-pin a thriving global civil society (Hainsworth and Paeth 2010, pp. xiii–xiv). Public theology 'must show that it can form, inform and sustain the moral and spiritual architecture of a civil society so that truth, justice and mercy are more nearly approximated in the souls of persons and in the institu-tions of the common life' (Stackhouse 2007a, p. 107). These references to *forming, informing,* and *sustaining* suggest a formational or vocational role for public theology, of capacity-building and shaping civic virtue among those of faith.

This understanding of public theology may be an outworking of Stack-house's own Reformed theology, which has traditionally held that Christian vocation is no longer restricted to religious institutions, but 'secularized' into everyday pursuits. Public theology may be more visible in the official statements of church authorities or the professions of politicians, but it is also vitally exercised in the everyday witness of ordinary Christians. It is in the exercise of responsible citizenship that the gospel finds its most effective, but most underrated, apologists in a post-secular age. Inevitably, then, building up the secular vocation of the laity ought to constitute a significant fulcrum of the churches' public engagement. While theological education is concerned with forming Christians in a particular inherited tradition and fostering biblical and theological literacy, it should also inform and build them up to be 'ambassadors for Christ', as represen-tatives and messengers of the gospel in the world. The terminology of 'ambassador' is especially pertinent to our discussion of Christians in pub-lic life. Ambassadors are public representatives of a government or cause: when a citizen of one country meets an ambassador, they encounter not just an individual but the nation or organization in whose name they have been sent. An ambassador may be sent abroad, and therefore be on foreign territory, where the terms of engagement may not be of their making. The expectations of the role are those of diplomacy and advocacy on behalf of one's commissioning body, coupled with a respect for the context in which one finds oneself. Ambassadors and other diplomatic envoys are sent to build bridges, establish mutual benefit, facilitate cultural exchange: there are no grounds to assume a position of victimhood, or antagonism, there-fore, but only to receive the respect and hospitality due to an honoured representative, and to reciprocate.

This suggests that if we consider Christians as the most effective ambas-sadors and apologists for the gospel, then this places a renewed onus on

the Church to equip the laity to exercise such a secular calling effectively. It redirects the matter of Christian formation and education towards the practices of citizenship, and establishes a stake for public theology in fostering theologically literate persons. This is reminiscent of renditions of religious social capital as pointing to the enduring significance of local practices of faith as the well-spring of any religious engagement with the public square. The best apologists are those fully immersed in the community of faith which is where the exemplary vision of truth and goodness is nurtured; but that implies a close link between apologetics and catechesis, to enable people to learn the skills of theological reflection and argument, as well as being attuned to contemporary culture. 'To be an apologist is to accompany our fellow searchers as we consider whether the Christian faith, or atheism, or any other worldview, does or does not make sense of these matters' (Davison 2011, p. xxvii). Note here the absence of adversarial language, the collaborative journey of shared enquiry and the epistemology of 'making sense' – a practical wisdom that is credible intellectually and performatively.

This might begin, for example, with Christians telling their stories. In the last chapter, I touched on the way in which narrative theology might resolve the impasse between an over-particularistic, self-referential ecclesial discourse and the adoption of the lowest common denominator. In her work on public theology as narrative, Mary Doak argues it has the potential to constitute 'a unified whole through attention to particularities' (2004, p. 3). Narrative is the means through which we realize our historicity, both specific and universal: 'careful attention to the structure and function of narrative suggests that it not only provides and reinforces a communal identity but is also a source of critique and transformation, enabling us to imagine possibilities for the future that are appropriate to the specific historical contexts providing the conditions and limits of our praxis' (p. 3). It allows the rhetorical power of theological tradition to be introduced into the public domain 'with their religious roots clearly intact', while being sufficiently porous to create space for communicative exchange with the narratives and vantage-points of others (p. 15).

> If, as political and liberation theologians argue, the central stories of our faith cannot be properly understood as less than universal in import, it is also the case that those political and universal claims cannot be divorced from the particular religious faith in which they are rooted, as

the narrative theologians proclaim . . . At the same time, narrative theologians need to broaden their focus to account for the various narratives that form our identities, and to acknowledge that, despite their historical particularity, narratives are not immune to external evaluation and critique. The false dilemma demanding that we either accept that public life consists in a non-negotiable clash of narratives or engages in a discredited search for a universally accepted rational foundation must be rejected; only then will we develop a narrative theology adequate to the universal significance of Christian claims about the conditions for human flourishing. (p. 4)

The primary nature of theology as a discourse of *vocation* and Christian practice reminds public theology that it must be directed towards facilitating the skills of everyday moral reasoning as well as issuing in the public pronouncements of church agencies and leaders. If Stackhouse's public theology acquires an apologetic, vocational strain, informed by his Reformed roots, then a similar emphasis may be found in other traditions. For example, the documents of Vatican II (1962–5) make similar connections between the role of the Church in relation to public (including cultural, technological and economic) life, and the vital significance of a laity that is charged with representing Christ to the world. So, for example, the conciliar document *Gaudium et Spes* diagnoses the challenges of modern atheism and agnosticism as essentially requiring missionary and apologetic responses. These seem remarkably resonant, fifty years later, with many of the challenges of the post-secular condition. As the document argues, those who fall short of an exemplary Christian lifestyle, or who cannot put up a decent defence of the faith, are all complicit in the retreat of the Church from the everyday (secular) world. Nothing less than the very credibility of the gospel is at stake:

Without doubt those who wilfully try to drive God from their heart and to avoid all questions about religion . . . are not free from blame. But believers themselves often share some responsibility for this situation . . . Believers can thus have more than a little to do with the rise of atheism. To the extent that they are careless about their instruction in the faith, or present its teaching falsely, or even fail in their religious, moral or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than to reveal the true nature of God and of religion. ('Pastoral Constitution on the Church

in the Modern World' [*Gaudium et Spes*], in A. Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Leominster: Fowler Wright, 1981), pp. 903–1014, at p. 919, para. 19.

If *Gaudium et Spes* places high expectations on the laity, however, it may also be said that there is a corresponding onus on Church leaders to put renewed energy into basic Christian catechesis and adult formation so that ordinary Christians are better equipped to exercise that secular ministry. If the Church is to recover a stronger sense of its apologetic task, therefore, then the education of the laity, and their own 'theological literacy' becomes a pressing missiological priority. Writing from the Brazilian context, Júlio Paulo Tavares Zabatiero suggests that if the rightful place for theology is in the public square, as a 'public language for justice' (Tavares Zabatiero 2012, p. 66), then Church itself must be more strategic in fostering apologetic engagement among the laity. Much of the Christian education in the churches is focused on learning about doctrine – Lindbeck's 'knowing that' – but the tasks of 'knowing how' and 'knowing why' are also priorities in enabling lay people to become fluent practitioners and ambassadors for a public faith: as voters, employers and employees, consumers and neighbours. This requires the Church to cultivate intelligent, engaging and relevant programmes of Christian formation: 'to enter the public square theology needs to be reinvented constantly, and to be reinvented theology needs to reoccupy the centre of training and reinvent theological education, so that people are capable of undertaking the work and the requirements of intellectuals in the public sphere' (Tavares Zabatiero 2012, p. 69).

Conclusion: Public Theology as Christian Apologetics

The paradox of Western post-secular society points to the simultaneous trajectory of continued secularism, resistance to 'doing God' and deficits of religious literacy to be overcome, alongside a renewed currency of religious discourse and faith-based activism in public life. To its 'cultured despisers', religion may still have a poor reputation but that will not be enhanced – quite the opposite – if they suspect a lack of transparency in relation to the true values and convictions of political thinkers poised to

exert influence in the corridors of power, and dismiss theological contributions to public debate as mere 'clandestine efforts . . . to veil religious aims in a public vocabulary' (Klemp 2007, p. 544).

Even allowing for a growing gulf between the general population and the dwindling number of those who actively practise a religious faith, and however fractured and fragmented the public domain may be, the re-emergence of religion as a force in public life requires the voices of faith to consider how best to communicate the basis for their convictions. This sentiment underpins the 'apologetic' stance to which public theologians allude. Yet this is not simply a matter of pragmatism, but comes down to the question of whether theology is a public discourse at all and whether it is answerable to non-theological traditions of reasoning. In response to criticisms from post-liberal and postmodern traditions, public theologians of a more liberal, dialogical persuasion now acknowledge that theology is not a generic or universal language. However, this is still more a matter of being 'rooted' in, without being 'confined' to (Ziegler 2002, p. 142) its own historic traditions, while defending on theological grounds the prospect of common grace and a negotiated arena of shared reasoning.

Public theologians have always advocated the essentially 'bilingual' nature of their profession. As a discourse, it needs to be grounded in biblical and theological tradition but capable of being understood by those outside its own boundaries, appealing to reason and experience to show that the values of faith make good sense and better practice. This may involve a process of 'translation' from confessional or dogmatic language into commonly understood concepts and values. This is what I have been tracing as constituting the heart of Christian apologetics, as a form of theology called upon to provide public justification for its reasoning. This will entail a deep sympathy with the integrity of the godless and a compassionate identification with the godforsaken, while willing their transformation in and through a process of critical 'interruption' (Boeve 2008, p. 205).

The primary nature of theology as a discourse of *vocation* and Christian practice reminds public theology that it must be directed towards facilitating the skills of everyday moral reasoning as well as issuing in the public pronouncements of church agencies and leaders. Actions may speak louder than words, but the nature of the post-secular condition suggests that while practical care and service constitutes the essential *praxis* of public theology, faith-based contributions must not be marginalized by their own hesitancy to speak of faith in public. Public theology is not only concerned

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to do theology *about* public issues, but called to do its theology *in* public, with a sense of transparency to those of other faiths and none. While there may be times when the Church speaks and people do not listen, that is never a reason for not speaking at all. I am calling, therefore, for public theology to retrieve an understanding of itself as Christian apologetics, a sharing of the motivations behind the practices of citizenship, as well as those of discipleship. The imperative to 'give an account of the hope which is within you', has always been a function of Christianity's relationship with its cultural surroundings. It must continue to underpin the vocation of the public Church as it is called to speak truth to power and seek the welfare of the city, and as its people venture into the contested spaces of public deliberation as articulate and faithful ambassadors for Christ.

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