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The Public People of God: A Paradigm for Social Ethics

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INTRODUCTION

The almost never-ending Clinton-Lewinsky affair displayed the blurred lines of public and private in contemporary western life. The varied reactions to the sorry saga from both sides of politics represented a range of pragmatic, political, philosophical and religious views regarding the relationship of private and public dimensions of contemporary society. Many liberals separate private and public sharply, saying President Clinton's sexual peccadillos are private and yet would rightly say with feminists that 'the personal is political'. Many conservatives are equally inconsistent, being upset most because Clinton's behaviour violates the 'private' family values they uphold, while allowing a similar individualistic and libertarian philosophy full reign over economics and politics.

Western culture's confusion and inconsistency over the public-private relationship is echoed in the church as many of the views voiced above were those of Christians. In this light it is important to put the question of the nature of the public and the church's public role into an historical and global context. Contrary to the parochial conceit of many modern westerners, the private-public split is a product of a liberal Enlightenment or modern perspective, about which death-notices are regularly, though perhaps prematurely, posted.

However, a change does seem to be upon us. Australian media theorist Catherine Lumby notes that unprecedented levels of media coverage and surveillance of private life driven by technological change, frenzied competition and globalization are pushing a changed perception of not only the relationship of public and private but the very notion of a public sphere(s) and space(s) itself. '[T]he contemporary media sphere constitutes a highly diverse and inclusive forum in which a host of important social issues once deemed apolitical, trivial or personal are now being aired.' These include 'the rise of feminism, environmentalism, gay and lesbian rights, indigenous rights, and a host of allied

movements'. Citing John Hartley's *Popular Reality* she suggests that the image-intoxicated 'postmodern public sphere' is 'intensively personal (inside people's homes and heads)' and 'extensively abstract (pervading the planet)'.[1]

The modern private-public split is also parochial in terms of place and culture, being primarily western; in many cultures, whether tribal, Islamic, Confucian or other, such splits are not as sharp. Yet the privatization of values and religion is not irrelevant to non-western Christians. Secularization and privatization of religion *may* move out from the west along the frontiers of globalization (if globalization from above is seen primarily as westernization), leading to Dan Beeby asking: 'Where will the growing churches of South Korea and China [and Africa and South America] be in fifty or a hundred years time? Do they face a bleak European future where churches will opt to be small private yachts in a sea of religiosity?'[2] On the other hand, globalization from below, where non-western cultures speak back to the west, may lead to increasing recognition of the public significance of religion.[3]

Given this context of cultural and ecclesiastical confusion and change concerning the relation of public and private and the fact that neither in church history nor today can consensus be reached 'over the participation of the people of God in the public place'[4], this paper will seek to provide theological resources for resisting the privatization of God's people and for affirming the people of God as an alternative public and polity, yet of universal relevance. It will argue:

1. Through a rapid re-reading of modernity and postmodernity that not only 'the personal is political' but 'the pastoral is political' also.[5] Pastoral or shepherding imagery in Scripture has its background in kingship or divine political terms and has implications for the public and political dimension of pastoral practice.

2. 'The naked public square' that results from modernity rigidly separating private and public is no neutral arena or vacuum of values. Because nature and culture abhor a vacuum it is subtly and secretly filled with values. The liberal public square accepts individual freedom as the ultimate, absolute value and its economic embodiment in late capitalism and the market as master narrative. Christians are effectively not allowed to tell their stories in public, they are only for bedtime reading. It is time we came out of our banishment to the private.

3. Due to the postmodern fragmentation of society there is no undifferentiated public, but rather a global public with multitudes of local sub-publics or local publics with global sub-publics, as illustrated by many forms of media. This raises the question of 'whose public, which rationality'[6] are we addressing? Christians should dialogue with all these

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[1] Catherine Lumby, *Gotcha: Life in a Tabloid World* (St. Leonards NSW: Allen & Unwin. 1999), pp. xi–1. Cf. Trevor Hogan, 'What's Public?: Pluralism, Democracy and the Common Good', unpublished paper delivered to the *Hard Choices Conference*, 29/9/99 John XXIII College, Canberra, pp. 1–2.

[2] 'The Gospel and "Asian Western Culture" ', *The Gospel and our Culture* 5:4, 1993, p. 4.

[3] See P. L. Berger ed., *The De-Secularisation of the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) and Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of World Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

[4] Bruce W. Winter, 'The Public Place for the People of God', *Vox Evangelica* XXV, Nov. 1995, p. 7.

[5] Ian G. Packer, 'Seeking a Community of Promise: The Ethico-Political Priority of the Ekklesia in Postmodern Public Theology', BA Hons thesis, Murdoch University, 1999, p. 125.

[6] Adapting A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IND.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

publics without letting our distinctive Christian polity and unity be destroyed by captivity to particular publics or rationalities.

4. This distinctive polity is that of the republic of God. We are citizens of heaven. As the household of God and *ekklesia* of the city of God, the church makes a public claim in the name of Jesus as Lord; we do not retreat into a private realm. As representatives of the republic of God we are to be independent of the party spirit and patronage systems of the world, engaging in public benevolence on behalf of those made invisible or private.

5. Several visions of Christian engagement in the public domain will be examined. These include Universal, Liberationist, Middle Axioms, Ecclesial and People of God paradigms. The latter is preferred as the primary and most inclusive biblical image of who we are. It includes both gathered and scattered aspects of our identity and polity. The polity of God's people provides a middle axiom between theo/anthropo-logical principles and wider social application and policy. As a scattered community it supports and holds accountable the distinctive public vocations of frontline Christians who exercise expertise in social ethics and policy.

1. 'THE PASTORAL IS POLITICAL'

If biblically and sociologically 'the personal is political',[7] so too, biblically, 'the pastoral is political'. The pastoral is an abstraction of the concrete biblical imagery of shepherding. The predominance of shepherding/pastoral motifs derives from king David's original occupation (1 Sam. 16:11). In king David, both idealized and less so, realized, the pastor is politician, and the politician is pastor. Later kings and leaders fell short of this Davidic ideal and allowed God's sheep to be scattered in exile, so busy were they fleecing their sheep. Yet drawing on David's vivid awareness of God as supreme king, pastor and shepherd (Ps. 23), Ezekiel 34 depicts God promising to again directly shepherd his sheep rather than delegate the task to incompetent and corrupt leaders.[8] John 10 portrays Jesus fulfilling this prophecy of a Messianic Good Shepherd who, unlike the Pharisees and other Israelite rulers, lays down his life for the sheep. This is the sacrificial model for elders as undershepherds of the chief shepherd (1 Pet. 5:1–5), not one of secular, self-seeking, party politics, ruling as the Gentiles rule and divide, but of self-giving, serving, kingdom of God politics (Mark 10:41–45).

If this re-reading of the Bible's pastoral imagery sounds strange to our ears it is because we have so privatized and spiritualized its pastoral imagery. How did the privatizing[9] or de-politicizing of the personal and religious occur? The standard reading of secularization or the Christian retreat from public life is that it is due to the churches' inability after the Reformation and particularly during the 'Wars of Religion' to create a public space for rational dialogue rather than passionate diatribe. Therefore secular rationality and the liberal, tolerant State was developed during the Enlightenment as part of the search for public peace.[10]

William T. Cavanagh, however, argues that the Wars of Religion were often more state than church sponsored, that nobles and governments of the same religion often fought

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[7] G.R. Preece, 'The Republic of God is a Great Outdoor Restaurant', *Zadok Paper* S91, Summer 1998.

[8] Cf. Paul Barnett, 'Shepherding the Flock: Part 1: The Shepherd in the Old Testament' Essentials (Dec. 1999), pp. 8–11.

[9] Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1983).

[10] Cf. Jeffrey Stout, *The Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality, and the Quest for Autonomy* (Notre Dame, IND: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 13.

each other, and that the established view is a convenient creation or salvation myth of the absolutist state. ' "Wars of Religion" is an anachronism, for what was at issue in these wars was the very creation of religion as a set of privately held beliefs without direct political relevance … by the new State's need to secure absolute sovereignty over its subjects'.[11] Originally, the Latin *religio* meant to bind together, to make a whole, not a minor part that is bound or imprisoned in the private realm. Tragically, many churches were easily compromised by the state's 'divide and conquer' policy, forfeiting the distinctive contribution their own polity could make toward peace. Their reciprocal bellicosity cannot be excused even if it is ironic that some see it as progress for people to kill for the nation or a pair of Reeboks instead of religion.[12]

Enlightenment based constitutions and political arrangements in France, the United States and Australia have effectively banished Christianity from public space while maintaining nominal freedom of 'private' worship. In supporting the US Supreme Court's prohibiting of the use of the drug peyote by the 'Native American Church', conservative columnist George Will commended their Jeffersonian libertarianism and dualism:

> A central purpose of America's political arrangements is the subordination of religion to the political order …. The founders … wished to tame and domesticate religious passions of the sort that convulsed Europe …. not by establishing religion, but by establishing a commercial republic—capitalism. They aimed to submerge people's turbulent energies in self-interested pursuit of material comforts. Hence religion is to be perfectly free as long as it is perfectly private—mere belief—but it must bend to the political will (law) as regards conduct …. Mere belief, said Jefferson, in one god or 20, neither picks one's pockets nor breaks one's legs.[13]

Christianity is thus made inconsequential, a matter of 'mere belief' from the top of the head, which even the demons have (James 2:19). Not only will people not kill for it, they will not die for it, nor embody it. In this dualistic division of labour Christians' bodies are subordinated to the state and the state to economics while their souls are left to the church. The church is subject to soul-itary confinement and Christians are consigned to the closet as effectively as gays once were. This allows advertisers to publicly name and norm our bodies according to their own stories of status and arbitrary individual freedom instead of the biblical story of the body in terms of cross, resurrection and Pentecost as 'members of Christ', 'bought with a price', 'temples of the Holy Spirit' etc (1 Cor. 6:13–20, cf. chaps. 10–12).

Like Jefferson, Voltaire in his *Lettres philosophiques* vividly illustrates the civil religious privatization of Christian assemblies and worship and their replacement by alternative commercial assemblies and worship as a way of producing private contentment and public peace respectively:

> Enter the London Stock Exchange, that place more respectable than many a court. You will see the deputies of all nations gathered there for the service of mankind. There the Jew, the Mohammedan, and the Christian deal with each other as if they were of the same religion, and give the name infidel only to those who go bankrupt; there, the Presbyterian trusts the Anabaptist, and the Anglican honors the Quaker's promise. On leaving these

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[11] ' "A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House": The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State', *Modern Theology* 11:4 (October 1995), p. 398.

[12] William H. Willimon, 'Christian Ethics: When the Personal is Public is Cosmic', *Theology Today* 52.3, Oct 1995, pp. 367–68

[13] Quoted in Stanley M. Hauerwas, *After Christendom* (Homebush, NSW: Lancer; Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), pp. 30–31.

peaceful and free assemblies, some go to the synagogue, others to drink; this one goes to be baptized …; that one has his foreskin cut off and the Hebrew words mumbled over the child which he does not understand; others go to their church to await the inspiration of God, their hats on their heads, and all are content.[14]

Hand in hand with the forced retreat of religion from public space due to state absolutism and economic or utilitarian individualism came the privatized self of Enlightenment, Romantic or 'expressive' and later 'therapeutic individualism'.[15] This inspired the 1960s sexual and therapeutic revolutions and aspects of postmodernism. While the rational, scientific, political and economic self could enter the public domain of university, parliament and market, the Romantic, expressive, subjective, valuing self was confined to drawing rooms, bedrooms, psychiatrists' couches and churches.[16]

Stanley Hauerwas speaks of 'The Democratic Policing of Christianity' by many Christians who are complicit in keeping their Christian convictions private.[17] Yet, as Will Willimon shows, 'there is no such animal as the "private" self, the self prior to or somehow detached from a public. Our language, symbols and reality are socially, that is, publicly constructed'. There is therefore no 'private' ethics, for all action contributes to or detracts from the public good. 'Personal' problems, the focus of much evangelical therapeutic ministry, are not just personal failures of psychological adjustment, but related to the way power is used and abused in society (and church)'.[18] Our pastorally therapeutic fixation on problems such as workaholism ignores the way this individualistic approach functions as an ideology and idolatry allowing public corporations and governments to project the blame for their policies onto individuals. Many churches and clergy have been willing dupes in this therapeutic individualist perversion of true, preventative, pastoring.[19]

2. RE-CLOTHING THE NAKED PUBLIC SQUARE

The modern privatizing of the allegedly irresolvable and violent disagreements about religion and values results in what Richard J. Neuhaus calls *The Naked Public Square*.[20] This is an allegedly neutral, secular, fact-based arena, minimizing substantial disagreement about God, human nature and destiny, and social directions in the name of democracy. However, the greater danger to democracy is when ' "the separation of church and state" is taken to mean the separation of religion from public life. The public square, like nature, abhors a vacuum. If it is not filled with the lively expression of the most deeply

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[14] Quoted in Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Science of Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), pp. 90–91.

[15] R. Bellah et al, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), pp. 27, 32–35, 46.

[16] See C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MASS.: Harvard University Press, 1989) and G.R. Preece, 'You are Who You are Called: Trinity, Self and Vocation' in S. Hale and S. Bazzana eds. *Towards a Theology of Youth Ministry* (Sydney: Aquila Press, 1999), pp. 133–51.

[17] In his *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1994), ch. 4.

[18] Willimon, 'Christian Ethics', pp. 369–70.

[19] See R. Wuthnow, *The Crisis in the Churches: Spiritual Malaise, Fiscal Woe*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), chs 4 and 5, esp. pp. 98–99 on the therapeutic 'happiness' language of clergy.

[20] 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.

held convictions of the people, including their convictions grounded in religion, it will be filled by the quasi-religious beliefs of secularism' as Nazism and communism showed.[21]

Candidates to fill or re-clothe the naked public square include the 'procedural republic', economic or market values, a revived republicanism, family values or a vision of the City of God. The first, what Michael Sandel calls critically a 'procedural Republic', cannot morally or spiritually sustain the liberty it offers.[22] Here the legal procurement and protection of rights to choose or consume is used to deny debate about large matters of meaning or principle. Visions of virtue—of the good society—are kept submerged, except on some specific 'moral' issues like abortion or euthanasia where a conscience vote may be allowed and the churches come out of exile into the public domain in the name of those disallowed public identity.[23]

However, secondly, the good is generally a private question for the borders of life, not the centre which concerns economic goods or values. 'We have rights, rules, procedures, economic statistics, experts and technologically efficient means but to what end? We are trapped between a public economic absolutism/fundamentalism and a private radical relativism.'

Political democracy is difficult to sustain long-term without some economic democracy or active participation. Today there is a global 'gap between the scale of economic life and the terms of political identity'—'between polity—in the sense of self-rule—and economy'.[24]

This turns upside down the biblical view described by Robert Jenson that:

> The economy is for polity .... [W]hat God is up to in the economy is *compelling the polity*. In the economy God rules us in the same way as he rules galaxies and amoeba: without our choice. We must eat, take shelter, and the like; and we are an economy insofar as we cannot manage these singly. God so arranges his creation that we cannot but deal with one another. Just so, communal moral choices become inevitable, and with them politics—and with politics prophecy.... [A]n economy that produces such inequalities of wealth as to dispense some from and incapacitate others for communal moral deliberation is just so evil, counter to the economy's godly function. 'Safety nets' are nothing to the point; it is not poor citizens' mere survival that is the polity's responsibility, but their freedom for the polity.[25]

In the light of this biblical challenge we must ask Sandel's question: '[W]hat economic arrangements are hospitable to the qualities of character that self-government requires?' The global economy increasingly functions on a virtual basis, not necessarily conducive to (normally face to face) virtuous relationships. While many argue for 'cosmopolitan' or even cyberspace citizenship, Sandel argues that 'if civic virtue can only be cultivated closer to home in families[26] and schools and workplaces, rather than on a global scale,

[21] Richard J. Neuhaus, 'Proposing Democracy Anew—Part Three', *First Things* (Dec. 1999), pp. 70–71.

[22] Michael Sandel, 'The Politics of Public Identity' in Echoes 1:3, (Winter 1997), pp. 6–9. Cf. his *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press, 1995).

[23] Neuhaus, 'Proposing Democracy', p. 70.

[24] Michael Sandel, 'Politics', p. 9 and Richard Sennett, 'The New Political Economy' in *Echoes* 1:3 (Winter 1997), p. 10 respectively.

[25] 'Toward a Christian Theory of the Public' in his *Essays in Theology of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 144–45.

[26] See B. and P.L. Berger, *The War over the Family: Capturing the Middle Ground* (Garden City NY, 1983), ch. 8 'The Family and Democracy'.

then how can we address the gap between the local and the global?' Democratic societies are challenged to construct local, mediating, and global institutions to nurture the characteristics self-government requires.[27]

This global gap appears to expand the empty public square. But in fact it has been filled by the myth of the market. Australian activist Tim Costello points out that medieval towns had three main institutions in the public square—the church, town hall and market—but today's towns are mainly market towns.[28] Markets are best for exchanging goods and services, but they are not an overarching metaphor or master narrative for life; the state is best for preserving order and justice (Romans 13). Yet both depend on other mediating institutions; they also need biblical and republican narratives and traditions to sustain the virtues necessary for economic and political life to flourish.

Francis Fukuyama, who at the fall of communism lauded capitalism as the end of history, now laments the loss of trust and sense of civil society and mediating institutions outside the family required for even a workable market and minimal society to be maintained without constant and costly recourse to law.[29] This leads to a 'post-public society'.[30] Fukuyama blames the 1960s cultural 'rights revolution', 'the rise of moral individualism and the consequent miniaturisation of community for rising crime, distrust and family breakdown. We use rights as rifles to keep strangers at bay and preserve our privacy but lament a lack of community. Just as the Great Disruption of the early 19th century Industrial Revolution and unfettered capitalism was followed by a Victorian era spiritual and moral reconstruction so our current information and individual rights revolutions and unfettered global capitalism may well need a similar spiritual and moral reconstruction.'[31]

Richard Neuhaus sees such reconstruction coming not from the state but from a renewal of 'mediating institutions' such as family, church and all sorts of voluntary associations. 'The discernment and teaching of the moral law, for instance, is primarily the task of institutions such as the family and the church. In articulating that law, the state is responsive rather than generative.' These mediating institutions 'stand between the autonomous individual and the "megastructures" of society'—state, multinational corporations etc. This is closely related to Roman Catholic social teaching on 'subsidiarity' or persons in various communities making the decisions that most closely affect them.[32] Many fundamentalists, while rightly reacting against infringement of their right and responsibility to teach their children (Deut. 6), for instance, idolatrously absolutize the family, something Jesus often challenged (e.g. Mark 3:20–35 balanced by 7:9–13). They seek a return to Pleasantville 1950s or Victorian values as the simple solution to society's

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[27] Sandel, 'Politics', 6–9. For an attempt at this see G.R. Preece, *Changing Work Values: A Christian Response* (Melbourne: Acorn, 1995), ch. 3 on my former Sydney parish's Work Ventures project.

[28] Tim Costello, 'Rise Before Dawn', Ridley College Centre of Applied Christian Ethics Lecture, May 1997.

[29] F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992); *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1995). On the social costs of unfettered liberalism see my 'America the Land of the Free and Unfree', *Zadok Perspectives* 34 (June 1991), pp. 16–17. On the need for new relational networks see Eva Cox *A Truly Civil Society* (Sydney: ABC, 1995) and especially M. Schluter and D. Lee, *The R Factor* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993).

[30] Christian T. Iosso, 'Changes in Ecumenical Public Witness, 1967–1990', in *The Church's Public Role*, ed. Dieter Hessel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

[31] *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order* (London: Profile Books, 1999).

[32] Neuhaus, 'Proposing Democracy', p. 70. Cf. Reformed notions of 'sphere sovereignty' and n. 72 below.

ills, assuming that the family is not only a necessary mediating structure, but sufficient. In defensively pulling up the drawbridge to protect their private family values part of society they fail to challenge the heart of 'secular' society. For all their good intentions, family values advocates often do not realize that the very notion of 'values' as some sort of private consumerized choice separate from the public, economic and scientific world of fact forfeits the game.[33] It leaves a public vacuum for various pagan spirits and vices to fill. Nor do they stop at the front gate.

The post-industrial domestication of home and church life away from the public realm exacerbated the church's part-retreat, part-excommunication into the private arena. Religion, like women who mainly practise it, belongs in private. Christians, by and large, can practise 'bedroom ethics' or family values but not 'boardroom ethics' or corporate values in western societies.[34] We clothe the naked public square only when its nakedness invades our TVs, computers or art galleries and rely heavily on the state or law to do it, rather like the famous photo of an English policeman with his helmet over a naked streaker's private parts.

Our famous evangelical forbears, William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect, were strong family advocates, seeking to protect it from the city vices of business and politics by being among the founders of modern suburbia at Clapham, south of London. However, the personal and communal spiritual disciplines of the sect, and their spirited extended family discussions provided a platform for challenging the public world of London and the global, colonial world of trade and slavery.[35]

Sadly, some fundamentalists who campaign for family values fail to maintain the balance which their forbears were able to maintain. They are more pejoratively sectarian and are bound by what Gibson Winter called *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches.*[36] Some float on the rising tide of privatization of public enterprises and services, education, transport, recreation, tax avoidance—in sum the privatization of time and space. This secession of the successful from the public domain and public service leads to 'private affluence and public squalor' (J. K. Galbraith). Some churches reflect worldly 'lifestyle enclaves' as espoused in the comment of one person that his community would be just great if we could put a moat around it and pull the drawbridge up.[37] It can be an abandonment of citizenship and discipleship to 'seek the welfare [shalom] of the city where I have sent you into exile' as Jeremiah 29:4–9 says and New Testament Christians put into practice in their exile in 'Babylon' or the Roman empire.[38]

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[33] Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Demoralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* (New York: Knopf, 1995). Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre's seminal *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IND: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

[34] Willimon, 'Christian Ethics', p.36,

[35] Robert Fishburn, *Bourgeoise Utopias. The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (NewYork: Basic Books, 1987), esp. pp. 51–62.

[36] New York: Macmillan, 1962. Suburban sites of family values are prey to the city vices—sex, drugs, violence—that suburbanites fled from. Larry L. Rasmussen, *Moral Fragments and Moral Community: A Proposal for Church & Society* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1993), pp. 47–48.

[37] Bellah, Habits of the Heart, pp. 71–75, 335. Cf. J. Milbank, 'Enclaves or Where is the Church?' *New Blackfriars* 73: 861, June 1992.

[38] B. W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City': Christians as Benefactors and Citizens: First-Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids and Carlisle: Eerdmans and Paternoster, 1994); idem, 'Public Place', pp. 7–16.

This is an asocial family form of individualism, as the French sociologist Alexis de Tocqueville saw it in 19th century America:

> Each person, withdrawn into himself, behaves as though he is a stranger to the destiny of all the others. His children and his good friends constitute for him the whole of the human species. As for his transactions with his fellow citizens, he may mix among them, but he sees them not; he touches them, but does not feel them; he exists only in himself and for himself alone. And if on these terms there exists in his mind a sense of family, there no longer remains a sense of society.[39]

This vision of estrangement from a wider sense of society reached its peak when former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, an advocate like Fukuyama of a return to Victorian values, said 'there is no such thing as society', only individuals and families. Yet she forgot that, as Ford K. Brown wrote, the Fathers of the Victorians and their virtues were the Clapham Evangelicals with their wide social concerns.[40] A.H. Halsey also notes that Thatcher's individualism finally undermines the family:

> [B]y an irony of history, while Mrs Thatcher forebore to extend the ethic of individualism into domestic life, and tacitly accepted that the family was the one institution that properly continued to embrace the sacred as distinct from the contractual conception of kinship, those who denounced her doctrines of market-controlled egoism with the greatest vehemence were also those who most rigorously insisted on modernizing marriage and parenthood along her individualistic and contractual lines.[41]

Helpful in part as are most of these attempts to re-clothe the naked public square, they would still elicit the fairy tale boy's cry, 'the emperor has no clothes'—or at least not enough clothes. The naked public square needs re-clothing not in the pseudo-narratives of 'late-modern liberalism' but in the biblical narrative of the city of God that inspired Augustinian Christendom (minus its coercive features), early modern (16th century) liberalism,[42] and some of our most urbane cities or public places. We need to reclothe public space and challenge economically exclusive discourses by 'restor(y)ing' or 'reframing' our lives biblically and theologically[43] as narrative ethicists stress.

This vision inspires Christian sociologist Richard Sennett's attempts to 'help people transcend their sense of institutional nakedness and uselessness'. For him the cracking of capitalism's moral and spiritual base is exacerbated in our increasingly placeless and virtual global economy. The rapid turnover of jobs and consequent mobility causes '*The*

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[39] Frontispiece to R. Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

[40] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961.

[41] No source. Cf. John O'Neill, *The Missing Child in Liberal Theory: Towards a Covenant Theory of Family, Community, Welfare, and the Civic State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

[42] See Oliver O'Donovan's seminal *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 275–76. cf. 226–30.

[43] On 'restor(y)ing see Audrey N. Grant, 'Towards Restor(y)ing a vision of education for Third Millenium', *Ridley College Centre of Applied Christian Ethics Newsletter* III.1 (1998). Ian Barns advocates doctrinally 'reframing' the 'fiduciary framework' (Lesslie Newbigin, *The Other Side of 1984* [Geneva: WCC, 1984], p. 30) of modern secular society and 'the conditions of existence'. See 'Going Public: Reflections on Zadok's Role in Australian Society', *Zadok Paper* S86 (Autumn 1997), pp. 8–11 and 'Towards a Post-Constantinian Public Theology', *Faith and Freedom* (June 1996), pp. 29–38.

Corrosion of Character', [44] an erosion of vocational, locational and family loyalty, even for the previously stable middle class. 'The global economy does not "grow" personal skills, durable purposes, social trust, loyalty, or commitment'.[45]

Sennett's means for clothing our 'institutional nakedness' are firstly for localities and cities to offer tax cuts in exchange for corporations' long-term commitments and job provision. Secondly, he believes the dense, impersonal human contacts of the city's pubs, playgrounds and markets promoted by the 'New Agora' movement (based on the ancient agora or market as a meeting place)[46] will promote the 'impersonal citizenship' needed in 'a disjointed and disenfranchising postmodern world'. Sennett rightly argues that 'neither classical … cities nor defensive, inward-turning localities'[47] provide answers.

Thirdly, Sennett recognizes that mere urbanity is not enough either to guarantee community or counter human depravity and suffering. He describes how our bodies act as microcosms of the macrocosm of the city and how we have sought a utopian and absolute autonomy since the French Revolution. By contrast, a Christian view of the body's insufficiency, pain and exile, in need of God and others, is required to nurture an alternative vision of the city's public space. By bringing those in pain or exile into public visibility through places of sanctuary, hospitality and charity as the church did in medieval Paris, for instance, we are all made more whole.[48]

The eschatological goal of the biblical narrative is the city of God which transforms the earthly city. This story of the city of God out-narrates all utopian stories of the secular city[49] which justify violence against their voiceless victims. As John Milbank says, the Christian story is 'a master narrative in which there are no masters'. Milbank unmasks secular sociological and political reason as a Christian heresy. Drawing on Augustine's *City of God* written at a time of disruption (to the Roman Empire) not dissimilar to our own, it traces the origin of the Roman republic, and any human society or 'City of Man' to an ontology of violence and mythology of original conflict. One god of the pantheon and one power group saves the republican city from such conflict. In Rome it was Jove, and Romulus who killed his brother Remus. In the Enlightenment it was the state that saved us from inter-religious rivalry. Today it is Mammon and the market which saves us from

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[44] *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998). Cf. William Wolman and Anne Colamosca, *The Judas Economy: The Triumph of Capital and the Betrayal of Work* (Reading, MASS: Addison-Wesley, 1997). Both are reviewed by me in *Zadok Perspectives* 63 (Autumn 1999), pp. 36–37.

[45] Richard Sennett, 'The New Political Economy' in Echoes 1:3 (Winter 1997), p. 15. Cf. on such covenantal characteristics Max Stackhouse ('Mutual Obligation as Covenantal Justice in a Global Society' *Zadok Paper*, Spring/Summer, 1999/2000) but contrast more positively on globalization's possibilities for nurturing those virtues, his unpublished paper 'Public Theology in Global Perspective: A Reformed View', Ridley College Centre of Applied Christian Ethics, 27 Sept 1999.

[46] Cf. J. Hartley, *The Politics of Pictures: the Creation of the Public in the Age of Popular Media*: (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 35.

[47] 'The New Political Economy', pp. 11, 15.

[48] R. Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: the Body and the City in Western Civilization* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), pp. 370–76 on 'Civic Bodies' and chap. 5 on Paris.

[49] See Ian Barns, 'Nomad Pilgrims: on the way to the heavenly city', *St. Mark's Review* 173 (Autumn 1998), pp. 24–30, and William T. Cavanagh, 'The City: Beyond Secular Parodies', ch. 9 in J. Milbank, C. Pickstock and G. Ward eds. Radical Orthodoxy (London: Routledge, 1999). Robert Jenson ('Public', p. 142) notes that 'a polity is, indeed, the institutionalization of an eschatology' needing prophecy.

the interfering 'nanny' state. Victims like the unemployed or refugees are made invisible—private and shameful, while rivals are subordinated and enemies resisted.

The Christian story, by contrast, is based on an ontology of peace created by one God who effortlessly establishes a world of shalom. Despite the destructive detour of human pride and domination, God's heavenly city brings 'liberation from political, economic, and psychic *dominium*'. It inaugurates a different kind of political community for pilgrims seeking refuge from sin and violence, remembering the victims, showing equal concern for all its citizens and reconciling enemies.[50] We can move forward into the next millennium only if we publicly name the violence and the redemption of our history.[51]

3. WHOSE PUBLIC, WHICH REALITY?

But which public is to be object of our proclamation about an alternative polis? Much modern talk of the role of the public church falsely assumes an easily identifiable monochrome public and media which Christians assimilate and address with secular bromides. It lets the world set the agenda, to use the 1960s and 1970s World Council of Churches (WCC) language, casting Christians literally as re-actionaries. It reduces Christians to speaking in a moral Esperanto.[52] There is no reason for anyone to listen to echoes of their own words, like some non-directive counsellor who adds their soothing 'mm' to the end of the secular world's every sentence.

For too long the mainline church danced to the 'progressive' tune of modern secularism, but today its temptation is to dance to the beat of postmodern pluralism. Yet as Hauerwas notes: 'Pluralism turns out to be a code word by mainstream Christians meaning that everyone gets to participate in the democratic exchange on their own terms *except Christians themselves.*'[53] Many Christians feel they can participate in the pluralist public square only if they do a secular 'streak'—strip themselves of their Christian clothes and argue on 'secular' grounds which is contrary to Paul's commands to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom. 13:14). This perverted pluralism (unlike a creation based plurality of institutions) is really a monism of money or economic fundamentalism.[54]

In the pluralist democratic dance the church is often left partnerless, arms desperately held out ready to embrace anyone who would oblige her for the next dance. To paraphrase Dean Inge: 'He who marries the political structures of this age had better beware lest they end up a widower by the next political shift'.

This short-sighted strategy also ignores the increased fragmentation of the public into sub-cultures or micro-publics through narrow-casting aimed at specific demographics or

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[50] *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 391–92.

[51] Today, Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu in South Africa and John Paul II in his regular apologies for the church's horrors inflicted on native peoples, Jews and Muslims demonstrate the power of reconciliation and repentance (see Bruce Duncan, 'The Jubilee and the Pope's Apologies for Catholic Failures', *Zadok Perspectives* 65 (Spring/Summer, 1999/2000), pp. 26–29).

[52] Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics after Babel* (Boston, MASS: Beacon Press, 1988), p. 163 on secular bromides and p. 5–6 on 'Esperanto'.

[53] *Democratic Policing*, p. 93.

[54] Cf. Francis Canavan, 'New Pluralism or Old Monism', Ch. 1 in his *The Pluralist Game: Pluralism, Liberalism, and the Moral Conscience* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), pp. 5–6. '[M]onism dictates that there should be only one set of secular, officially neutral public institutions in all fields…. If we wish to achieve a genuine pluralism, we must come to see that secular monism is increasingly out of date'.

market niches.[55] Enclaved cosmopolitan elites of first or third world nations and some church social responsibilities groups often take their bearings from global media and contacts, not national or local ones. They have little comprehension of other publics outside the urban elite that political populists like Australia's Pauline Hanson or America's Pat Buchanan and Rush Limbaugh appeal to, however inappropriately.

These lower middle class and working class publics' conservative productive and family values are criticized as parochial, politically incorrect or fundamentalist by the new cosmopolitan middle class made up of the information, media, social welfare sectors with their expressive individualist values of unlimited self-and sexual expression.[56] The clash of publics was visible in the demonstrations at the abortive World Trade Organisation talks in Seattle in December 1999, where there was a strange alliance of green groups, economic nationalists, unions and mainline church groups. This expressed the sense of anger and anxiety at economic globalism's abandonment of public risk policies; this is true whether it takes the form of trade or ecological barriers preserving the social and natural ecology of particular nations and localities. It is part of the 'revenge of the particular' against universalism or globalism.[57]

These groups rightly ask whether we are part of a global village or global pillage? Are we global citizens or only consumers in a global economy? The nation state finds itself increasingly powerless before the network society[58] of financial markets and multinationals, as during the Asian economic crisis. Many problems are too big or global for nations, while others are too small and local. New global forms of governance or political participation (polity) are necessary to regulate global financial speculation and plundering.[59] Otherwise, xenophobia, scapegoating and inhospitable attitudes to migrants and refugees will continue to grow.

In this context the global or catholic people of God linking first and third worlds as in the Jubilee 2000 movement is the main alternative to an ideology of exploitative economic globalism. We need to develop a discerning response to the positives and negatives of globalization as a form of economic and technological networking.[60] The church's traditional critique of gambling, often dismissed by others as a mere private vice or personal choice, has had its public relevance and the state's parasitic dependence upon it successfully demonstrated in my own state of Victoria, Australia by Tim Costello and others. We could extend this critique of gambling to its big brother of global financial speculation or gambling where the analogy holds. This is one way in which the personal and pastoral is political and global and where our practice of preventative pastoral care carries political authority.

A further implication of the catholicity of God's people is for churches to beware of inserting themselves into the existing party political process of national and global class

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[55] Scott Turow, *Breaking Up America: Advertisers and the New Media World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[56] In criticizing family values fundamentalists for absolutizing the family I am not standing with the cosmopolitan middle class but wanting a balanced biblical concern for family virtues in their place.

[57] Cf. Hugh Mackay, 'An Explosion of Post-Materialist Anger Before the Healing Century', *The Age* (11 Dec. 1999), News Extra, p.9. Though groups like Greenpeace have their own global connections.

[58] M. Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, (Malden, MASS: Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

[59] George Soros, *The Crisis of Global Capitalism: Open Society Endangered* (London: Little, Brown & Co., 1998).

[60] Cf. M. Stackhouse, 'Global Perspective'.

and cultural divisions. In doing so we become captive to particular publics, undermining our own reconciling and catholic polity. Many of the tensions within the churches on topics such as globalization and free trade were illustrated by the fact that there were also conservative Christian Coalition and Republican groups supporting the World Trade Organisation at Seattle.

Likewise in ecumenically oriented mainline churches such as my own Anglican Church, divisions on homosexuality and euthanasia can be partly explained by their echoing the above split in the middle class. The Pentecostal churches, by contrast, generally represent a lower middle and working class clientele with more conservative family and work values. In splitting in this way we often replicate the adversarial politics of the wider culture and exclude certain groups from the reconciling politics of the gospel. This is the heresy of party spirit, a fruit of the flesh or this secular age, not of the Spirit of the age to come (Gal. 5:20). As such it is not radical but reactionary and outdated. Is there a better notion of the people of God as a non-party political polis or public?

4. THE REPUBLIC OF GOD AS A REPUBLIC

In a global market society citizens can easily become mere consumers and the public so many market niches. Such a temptation warns us to re-emphasize the theological themes of the kingdom or Republic of God, Augustine's *City of God* versus the city of Babylon, and (the non-coercive aspects of) Christendom as the background for reconstituting the notion of a public.[61]

For the Christian, citizenship is more than modern nationalism or postmodern consumerism. It is citizenship in the Republic of God. Rather than worshipping 'the belly', and thinking only of earthly things' 'our citizenship [or commonwealth] is in heaven' (Philip. 3:19, 20). The 2nd century Epistle of Diognetus provides an excellent commentary: 'as citizens, Christians share all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers …. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives.' This is 'the dialectic of distance and belonging, of strangeness and domesticity, of surpassing the laws and obeying them'[62] that we are called to live out in our own public places as we 'seek the shalom of the city'.

The public place in the New Testament is more than just the state as mentioned in classic texts like Romans 13, 1 Peter 2:13–17 and Revelation 13. The '*politeia* encompassed matters relating to the welfare of the city'—including public benefactions by the rich, 'the meetings of the *demos*, i.e. the secular *ekklesia*' courts and city council etc.[63]

The very term early Christians took for their meetings shows that they refused to be seen as another tolerable exotic eastern private cult offering purely personal salvation. Instead they thought of themselves as an *ecclesia theou*—'the public assembly [of the city of God] to which all humankind was summoned; it was called not by the town clerk but

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[61] See O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, ch. 7 on Christendom.

[62] In M. Staniforth ed. and trans. *Early Christian Writings: the Apostolic Fathers* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 176–77.

[63] B. Winter, 'Public Place', p. 8–9. On the various New Testament responses to the state see W. Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbours: Church and State in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).

by God. In such an assembly no earthly emperor could claim supremacy. Early Christians refused to be relegated to a cultic corner of life but claimed the whole culture.'[64]

This large claim led to Roman Stoic terms 'public' and 'republic' being re-minted biblically. Now the public or covenantal civil society was prior to the republic. The government or republic was to serve the public and above all, God (cf. Romans 13:1–7, esp. 4, 6). Ecclesia (the assembly of responsible citizens or worshipers) was 'understood to be prior to the "polis" conceived as a "state" or regime'.[65]

Christianity achieved a 'moral revolution' by expanding the public domain.

> [It] redeemed and sanctified *individual and everyday life*, especially the lives of society's victims, with a dignity only the elite enjoyed [cf. 1 Corinthians 1:26–28 'not many of you were wise … powerful, … noble' …]. The private sphere of women, children, slaves, and other outcasts was lifted from Greek contempt for its necessity and elevated to the honor of the free male public sphere of politics, philosophy and the military.[66]

The household gave its name to the church, and was much wider (including slaves or workers and extended family) than the contemporary misuse of 'family' for church. Thus the personal and pastoral became political.

Christians also challenged the typical Greco-Roman pattern of political patronage. Rather than being mere clients of patrons or 'political hangers-on', a kind of rent-a-crowd, living on handouts, Paul modelled self-support and independence, not only personally but publicly and politically (2 Thes. 3:6, 12). He challenged Christians not to be patron-ised. 'This was part of the radical Christian ethic for the public place …. No longer could they be parasitic clients. All Christians who were able had to work with their own hands and thereby be in a situation to "do good", i.e. to be benefactors and not grow weary in this calling'.[67]

Further, Christians should not restrict their welfare provision to a rigidly reciprocal patronage system (Matt. 5:46–48) of 'mutual obligation' being advocated increasingly today. Mutual obligation may be one way to call people out of crippling welfare dependence. However, in a global risk society reducing its public risk policies so that individuals bear all risks, the onus should also be on the obligation of the well-off not to withdraw from social responsibility. The allowing of non-coercive faith based groups in the US and Australia to receive government welfare funds may also be a way forward in welfare reform, though the danger of state patronage is real.[68] Whoever pays the piper often calls the tune.

5. UNIVERSAL, LIBERATION, MIDDLE AXIOM, ECCLESIAL OR PEOPLE OF GOD ETHICS

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[64] Newbigin, *The Other Side of 1984*, p. 33.

[65] M. Stackhouse, 'Public Theology and Ethical Judgment', *Theology Today* (July 1997), p. 166, n. 3.

[66] Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 56, 58, cf. pp. 55–99.

[67] Winter, 'Public Place,' p. 13.

[68] In January 2000 Australian government funding to church groups to find jobs for the unemployed came under considerable fire because these church groups hired people who shared their Christian ethos to help the unemployed.

There are a range of broad ideal types of contemporary Christian approaches to social ethics. I will examine the above types in this section. The first is a more global, universal ethic. In secular terms it is a modern, Enlightenment based approach, named Habermasian after the German sociologist Jürgen Habermas. This pattern of 'communicative action' is based on a relative form of rational consensus which characterizes progressive western societies 'where public spaces exist to permit free or uncoerced debate' over questions of truth.[69]

Many mainstream Christians adopt something like this universal approach to ethics. Max Stackhouse draws on some similar sociological sources to Habermas, but goes back behind the Enlightenment to the way 'Christians, Jews and later Muslims in the Middle East and Mediterranean combined biblical religious insight with Greek philosophy and Roman legal theories (including natural law) to form the pillars of Western civilisation'. Stackhouse sees the early church fathers developing a form of 'public theology' which solved the 'metaphysical-moral disease' of classical civilisation, providing it with 'a moral and spiritual inner architecture'. Further developments since the Renaissance-Reformation, Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution and now globalization have spread this civilisation.

In a similar way to Habermas, Stackhouse recognizes the functional differentiation of modernity and its public(s). He identifies a religious public governed by holiness, a political public or civil society governed by justice, an academic public governed by truth and an economic public governed by creativity. Each of these creational and cultural spheres and publics has its own relatively autonomous norms,[70] but in order for philosophical thought, social analysis and moral judgement to be related and dialogue rationally, ' "Logos" requires "theos".'

Stackhouse seeks to uncover the somewhat hidden Christian underpinnings of modern western and increasingly global civilization and 'universalistic ethics' of covenantally based human rights and institutions.[71] As he observes,

> True, the West's contribution to it [modernity] has sometimes been … imperialistic, colonialistic and exploitative. But we judge these as false, unjust and unethical because the same theology that prompted expansion in these ways bears within it universal principles that demand both a self-critical judgment when its best contributions are distorted and a wider willingness to learn from other publics than those of the West … In this public, the great philosophies and world religions, which have demonstrated that they can shape great and complex civilizations over centuries, must have a place.[72]

This approach tends to be Old Testament or creation and covenant based in providing a broad basis for social ethics. It is less christological, ecclesiological and eschatological,

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[69] See *Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader, ed. Steven Seidman* (Boston, MASS, Beacon Press, 1989), p. 18, and introduction, chs 6, 7 and 10.

[70] Stackhouse, 'Global Perspective' p. 4 develops the Reformed view of creation orders—'familial, political and ecclesiastical' itself reformed by Jewish scholar Walzer's 'spheres of justice', neo-orthodox Barth, Bonhoeffer and Thielicke's 'orders of preservation' or divine mandates, Kuyper's Reformed 'sphere sovereignty' and his sociologist friends Weber and Troeltsch's 'departments of life'. Cf. also the stress in Catholic social tradition on subsidiarity or allowing each social sphere to be self-governing.

[71] Stackhouse, 'Public Theology and Ethical Judgment', pp. 166–67, 174, cf. his 'Global Perspective', p. 5–6 and more generally his *Public Theology and Political Economy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) and his et al. ed. *Christian Social Ethics in a Global Era* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), M.L. Stackhouse et al, ed. *On Moral Business: Classical and Contemporary Resources for Ethics in Economic Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

[72] Stackhouse, *Public Theology*, p. 178–79.

while not excluding these. Its mainly Anabaptist critics see it thinning down distinctive Christian speech and ecclesiological practice. They say that its modern universalism obscures the particularity of the church's own politics and its apologetic approach can lapse into an apology for western liberal society.

The second broad type is the ecumenical and liberationist WCC approach of direct political advocacy. Since the 1960s and 1970s the WCC has largely allowed liberationist struggles to set its agenda. Since the 1980s it has focused on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. These three slogans are all worthy and urgent but are often hijacked by an unbiblical and uncritical liberationist hermeneutic.

The WCC has largely forgotten its missionary roots in the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910; it has also forgotten the more biblical, confessional and neo-Orthodox approach of its pre-World War II precursors: the Confessing Church, the Faith and Order movement, and the Faith and Work programme on the laity's vocational role in the world. Karl Barth's adage that the good preacher should have the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other was rightly influential in the WCC. But Barth had the Bible in his right hand and the newspaper in his left. This biblical priority contrasts with the distorted views of some contemporary ecumenical thinking which equates the authority of the Bible and experience (especially the experience of those needing liberating).

Lesslie Newbigin, a great missionary involved in the WCC, sadly commented on European church social justice statements, that you can often tell which party they belong to or newspaper they have read, but not which parts of the Bible. This conflictual or party political approach ironically tears the ecumenical movement apart.

The WCC's early Faith and Work programme was particularly influenced by our third type, the Anglican *via media* and 'middle axioms' method of layman J.H. Oldham and Archbishop William Temple.[73] Though respecting the relative empirical and policy expertise of economists, they held that established religion nonetheless can subject economics to moral criteria as it had before the rise of 'technical' or Enlightenment economics in the 17th century. They sought bridging principles or 'middle axioms' between basic theological (God's nature and purpose), anthropological (humanity's dignity, tragedy and destiny) and social principles (freedom or respect for personality, fellowship and service) on the one hand, and specific economic and political issues on the other, such as unemployment policy. Such 'middle axioms' were that every willing worker should have a job and have a voice in their business or industry and know that their work serves the common good. These are distinguished from more specific policy proposals or political programmes (e.g. industry policy, paid holidays etc.), which Temple relegates to an appendix of his *Christian Social Order*. By doing this, he indicates that they have lesser authority and that there is room for disagreement, which is a way of preserving Christian unity. Though Temple is still influential, in their political advocacy for the poor and oppressed, some Church Social Responsibilities Committees and welfare groups have forgotten his important distinction, which causes division among God's people about issues of legitimate difference.

However, Bernd Wannenwetsch rightly argues against Temple's Platonic-Hegelian idealism and his modern universalism. For Temple there is 'one public discourse in one society'—'whether shaped by the ... unity of reason or by the vision of a basically "Christian society" instead of a postmodern situation of a variety of discourses'. Surprisingly for an Anglican, the church and its 'political worship' through reconciling practices of baptism, fellowship and eucharist get short shrift. They are the missing

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[73] W. Temple, *Christianity and Social Order* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1942).

middle axioms between Temple's broad theological and anthropological principles, his general middle axioms and specific policies left to experts.[74]

A fourth 'ecclesial ethic' or Hauerwasian as opposed to Habermasian approach (named after Methodist theologian Stanley Hauerwas but similar to Anabaptist John Yoder and Anglo-Catholic John Milbank[75]) argues that the Christendom and liberal Enlightenment models are both bankrupt. The former is bankrupt through its complicity with violence, the latter through using the former's abuses to absolutize the state and allow only a thin Christian freedom of worship at the price of it having no public relevance. Unlike Stackhouse and Habermas, if Hauerwas were asked with Ghandi what he thought of western civilisation he would likewise reply, 'it would be a good idea'.

Ecclesial ethics opposes the Constaninian or Reformed church model of running the world through its members' various vocations as these implicate them in violence. Nor is the church to be privatised by liberalism. Instead, the church's polity or social structure provides an alternative public political model. This will be judged eschatologically by its faithfulness to Christ's way of peace, not by its ability to get specific policies implemented by grabbing the levers or ears of power. The church's main contribution is through a renewal of political imagination and vision embodied in its own life. For Hauerwas, the church does not have, but is a social ethic, an alternative polis.[76]

Hauerwas cites Czech playwright-president Vaclav Havel's wonderful unintended description of this when asked why their non-violent Velvet Revolution was successful. 'We had our parallel society. And in that parallel society we wrote our plays and sang our songs and read our poems until we knew the truth so well that we could go out to the streets of Prague and say, "We don't believe your lies anymore"—and Communism *had* to fall.'[77] The ekklesia is that parallel society with similar social and identity forming stories and practices—the drama of salvation, songs of praise and psalms and poetic visions.[78]

Similarly, Newbigin warns against ecumenical and denominational diminishment of the role of the local gathered congregation as 'the primal engine of change'. He explains:

> Our powerful denominational and interdenominational agencies for social and political action develop ways of thinking and speaking which distances them from the ordinary congregation …. Our political and social programs are detached from the gospel of

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[74] Bernd Wannenwetsch, 'The Political Worship of the Church: A Critical and Empowering Practice', in *Modern Theology* 12:3 (July 1996), pp. 272–73.

[75] Despite differences of ecclesiological tradition and accent. See S. M. Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: a Primer in Christian Ethics* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), idem, *After Christendom?* (Homebush W.: Lancer; Nashville: Abingdon, 1991); J. H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* op. cit.; J. Milbank, C. Pickstock and G. Ward eds. *Radical Orthodoxy*, (London: Routledge, 1999). For 'ecclesial ethics' see Packer, op. cit.

[76] On vision, see S. M. Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue. Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection* (Notre Dame IND: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974); on church as polis, see idem, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981); idem *In Good Company: The Church As Polis*; cf. on Hauerwas, Arne Rasmusson, *The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame IND: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

[77] Quoted without source in Marva Dawn, *Is it a Lost Cause? Having the Heart of God for the Church's Children* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 48–49.

[78] Bernd Wannenwetsch, 'The Political Worship of the Church: A Critical and Empowering Practice', in *Modern Theology* 12:3 (July 1996).

forgiveness … announced in Church …. They become simply programs of, or meshed with, the programs of political parties and secular pressure groups.[79]

We become either the conservative or radical party at prayer, praying on only our right or left knee with either our right or left eye open to gain our political information.

On the other hand, in Havel's apt illustration, the going out into the streets represents the scattered dimension of the life of God's people and leads into our fifth view—people of God ethics. Sojourners leader Jim Wallis tells the story of a gunman in an anarchical American city shooting at someone all the way into the sanctuary of a Sunday morning church meeting, as worshippers took cover. At a press conference church leaders denounced this violation of sacred space only to be challenged by a young Pentecostal street pastor saying that 'if we don't take the church to the streets, the streets will come to the church'.[80]

We need both gathered and scattered aspects of the people of God, for both identity and relevance. Ecclesia ethics prophetically reminds mainstream and Reformed churches of the centrality for their identity and social ethics of the reconciling practice of Jesus embodied in the church.[81] Their important reaffirmation of ecclesial practices such as worship, community and non-violence among Anabaptists or preaching and evangelism among Evangelical Anglicans should not be neglected. Yet Yoder (less so) and Hauerwas (more so) operate with a restrictive 'canon within the canon' that sometimes fails to do full justice to the whole scriptural narrative and trinitarian counsel of God. An extreme ecclesia ethics results in a kind of Jesuology or Christological reductionism of the Word. This neglects God's universal trinitarian action as Creator and Spirit which is moving the world towards the kingdom, in part, through the vocations of ordinary Christians.[82] Also, O'Donovan's *Desire of the Nations* has shown that some non-coercive notion of Christendom is still necessary to do justice to Christ's conquest of the powers and the gospel's implications for government. Further, Stackhouse and others ask how many churches are a genuine alternative to the world, though Hauerwas has provided examples from churches to which he has belonged.[83] Of course, the big challenge for those who want the ecclesia or the people of God to provide a thick cultural alternative and polity to the world is how to make the thin nourishment of one hour a week on Sunday found in many churches sustain such an alternative.

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[79] Unable to trace source.

[80] From an address on 'The Conversion of Politics', Whitley College, Melbourne 26 Aug 1995.

[81] 'For the radical Protestant there will always be a canon within the canon: namely, that recorded experience of practical moral reasoning in genuine human form that bears the name of Jesus' (J.H. Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984], p. 37). Cf. Richard Hays' friendly critique of Hauerwas in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), pp. 253–66 esp. 260–61. Others also use a canon within the canon, but the best position from an evangelical perspective most comprehensively covers the canon.

[82] See G. Preece, *The Viability of the Vocation Tradition in Trinitarian, Credal and Reformed Perspective* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1998).

[83] See S. M. Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today* (Durham NC: Labyrinth, 1988); 'The Ministry of a Congregation', pp. 111–31 and idem *Sanctify them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998) ch. 9—'In Defense of Cultural Christianity: Reflections on Going to Church'.

A better alternative to ecclesial and other systems of ethics, (which at the same retain retains their strengths), highlights the primary and most inclusive biblical image of who we are as the people of God.[84] Ecclesial ethics,

> if left conceptually isolated from the more inclusive [concept] of the people of God …. may … promote ghettoism, sects and a remnant mentality.
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> . . .
>
> In the Scriptural depiction, the destination of Christians is not, in ultimate terms, participation in the heavenly *ekklesia*, but participation in the life of the city of God on a renewed earth. Their job description includes reigning on the new earth (e.g. Revelation 5:10, 22:5) …. Indeed the Adamic task of dominion (Gen 1:26–28) will be consummated in the new world (Heb 2:5–9; 1 Cor 15:10–28).
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> . . .
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> The concept of the people of God, however, covers both the gathering and the scattering of believers, both Old Testament and new; Israel in the land, Israel amongst the nations; Christians gathered, Christians scattered as a dispersion.
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> Particularly important is the witness of 1 Peter.[85] For in a letter addressed to Christians in a troubled and troubling environment, *ekklesia* does not feature, but *laos* does quite explicitly. The Christians' corporate self-understanding is to be shaped by the great concepts of Israel's past: dispersion, children, exile, brethren, house, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, aliens, exiles, household of God, flock and brotherhood. Christians, who thus see themselves as the people of God, have a face towards the world (1 Pet 1:1, 14, 17, 22; 2:5, 9 especially 10, 11; 4:17; 5:2, 9).
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> . . .
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> The divine purpose is consummated not in an *ekklesia,* but in a city, not the city hall.[86]

A 'laology' like this gives equal emphasis to the public role, mission and vocations of God's people scattered. As Stephen Mott says: 'The Twelve were chosen to be *with* Jesus so that he might *send* them to proclaim the Good News and to cast out demons'.[87] This is minimized not only by more extreme ecclesial ethics but by the liberationist WCC dominance of advocacy over vocation. The WCC's clerical and radical agenda often forgets the church's central task and expertise in proclaiming Christ, oversimplifies complex economic and technical questions and obscures the scattered role of God's people through

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[84] See the seminal article revising the influential ecclesiology of Sydney Evangelical Anglicanism by G. A. Cole, 'The Doctrine of the Church: Towards Conceptual Clarification' in B.G. Webb ed. *Church, Worship and the Local Congregation* (Homebush W., Lancer, 1987), pp. 3–18. As Cole summarises Paul Minear (in G.A. Buttrick ed., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1972], p. 611 and P. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* [London: 1971]) 'The use of this term (*ho laos tou theou*) in the New Testament is more frequent, more ubiquitous, more evocative of the sense of identity and mission than the use of the term ecclesia.' (p. 9). Cf. M. Barth, *The People of God* (Sheffield, 1983), p. 49.

[85] 1 Peter is particularly significant as the source for S. Hauerwas and W. Willimon's image of Resident Aliens, Nashville, Abingdon, 1989. Cf M. Volf, 'Soft Difference: Church and Culture in 1 Peter' *Ex Auditu* vol 10, 1994, pp. 15–30

[86] Cole, 'People of God', pp. 7, 8, 10–11, 13.

[87] S.C. Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 139.

lay vocational and ethical expertise and influence.[88] The indirect and persuasive role of the laity living out their calling as salt, light and leaven in the working world is overshadowed by emphasizing political power and direct action. Resolutionary Christianity (which thinks resolutions by Social Responsibilities groups will change the world) takes over from the quiet but revolutionary doctrine of vocational liberty and recognition of varying expertise and gifts. It is the laity that are the experts on the frontline of most ethical issues today.

However, as ecclesial ethicists rightly stress, for the *laos* or the people of God to be faithful disciples in diaspora, they need constant reminding of their identity as the people of God gathered. The individualizing, secularizing and privatizing of the doctrine of vocation that leads many to put individual career before God's kingdom must be countered. For many Christian professionals their professional group has a more profound socializing effect than their church—in effect it becomes church to them. In it they find their identity and security and in the light of its standards and ethos they make their major life decisions—what car to drive, clothes to wear, which school for their children, suburb in which to live and even what church to attend.

Most local ecclesias are little help to public Christians struggling with vocational and professional issues.[89] These Christians' sense of pastoral isolation is palpable. The sheep are not being fed or pastored in a way that promotes the Kingdom of God outside the four walls of the church gathered. Only when the theological and practical primacy of the people of God image is maintained through small work-based and other groups and when the strong Reformed emphasis on vocation is connected with the Anabaptist emphasis on ecclesial formation, will many Christian professionals stop finding their primary profession of Christ subverted or privatized by their secondary one. We need in some ways a form of Monday monasticism—a corporate discipline for workplace disciples.[90]

As Lesslie Newbigin again reminds us:

> if the congregation sees itself in Exodus 19 and 1 Peter's terms as a 'holy priesthood' for the sake of the world, and its members are equipped for the exercise of that priesthood in their secular employments, then there is the point of growth for a new social order. Even if it is a very small congregation … it can thus become the growing point from which the subversion for the principalities and powers [Eph 3:10] and the first shoots of a new creation can develop … without which political action on the macro scale will always fail.[91]

The local church as the catholic people of God in a particular place affirms what Scripture and many sociologists set over against global capitalism—the significance of place, creation and engagement with reality rather than a postmodern retreat into a

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[88] Robert Benne, *The Paradoxical Vision: A Public Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995). Cf. Paul Ramsey (*Who Speaks for the Church?* [1967], pp. 13, 15) who calls this the 'church and society syndrome' whereby a 'social action curia' assumes expertise in all of life.

[89] As Australian surveys show. See John Bottomley 'The Ministry of Lay People in Paid Employment' Research project for an M. Min degree at Melbourne College of Divinity, 1999 and Philip J. Hughes, *Faith and Work* (Hawthorn VIC, Christian Research Association, 1988). For the US, cf. R. Wuthnow, *The Crisis in the Mainline Churches: Spiritual Malaise, Fiscal Woe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

[90] See J.H. Yoder, 'Reformed Versus Anabaptist Social Strategies: An Inadequate Typology', and R. J. Mouw, 'Abandoning the Typology: A Reformed Assist', *TSF Bulletin* 8 (May-June 1985) and their 'Evangelical Ethics and the Anabaptist-Reformed Dialogue', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 17 (Fall 1989). See G. R. Preece, 'Everyday Spirituality: Connecting Sunday and Monday', *Zadok Paper* S76 (July 1995), pp. 10–14 for a range of practical suggestions for implementing such a Reformed-Anabaptist 'Monday monasticism'.

[91] *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 85–87.

private linguistic world.[92] Through a strong sense of being God's people, both gathered and scattered, local and global, called out of the world (*ekklesia*) and into the world (*vocatio*), God's people seek to hold the tension between those dimensions of the church's and world's life that threaten to tear apart under the momentum of the global economy and fragmented pluralistic publics which they participate in as producers, consumers and citizens.

Further, when Christians disagree on public issues or encounter difference, the unity of the people of God and the gospel as the ground of that unity (Eph. 4:1–6) should relativize party political differences. In doing so we demonstrate an alternative politics of reconciliation, not politics as usual, but the politics of Jesus. Yet as David Yeago notes:

> Disunity has ... exacerbated the problem of the church's relationship to society: disunited churches have bound themselves, wittingly or unwittingly, to the powers of culture, ethnicity, and class that hold sway among the nations, seeking both an *ersatz* cohesion in the absence of true ecclesial unity, and protection against other churches with which they were in conflict .... This ... applies both to the religious Right and to the religious Left with equal rigor. Whether the church presents itself as the mainstay of throne and altar, bourgeois morality, and true Americanism, or world peace, social justice, and the world-wide struggle against oppression, ... the church defines its mission, and thus its reason for being, by claiming relevance to this or that struggle to control and use the coercive power of the state. The church legitimates itself by taking on the socially recognized role of a motivational support-system for socio-political struggle.[93]

A church is secure in its primal identity in Christ when people can disagree about non-essentials, or adiaphora, on the basis of being welcomed and accepted by God's gracious hospitality in Christ (Rom. 14–15, esp. 15:7). A church of this kind will provide a model that goes beyond the hostility of party politics, the adversarial nature of our industrial and racial relations and the hostility towards immigrants and refugees. It will have room for diversity and become a truly hospitable public space.

This requires structural reform of our often adversarial parliamentary (synods), media and legal practices. Sandel's 'procedural republic' often seems to dominate church processes as the language of party politics, numbers games and managerialism obscure the distinctive theological language,[94] gospel practices and polity of God's people.[95]

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[92] Cf. the significance of Pauline epistles addressed to *ecclesiai* in particular places, Corinth, Thessalonica etc highlighted by Miroslav Volf, 'Theology, Meaning and Power: Conversations with PostLiberals on Theology and the Nature of Christian Difference', in Phillips and Ockholm, *Evangelicals and PostLiberals in Conversation*

[93] D. Yeago, 'Messiah's People: The Culture of the Church in the Midst of the Nations', *Pro Ecclesia* VI/1, pp. 147, 166 citing R. Wuthnow's *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton University Press, 1988) showing that US religious identity now has more to do with one's pet socio-political projects seeking religious blessing than with commitment to a particular church. R. L. Frame and A. Tharpe, *How Right is the Right? A Biblical and Balanced Approach to Politics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) ch. 5 provide 'Ten Commandments of Moderate Political Behavior' to counter this tendency.

[94] See Anthony B. Robinson, 'At the UCC Synod The Procedural Church', *Christian Century* (August 13–20 1997), pp. 717–18. 'Procedures Replace Pastoral Leadership. Catch phrases like "inclusive," "just peace," "multicultural" and "multiracial" replace a substantive teaching office .... Somehow the absence of even one real meal together seemed to symbolize a deeper emptiness and hunger at the center of the procedural church. "Each one," Paul wrote to the factionalised church at Corinth, "goes ahead with their own meal." '

[95] See J.H. Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1992).

Christians should never go to law against each other, and, by extension of Paul's principle ([1 Cor. 6:1ff](#))[96] preferably, not go to the secular media against one another also, although this is often the first move many make. For others such recourse arises out of immense frustration at not having been heard within the church due to its often non-dialogical structures. We need to keep on asking with Erik Wolf: 'What might it not mean for the world if church order and law were not merely spiritual adaptations of worldly constitutions and codes, but genuine and original witnesses to the brotherly fellowship of Jesus Christ!'

CONCLUSION

In short I have argued that the increasingly blurred postmodern perception of the relationship between private and public spheres of life provides a window of opportunity for the people of God to break out of its privatized modern captivity to be an alternative public and polity. Step by step I argued that:

1. In contrast to modernity's misguided attempts to confine Christianity to a private, pastoral domain of bare, inconsequential belief in order to keep the public peace, biblical shepherding imagery is anchored in Jesus' profoundly political embodied kingship. The christological and pastoral is thus political, and the church's pastoral ministries have a divinely political dimension in terms of leading people towards God's kingdom.

2. The modern 'naked public square' can no longer claim neutrality regarding narratives and values. It needs to be clothed with a master narrative other than market individualism. Various attempts to clothe the naked public are only partly helpful. Only a full-blooded biblical 'master narrative without masters' focused on the city of God can clothe the public square and redefine the public and its space.

3. Modern privatization of faith and postmodern fragmentation of society mean there is no single public, but rather a plurality of local publics constituted by many forms of media, yet often globally connected. Christianity's distinctive polity and unity should not be destroyed by political captivity to particular publics and issue based groups.

4. This distinctive polity is that of the republic of God. We are citizens of heaven and also members of God's global people. As the household of God personal issues and those confined to private life are made public and political. As the *ekklesia* or town hall of the city of God, the church publicly proclaims Jesus as Lord of all life. As representatives of his Lordship and republic, we are to be independent of the world's party spirit and patronage systems.

5. Various social ethical visions which are put forward expressing the way Christians should operate in public were examined. These included Universal, Liberationist, Middle Axioms, Ecclesial paradigms and my own preferred People of God paradigm. The latter is the primary biblical image of who we are and includes both gathered and scattered aspects of our identity and polity. As a gathered community it provides an alternative polis or hospitable public space to party hostility, modern privatized religion, and postmodern pluralism. As a scattered community it also allows space for the distinctive public, worldly vocations of Christians; it also permits us to relate our gathered polity to social policy. The polity of the people of God acts as a kind of middle axiom between theological and anthropological principles and wider social application and policy. However, it must be embodied in distinctive Christian social practices of reconciliation and pastoral/kingdom political support systems rather than letting its own polity and

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[96] Again the Anabaptists should be our model here. See S.M. Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, pp. 74–85. Cf. O' Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, p. 150.

unity be subverted by the importation of adversarial processes or thin culture-forming practices. As such it is an enormous challenge for the people of God to truly practise being the people of God—both gathered and scattered.

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Prospects for an 'Evangelical Political Philosophy'

Jonathan Chaplin

INTRODUCTION

The leading American social activist and theologian Ronald Sider has been foremost among those urging politically engaged evangelicals to develop an integrated framework of political thought to guide their political interventions. Commenting on the explosion of evangelical political action during the last two decades, what he reports of American evangelicals probably also applies in many other regional contexts:

> Evangelical political impact today is weakened because our voices are confused, contradictory, and superficial. We contradict each other. Our agendas are shaped more by secular ideologies than divine revelation. We have no systematic foundational framework for careful dialogue about our specific policy differences or even for successful repudiation of extremists.... Evangelicals urgently need a political philosophy. It would not solve all our political problems. But it would help.[1]

Although I would not construe the primary purpose of an evangelical political philosophy as the creation of evangelical political *unity* (desirable though that is), I think Sider's judgement is essentially accurate. The incoherence and indeed disarray of American evangelical political thought, first documented by Robert Booth Fowler in 1982,[2] was just as evident by the end of the decade, as illustrated by James Skillen's

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[1] 'Towards an evangelical political philosophy and agenda for Christians in the United States', *Transformation* 14/3 (1997), pp. 1–10.

[2] *A New Engagement: Evangelical Political Thought 1966–1976* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).