

Christian Ethics in a Pluralist Society

“At all events the mind must be withdrawn from all externals into itself. Let it trust in itself, rejoice in itself, esteem its own possessions, retreat as much as it can from things not its own, devote itself to itself, feel no damage.”

- Seneca, *On Peace of Mind*

“What constitutes a good reason for my doing this rather than that, for my acting from this particular desire rather than that, is that my doing this rather than that serves my good, will contribute to my flourishing *qua* human being.”

– Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*

“The more friends we have, and the more places we have them in, the further and more widely do we fear that some evil may befall them out of all the mass of the evils of this world... And when such things do happen...and the fact is brought to our knowledge, who, save one who has experienced the same thing, can understand the burning sorrow which then afflicts our hearts?”

- Augustine, *City of God*, XIX

“When we contemplate or see people in this condition, and when we consider their plight fully, we can hardly refrain from weeping; perhaps we cannot do so at all.”

- *City of God, XIX*

“Rights de-centre the agent. Instead of the agent’s happiness determining his action, the worth of the recipient and of how those others who will be affected by the action is to determine what the agent does.”

- Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*

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(c) Much that is taken for granted in modern Western society is parasitic on earlier Judaeo-Christian traditions of thinking

“The language of equality, non-discrimination, and human rights in general fills the vacuum left, at least in Europe, by the decay of institutional Christianity. It can be proclaimed with the kind of dogmatism associated with the worst elements of religion, with little appeal to reason or justification.”

- Roger Trigg, *Equality, Freedom & Religion*

Two questions:

What kind of democratic polity should we be seeking in pluralist societies?

How should the Church interact in the public sphere in such societies?

“*What we build should be the central topic of the democratic conversation, a conversation scored for many voices covering many subjects, but unified around the question: What kind of society do we seek to create for the sake of our children and grandchildren not yet born?*”

- Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together*

“Citizens have to do for themselves, as it were, what otherwise the rulers would do for them. But this will only happen if these citizens feel a strong bond of identification with their political community and hence with those who share with them in this.”

- Charles Taylor

“As I talk to my friends, my relatives, my professional colleagues today, I get a feeling of total ignorance of the other India. When in fact they are forced to take note, such as when they walk through the pavements on which people are sleeping, there is a feeling of revulsion, of rejection, of contempt, not of compassion, empathy and least of all of any sense of guilt.”

- Rajni Kothari

Towards Pluralist Citizenship

Faith and Public Reasoning

“Democracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values. It requires that their proposals be subject to argument, and amenable to reason. I may be opposed to abortion for religious reasons, but if I seek to pass a law banning its practice, I cannot simply point to the teachings of my church or evoke God’s will. I have to explain why abortion violates some principle that is acceptable to people of all faiths, including those with no faith at all.”

- Barack Obama

“We form most of our beliefs, and also most of our background beliefs by depending on the unchecked trustworthiness of others and it’s by relying on those beliefs that we’re able to arrive at a rational evaluation of other beliefs.”

- Christopher Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics*

“It is self-evident that a law before Parliament couldn’t contain a justifying clause of the type: ‘Whereas the Bible tells us that...’ And the same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for the justification of a judicial decision in the court’s verdict. But this has nothing to do with the specific nature of religious language. It would be equally improper to have a legislative clause: ‘Whereas Marx has shown that religion is the opium of the people’ or ‘Whereas Kant has shown that the only thing good without qualification is a good will.’ The grounds for both these kinds of exclusions is the neutrality of the state.”

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- Charles Taylor

'Confessional candour' in Deliberation/ Representation:

“Faith, both religious and secular, may be explicitly and unashamedly introduced into public deliberations, even formal ones such as those of a parliament, but it must step into the background when those deliberations move from the representative sphere to the moment of constitutional decision.”

- Jonathan Chaplin, *Talking God*

'Confessional restraint' at the point of decision-making:

"when the state speaks *qua state* it must speak with one voice: the voice of the political community itself. And that community lacks the competence to endorse a particular faith perspective."

- Contd.

Some Concluding Reflections

- Enlarged mentalities/ empathetic understandings

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- Moral underpinning of democracy: freedom and self-restraint

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- Our ultimate citizenship relativizes our “patriotism”

