The Unquiet Frontier: Tracing the Boundaries of Philosophy and Public Theology

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There are many different diagnoses of what constitutes the "post-secular." My own view is that it constitutes the unprecedented and paradoxical co-existence of two supposedly contradictory social, religious, and cultural trends: on the one hand, the persistence of secular objections to public religion and on the other, the novel re-emergence of religious actors in the global body politic. John Caputo's much quoted aphorism — that God is dead, but so also is the death of God — captures this agonistic model of the post-secular, in which what we are looking at is not the revival of religion, or the reversion of secular modernity into a re-enchanted body politic, but something more unprecedented and complex. Yet it also means there is little in the way of agreed discourse about the nature of the public square and the legitimacy of religious reasoning within it. This article considers one possible model, that of "post-secular rapprochement," as one way of envisaging how newly-emergent forms of religious activism and discourse might be mediated back into a pluralist public domain.

KEYWORDS post-secular rapprochement, public theology, Charles Taylor, Jürgen Habermas, apologetics

Introduction

In his monumental book, *A Secular Age*, the sociologist Charles Taylor traces the shifting paradigms of religion within modernity, and how to make sense of its novel and unexpected return. He talks at one stage of the "Unquiet Frontiers of Modernity"[1] to describe how it feels to inhabit a world seemingly far removed from religion, which is nevertheless continually shot through with glimpses of

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[1] Taylor C. A secular age (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press; 2007), p. 711–27.

what he terms "a place of fullness."[2] As moderns, we have learned to be self-sufficient, to live immanent lives and yet at the periphery of our vision, our lived, quotidian experience, lies a different landscape, in which our horizons of meaning, belonging and identity draw from a transcendent source, beyond immanence, which speaks of "some good higher than, beyond human flourishing."[3]

This image of living at the frontier has remained with me, especially as I have explored the complexities and paradoxes of the so-called "post-secular" condition.[4] The post-secular does feel to me more like a liminal space than a definitive condition or epoch: questioning not only what comes next — after or beyond the secular — but also what it is supposed to have succeeded: what, indeed, was the secular itself all about? So the post-secular roams across one indeterminate frontier of past and present: what was it like before? And how is it now different, and why is that? Where have we been; and where are "we" going?

But there are other unsettled, and unsettling, boundaries or interstices besides the temporal: between secular and religious, most obviously; public and private, insofar as the secular public square has conventionally been configured in particular ways; but when we come to think about the actual debates and diagnoses of this "post-secular" age, we find ourselves at intellectual frontiers: between modern and post-modern, between philosophy and theology; or the influence of ideas and social imaginaries in shaping our world versus the study of social movements and religious, cultural practices.

Whilst religious belief, practice, and identity have not been extinguished by modernity and although it has managed to survive (and in many contexts) prosper, it is important to stress that this is not necessarily a revival of previous forms, but rather, their mutation. Furthermore, the space religion/s occupies remains contested; and it is the Homeric metaphor of trying to navigate between the "Scylla" of religious resurgence and the "Charybdis" of continued secularism and scepticism that may best sum up the agonistic nature of the "post-secular." It may be *post*-secular not so much as denoting a successor phase to secularity and secularism, but as troubling and unsettling our prevailing definitions of these very terms, and inviting further examination of the many, and often paradoxical, configurations of religion and public life that are now emerging.

One solution to this has been to turn to models of faith-based activism as the operationalized "public theologies" of religious tradition: a pragmatic and contextualized process of mediation, in which the focus is on creating a shared commons of social action. This is attractive; but continues to beg the question of how religious actors resist the pressures of functionalism and instrumentalism. There needs to be a public theology to match the pragmatic practice — perhaps postsecular rapprochement or as I would call it, an "apologetics of presence" — in which actions and words are put to work in constructing a post-secular communicative space.[5]

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[2] Ibid., p. 6.
[3] Ibid., p. 7.
[4] Graham E. Between a rock and a hard place: public theology in a post-secular age (London: SCM Press; 2013).
[5] Ibid.

The unquiet frontier: The paradox of post-secular society

As it has emerged in contemporary debate within philosophy, theology, and social theory, the post-secular refers in particular to a revisionist understanding of classic secularization theory, understood broadly as both a separation of church and state, the privatization of faith, and the general decreased importance of religion in public life. The conventional account of secularization sees religious decline — even extinction — as an inevitable consequence of modernization. Yet evidence suggests that this is not the case. In many of the most rapidly-developing economies, such as Brazil, China, or India, religion continues to grow and to be a significant part of public life. A feature of the post-secular condition thus entails a shift in consciousness to allow a certain public recognition of religion, as in for example the interventions of faith-based activism within civil society but also in terms of recognition of religious identity and the legitimacy of religious reasoning in public debate.

Tony Blair's recent comment that "religious extremism" will be a major source of global conflict throughout this century may be a little simplistic (ignoring as it does other factors such as competition for natural resources, migration, climate change, and economic polarization), but it does go to show that faith is not dead, and reflects the global dimensions of this renaissance of religion as political force.[6] Closer to home, a major aspect of the post-secular is of course the return of faith-based organizations to areas of public policy — whether that is the provision of services such as foodbanks through Christian organizations like the Trussell Trust, or commentary on the part of faith leaders on matters of welfare reform, international relations, or political debate. Both of these should remind us that even in relatively secular Western societies, religious bodies have always occupied significant spaces within the voluntary and community sector as well as in the structures of the State and public opinion.

However, this renewed visibility takes place against two major counter-trends: firstly, the continuing prominence of secular humanist and atheist objections to the legitimacy of religion as public reason or political force, exemplified by Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Polly Toynbee, Sam Harris, and others, which suggests that scepticism towards the creeds and institutions of traditional religion is not diminishing.

Secondly, statistical evidence emphatically indicates a drift away from any traditional marks of belief and affiliation. In England and Wales, the 2011 Census notes a significant rise in those recording "no religion"; whilst those identifying as "Christian" holds up at around 59%, this is down from a figure of over 70% in 2001. This is bad news for traditional, mainstream institutions. Research by YouGov published in 2013 for the Westminster Faith Debates reveals that only 17% of those identifying as Church of England actually attend church regularly. And the age profile is also startling: nearly half of people over 60 say they are Anglican; but this applies to only one in ten of those in their twenties. Christian

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[6] Blair T. Religious difference, not ideology, will fuel this century's epic battles. 2014 January 24. Available from: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jan/25/religious-difference-ideology-conflicts-middle-east-tony-blair. (accessed January 25, 2014).

identity is failing to be transmitted from one generation to another, with very obvious implications for the long-term sustainability of religious faith.

> All in all, these data point to a society in which religion is increasingly in retreat and nominal. With the principal exception of the older age groups, many of those who claim some religious allegiance fail to underpin it by a belief in God or to translate it into regular prayer or attendance at a place of worship. People in general are more inclined to see the negative than the positive aspects of religion, and they certainly want to keep it well out of the political arena.[7]

It appears we have a perfect storm: institutions that inherited a particular way of relating to public life are fragile; sceptics and critics of religion continue to question its very legitimacy as a respectable intellectual option let alone a constructive force in society; and yet, religion continues to be a significant source of social capital, makes up the strongest single stake-holder in the voluntary sector, is a remarkably potent mobilizing force for volunteers; and globally, if not the "cause" of political and cultural change, cannot be disentangled from issues of identity, popular movements, nation-building, geo-political conflict, or humanitarian initiatives.

So this seems particularly "unquiet" territory, in the sense of being very volatile, in terms of people's shifting allegiances or indeed the erosion of significant moorings to institutional or creedal forms of faith. People do not identify with leadership and authorities; scepticism is strong, but heterodox kinds of belief may be stronger. Yet this very ambivalence of institutional, organized religion presents further problems when it comes to a consideration of how it might be manifested in public, or what groups and organizations might serve as the prime mediators and representatives of faith into the public realm.

Philosophers on religion and the post-secular

Still one of the world's top 100 thinkers according to *Prospect* Magazine's 2014 poll, Jürgen Habermas has emerged in his latter years as one of the chief proponents of what a post-secular age might mean for our assumptions about the nature of public reason and the conduct of secular, liberal democracy. He would in his earlier years probably have allied himself with a broadly liberal position which required the separation of religion from the state and the creation of a non-confessional public space in order to ensure the most equitable conditions for the articulation of a rich and non-partisan discourse of citizenship and participatory democracy.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, he has been more prepared to consider the introduction of religious sources of reasoning into a renewed vocabulary of civic virtue. Whilst many secular philosophers have tended to focus on the divisive and regressive influence of religion on society, Habermas is more prepared to identify its potential as a powerfully cohesive and beneficial

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[7] ComRes. British Religion in Numbers. 2012. Available from: http://www.brin.ac.uk/news/2012/after-general-synod-religion-and-health/ (accessed 24 Nov 2012).

source of moral and political reasoning, helping to correct some of the deficiencies of modernity.[8] He has alluded to a kind of melancholy in late modernity, a sense of lack within secular reason – as he says, "an awareness of what is missing," namely any sort of metaphysical or transcendental grounding of its commitment to things such as justice, progress, and well-being. This is prompted in part by a response to the global financial crisis of 2007–8, which he felt exposed the lack of any values of public accountability on the part of the global economy; and concerns about the impact of advanced biotechnologies on our understandings of human integrity and dignity.

If the post-secular constituted solely a kind of revisionism towards the relationship between modernity and religion, it would hardly be controversial, since the prevailing sociological consensus is now that, empirically and theoretically, the secularization thesis only really ever applied to Europe. The complication rests in Habermas' claim that religion should now be considered to have legitimacy in public discourse alongside that of reason. Secular citizens can no longer bracket out the claims of religion, but must engage with the potential semantic and cognitive content of faith. Despite the potential for religious or theological principles to nurture and inform public debate, however, Habermas argues that religiously motivated actors must "translate" their convictions into universally accessible language appropriate for the neutrality that is liberal democracy. He speaks of a process of "translation" by which explicitly metaphysical precepts might be introduced into public debate.[9]

But does this actually constitute a *post*-secular context in any meaningful fashion, if the predominant discourse of the public square remains essentially unchanged whilst attempting to broaden its terms of reference to embrace a deeper pluralism of values? It meets resistance from both sides: on the one hand, for secularists, it represents a betrayal of the neutrality of the rational public square, a surrender to special pleading. On the other hand, religionists find themselves wondering what is *post*-secular about Habermas' prescription, since the onus still appears to rest upon them to take responsibility for mediating the particularities of their tradition into something more publicly accessible. It does nothing to shake the foundations of secular hegemony, insofar as the logic of reason still trumps all others. Even if there is a consensus that, pragmatically speaking, it is necessary to reach a degree of accommodation with faith-based perspectives, the actual procedural protocols of this might require further elucidation.

Charles Taylor: The secular Rubicon

To speak of the post-secular, therefore, is to speak of the "growing resurgence of faith and spirituality in the urban and public realm."[10] Yet even though religion may be newly prominent, I am convinced that the language of revival or even of

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[8] Dillon M. Can post-secular society tolerate religious differences? Soc Relig. 2010;71(2):139–56.

[9] Habermas J. Between naturalism and religion: philosophical essays (Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2008), p. 131–2.

[10] Beaumont J, Baker C. The rise of the postsecular city. In: Beaumont J, Baker C, editors. Postsecular cities: space, theory and practice (London: Continuum; 2011), p. 1–11.

"desecularization," should be avoided.[11] Whatever is happening cannot be set up as a simple return to what came before modernity. Charles Taylor's anatomy of the "Secular Age" articulates this well. The secular age has fatally deprived people of a transcendent understanding of self, history, and society. The "porous" self is one whose everyday experience is ordered by the sacred, of being subject to divine and natural forces beyond oneself; the buffered self lives in a new existential and phenomenological world, in which the cosmos is disenchanted and the individual is free to chart their own course through life. There is no longer a transcendent source by which our moral lives are grounded and directed. It is more to do, simply, with a reorientation of the social imaginary away from transcendence towards immanence. There can be no reversion to the "unbuffered self": even the most religiously-observant and orthodox amongst us must live to some degree with the realization that the conditions of belief have radically shifted, in Taylor's words, "from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others."[12]

   So this is much more a gestalt or paradigm shift than a subtraction thesis. It is not a question simply of whether or not God is present or absent, but a question of the fundamental reference points by which one makes sense of reality. Even the process whereby the world appears to be becoming re-enchanted does not alter this. We are not going to return to premodern, presecular ways of life. Regardless of our own personal faith commitment, we have all crossed a Rubicon, we might say, into a realm in which personal autonomy, reflexivity and freedom of belief are axiomatic. We cannot disinvent secularism; we cannot *not* be aware that there are many paths of belief and unbelief, notwithstanding the persistence of religion and its bold return to the public stage. This realization is, for me, another decisive hallmark of this era as the *post*-secular, and actually accentuates the unprecedented nature of this condition, and the challenges to the conduct of public debate. How *are* religious actors to be incorporated into a Western cultural imaginary in which "the general equilibrium point is firmly within immanence, where many people have trouble understanding how a sane person could believe in God"?[13]

Terry Eagleton: Were we ever secular?

A recurrent theme of Terry Eagleton's recent work has been the failure of post-Enlightenment thought to expunge itself of its metaphysical foundations. One of the illusions of modernity is its failure to see that the recession of religion from day-to-day consciousness conceals its extended after-life in forms of apparently secular philosophies. In *Culture and the Death of God*, he argues that in the secular, modern era, a series of intellectual movements or watchwords — Reason, progress, the State, empiricism, and Nature — have occupied the position of God's surrogates:

[11] Berger P. The desecularization of the world: a global overview. In Berger PL, editor. The desecularization of the world: resurgent religion and world politics (Grand Rapids, MN: Wm B Eerdmans; 1999), p. 1–18.
[12] Taylor, A secular age, p. 3.
[13] Ibid., p. 770.

> The history of the modern age is among other things the search for a viceroy for God. Reason, Nature, *Geist*, culture, art, the sublime, the nation, the state, science, humanity, Being, Society, the Other, desire, the life force and personal relations: all of these have acted from time to time as forms of displaced divinity.[14]

The contemporary re-appearance of global religion now confounds the secularist consensus. Eagleton's thesis, however, is that we have never been secular: the Enlightenment was really an attack on the coupling of ecclesiastical authority and political sovereignty, particularly of the autocratic or oligarchical kind. It was thus not avowedly atheist, but sought more to root its social and political values in forms of natural religion. A universalist humanism replaced Christian revelation, but betrays a deep continuity, not least in the way that organized religion served to inculcate civic virtue and obedience in the populace, thus ensuring that reforms would empower the bourgeoisie without spreading to the masses: "religion is judged primarily in terms of its utility. It is acceptable only if it promotes the kind of morality one would still endorse without it."[15] It was not in the interests of Enlightenment thinkers to abandon completely the comforts and political expediencies of religion.

In fact, says Eagleton, the secularism of modernity was a misnomer. Rather, the history of modernity should be seen as an extended "rewriting of religious faith in secular terms."[16] It is the very artifice of any such ultimate values that is their ultimate undoing. Secular myths of nationhood, progress, the self or the revolution cannot "be legislated into existence by philosophical fiat"[17]; these ideals never succeed in being more than "ersatz forms of religion."[18]

Throughout his survey of post-Enlightenment thought, Eagleton exposes all alternatives to religion as pale imitations, since any secular or humanist appeals to absolute authority collapse, ultimately, under their own weight of self-referentialism. They lose any moral leverage by being devoid of value in the first place. "As the rationalising process comes to infiltrate the cultural and religious spheres, as with the mechanistic world of Deism or the legalistic nature of some Protestant doctrine, these realms become less hospitable to questions of fundamental value, and thus less capable of underpinning political power."[19] Any attempt to invest society, human knowledge, or morality with a sense of meaning fails because none of these surrogates is capable of transcending the conditions of their own generation. Audaciously channeling Nietzsche, Freud, and Alfred Hitchcock, Eagleton renounces the hubris of secular modernity in these terms:

> God is indeed dead and it is we who are his assassins, yet our true crime is less deicide than hypocrisy. Having murdered the Creator in the most spectacular of all Oedipal revolts, we have hidden the body, repressed all memory of the traumatic event, tidied

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[14] Eagleton T. Culture and the death of God (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; 2014), p. 44.
[15] Ibid., p. 25.
[16] Ibid., p. 47.
[17] Ibid., p. 61.
[18] Ibid., p. 80.
[19] Ibid., p. 43.

up the scene of the crime and, like Norman Bates in *Psycho*, behave as though we are innocent of the act. We have also dissembled our deicide with various shamefaced forms of pseudo-religion, as though in expiation of our unconscious guilt. Modern secular societies, in other words, have effectively disposed of God but find it morally and politically convenient – even imperative – to behave as though they have not.[20]

Eagleton's analysis touches on a further important issue for us, and it is the question of what kind of "religion" his fellow philosophers invoke when wishing to address this post-secular sense of nostalgia and loss; and also, what kind of "religion" may indeed endure. Not surprisingly, perhaps, his argument is that philosophers today are merely perpetuating a long-standing tendency on the part of post-Enlightenment thinkers who wish to defend Western values or rejuvenate the moral imagination: a turn to faith, but in functionalist terms. Whilst eschewing matters of belief for themselves, they express a longing for a faith that can be morally uplifting and socially pacifying for the masses. It is thoroughly in keeping with constructs of religion within liberal democratic traditions as essentially subjective, interior and private. This sentiment reached its epitome at the beginning of the twentieth century with William James' definition of religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men [sic] in their solitude."[21]

The price paid by this settlement, however, is to surrender the public, political impact of religious experience. Forms of religious establishment or civil religion may endure, but they inhabit a political and cultural settlement of personal choice and nationalist ceremony, and the division of the world into the temporal and the spiritual. In the temporal realm, God rules by virtue of law through secular authorities, whereas the spiritual domain is governed by faith and grace effected by Christ's death and resurrection. Hence the ease with which the public, secular realm can be evacuated of the transcendent and the sacred, whilst religious sentiment, discourse, and practice becomes the select enclave of the minority, struggling increasingly to make itself heard and understood on its own terms. And possibly the way in which the "spiritual" can be separated from the "religious": one subjective, chosen, self-made, wholesome; the other, hidebound, institutionalized, autocratic.

True to his Christian Marxist influences, however, Eagleton insists on something much more radical and iconoclastic — and *political*:

> If religious faith were to be released from the burden of furnishing social orders with a set of rationales for their existence, it might be free to rediscover its true purpose as a critique of all such politics. In this sense, its superfluity might prove its salvation. The New Testament has little or nothing to say of responsible citizenship. It is not a "civilised" document at all. It shows no enthusiasm for social consensus. Since it holds that such values are imminently to pass away, it is not greatly taken with standards of civic excellence or codes of good conduct. What it adds to common-or-garden morality is not some supernatural support, but the grossly inconvenient news that our forms of

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[20] Ibid., p. 157.
[21] Carrette J, editor. James, William: Varieties of religious experience (Centenary Edition) (London: Routledge; 2003), p. 29.

life must undergo radical dissolution if they are to be reborn as just and compassionate communities. The sign of that dissolution is a solidarity with the poor and powerless. It is here that a new configuration of faith, culture and politics might be born.[22]

What analysts often miss, he argues, is this very *popular* and *practical* nature of religion: its "capacity […] to unite theory and practice, elite and populace, spirit and senses."[23] What is significant for Eagleton is not so much what and how people believe, or even the spiritual substance of religion, as its quotidian, everyday influence on lives and cultures — including, crucially, its institutional, material forms of mediation. Its very privatization or mutation into some kind of spiritual balm is highly problematic, not only because this renders it nothing more than the opium of the masses. Rather, it is the enduring after-life of religion as public reality that can resist attempts to reduce it to subjective feeling or personal morality that attracts him and which constitutes its very resilience to forces of appropriation. Yet of course, in the face of the demographic and statistical slump recorded by organized religion in the West to which I alluded earlier, we have the potential undoing of this. Whether it is as a source of social cohesion or dissent, it is looking unlikely that public, institutional expressions of religion are the most likely to survive with sufficient critical mass actually to exert the very kind of cultural influence that much post-secular philosophy is expecting.

The post-secular public square

A number of questions remain. In the light of Habermas' call for the inclusion of religious voices in a pluralist public square, then how, procedurally and substantively might that proceed? If religious actors are to mediate their values, how might that work? What kind of communicative space does this require; how is it regulated; what are the protocols of participation?

From Eagleton's bracing critique of the dangers of a creeping functionalism in much of the invocation of a religious sensibility to the post-secular, comes — again, hardly a new problem — the question of how one conceptualizes "religion" as something which is often "black-boxed: decontextualized and reified, rather than identified as the property of specific faith traditions and operationalized in specific practices, both secular or civic and religious."[24]

Finally, from a more empirical perspective, but self-evident in the theoretical coupling within the post-secular of currents of resurgence and decline, comes the expectation that religious bodies such as the mainstream churches will be able to resume a leading role in the provision of welfare and the renewal of local civil society, when the reality is that institutionally they are ageing and dwindling. The churches may be excellent repositories of religious and spiritual social capital, they may constitute the moral heart of a regenerated political economy, but simple

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[22] Eagleton, Culture and the death of God, p. 207–8.
[23] Ibid., p. ix.
[24] Sandal NA. The clash of public theologies? Rethinking the concept of religion in global politics. Altern: Global Local Polit. 2012;37(1):67.

demography surely militates against that being the case for many more generations.

Yet on a sociological, theological, and political ground, it is precisely the institutional face of religion that, paradoxically, is set to redeem post-secular society: by sustaining and bearing the practices and traditions of faith onto the next generation (as in Callum Brown's speculations on the attenuation of religious memory); by the physical community that is now the Church being the outward expression (as the Body of Christ) of inward grace (the "message" of the Gospel); or, in a simultaneously highly prosaic and extremely politically potent manner, providing the infrastructure that mobilizes more volunteers into their neighborhood than any other organization. And yet, in a post-secular climate, amongst the substantial numbers of those who identify as "spiritual but not religious" this is the last aspect of religion that anyone wants to associate with. Yet without this — the activism, the performance of faith, and the practical wisdom that motivates it — theology is simply just words, abstract belief, propositions with no referent. If, ultimately, it is the operationalized practical wisdom of religion that will make the difference, that will not be achieved either in its privatized and de-traditionalized versions nor its philosophically idealized projections.

Post-secular rapprochement

If "religion" remains a somewhat abstract and reified phenomenon within many contemporary evocations of the virtues of metaphysics for public life, then one way of resolving this rests in a turn to practice. One example of this is the strategy of "post-secular rapprochement" as commended by urban geographers such as Justin Beaumont and Paul Cloke, in collaboration with urban theologians such as Chris Baker. It represents attention to the way in which various types of religiously-motivated activism converge with other faith-based organizations or even secular agencies to form broad-based strategic alliances around initiatives of neighborhood renewal, community organizing or charitable service.[25] For Cloke and Beaumont, these represent "postsecular repositionings of both discourse and praxis," since such interventions expressly demonstrate a new visibility of religious practice in the public realm — partly in response to neoliberal cuts in public expenditure and resurgence of third sector organizations — without any attempt to deny the evident pluralism of urban politics and civil society.[26] What matters is the localism and particularity of such initiatives, as practiced in new "spaces of ethical identity [...] in which citizens are able to journey from the unshakeable certainties of particular world-views, with their extant comfort zones, to the unknown real and imagined spaces of rapprochement."[27]

Common purpose creates sufficient condition for groups of many diverse convictions to suspend their differences in the interests of pragmatic and strategic engagement towards shared goals. As a result, what each encounters in the other is

[25] Cloke P. Emerging postsecular rapprochement in the contemporary city. In: Beaumont J, Baker C, editors. Postsecular cities: space, theory and practice (London: Continuum; 2011).

[26] Cloke P, Beaumont J. Geographies of postsecular rapprochement in the city. Prog Human Geogr. 2013;37(1):31.

[27] Cloke and Beaumont, Geographies of postsecular rapprochement in the city, p. 32–3.

the practical wisdom of belief systems as mediated in purposeful action. Some alliances may remain quite instrumental or temporary, but other projects may lead to longer-term collaborations and start to effect genuine dialogue between world-views. Similarly, not all expressions of faith will see rapprochement as a key objective; but the opening up of faith as praxis rather than faith as dogma offers concrete and specific territory — about specific values, aims, and ends in relation to shared space.

Such a model of shared practices as common ground reflects recent shifts in the study of Christian theology, such as the recasting over the last 20–30 years of the discipline of practical theology away from the "applied" tasks of ministry and pastoral care, towards a thoroughly performative discipline in which "practice" is the primacy discourse, and theology as doctrine and religion and belief function as "action-guiding world-views" but only to facilitate the exercise of faithful living and the practices of discipleship: "[…] religious actions, experiences and interpretations are always already mediated through specific material conditions."[28] It is also familiar, of course, in the light of various kinds of Liberation Theology to have emerged from the two-thirds world in the last quarter of the twentieth century, in which the Gospel is understood as embodied in forms of transformative and emancipatory praxis. The goal of theology is to facilitate orthopraxy or right action rather than safeguarding the boundaries of orthodoxy or right belief. This kind of enacted faith in action has been characterized by Justin Tse, another urban geographer, as "*grounded theologies*, performative practices of place-making informed by understandings of the transcendent."[29]

We might see how such grounded theologies "take place" in relation to human and physical environments as they help to shape particular cultural and social practices, including alliances with others. It helps us to see how spatially-embodied subjectivities are theologically constituted; but also how they occur within the ecology of specific places, points of time, or specific sets of issues or concerns. It is also to do with the formation of civic virtue: "The purpose of a pragmatic public theology […] is not to galvanize a singular metaphysical moral vision or to reinforce a singular normative world-view, but to facilitate and to nourish collaborative solidarities around common moral tasks."[30]

Cloke and Beaumont's juxtapositioning of the terms "discourse" *and* "praxis" seems crucial here. They characterize faith-based organizations as "communities of interpretation" as well as vehicles of "service and care."[31] What would it mean to regard these common spaces of pragmatic collaboration as also, potentially, spaces of apologetic exchange?

The corollary of such postsecular rapprochement is some kind of commitment to a shared realm of communicative reason and the collaborative task of forging a cohesive civil society. What is more, any truly public theology will have to justify its right to be part of that enterprise. There must be genuine mutual accountability,

[28] Sigurdson O. Beyond secularism? Towards a post-secular political theology. Modern Theol. 2010;26(2):192.
[29] Tse JKH. Grounded theologies: "religion" and the "secular" in human geography. Prog Human Geogr. 2014;38(2):202.
[30] Hogue MS. After the secular: toward a pragmatic public theology. J Am Acad Relig. 2010;78(2):366.
[31] Cloke and Beaumont, Geographies of postsecular rapprochement in the city, p. 36.

not as subservience to the lowest common denominator, but because the task of building a shared space of common purpose requires it. This returns us to the relationship between words and actions in post-secular rapprochement. Actions may speak louder than words, but the nature of the post-secular condition suggests that whilst the practices of faithful citizenship constitute a kind of first-order public theology, they may still need justification. "Giving an account of oneself" may be expressed in the praxis of care, social activism, and active citizenship, but it must also mean being able to speak with conviction into a reasoned public debate. Indeed, one of the ways in which public theology might promote the welfare of the city is to contribute towards a civil, inclusive space of public debate and action in which everyone is welcome to cultivate the skills of active citizenship.

In *Faith and Social Capital after the Debt Crisis*, Adam Dinham has argued that faith-based bodies risk being fatally co-opted into functionalist or instrumentalized relations if the only values or motivations they can articulate are immanent and pragmatic. Like Eagleton, he is concerned to keep alive the dimensions of faith-based social capital that is not exhausted by the short-term imperatives of strategic, broad-based alliances, if that means they lose any consciousness of their distinctiveness or fail to draw deeper values from the well-springs of faith. As he says, "It is time to advance faith-based reasons in faith-based terms."[32]

Dinham makes the case for the value of a public theological language that is not in thrall to managerialism or the instrumental tendencies of social capital, but which is capable of articulating "alternative public discourses which broaden [and deepen?] the canvas of concerns and the vocabulary of the social. A language additional or alternative to free-market capitalism […] is incredibly helpful in the revalorizing of neglected human categories."[33] Far from an intrusive intervention into public discourse, such faith-based discourse that speaks "in its own words" may actually enrich and broaden such communication.

As Christendom passes away, such a public theology would need to come to terms with the waning of its privilege, and the fact that its basic premises will not be immediately comprehensible to non-theological publics. Nevertheless, as Max Stackhouse argues, the "really existing dynamics of globalization cannot be grasped or guided without studying the relationship of faith to culture, culture to societies, and societies to the formation of a new public […] We need a theology wide and deep enough to interpret and guide this new public."[34]

This kind of public theology does not set out to defend the interests of specific faith-communities, but aims to generate informed understandings of the theological and religious dimensions of public issues. A priority has to be that it is accessible and comprehensible to those beyond the community of faith, and unfamiliar with theology, in the interests of public accountability and the integrity of the public realm itself. All authentic theology is public discourse, "if theology is to be trusted to participate in public discourse it ought to be able to make a

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[32] Dinham A. Faith and social capital after the debt crisis (London: Palgrave Macmillan; 2012).
[33] Ibid.
[34] Stackhouse M. God and globalization volume 4: globalization and grace (New York: Continuum; 2007), p. 33.

plausible case for what it advocates in terms that can be comprehended by those who are not believers."[35]

This discursive, apologetic rapprochement might proceed in practice in a variety of ways. It might begin, for example, with participants telling their stories. There are many ways in which narrative as a genre helps resolve the impasse between an over-particularistic, self-referential ecclesial discourse and the adoption of the lowest common denominator. In her work on public theology as narrative, Mary Doak argues it has the potential to constitute "a unified whole through attention to particularities."[36] Narrative is the means through which we realize our historicity, both specific and universal: "careful attention to the structure and function of narrative suggests that it not only provides and reinforces a communal identity but is also a source of critique and transformation, enabling us to imagine possibilities for the future that are appropriate to the specific historical contexts providing the conditions and limits of our praxis."[37] It allows the rhetorical power of theological tradition to be introduced into the public domain "with their religious roots clearly intact," whilst being sufficiently porous to create space for communicative exchange with the narratives and vantage-points of others.[38]

The re-emergence of religion in public, in areas such as politics, urbanization, social policy, and law, may well turn out to the defining characteristic of our generation. The question is, whether our conceptual frameworks are fit for purpose, and whether discourse of the "post-secular" possesses sufficient clarity and explanatory weight to meet the challenge. For some, public suspicion has been heightened by perceptions of religion as "extremist" and antipathetic to liberal democracy; for others, it represents renewed opportunities to speak into a less monolithic public sphere or replenish itself with theological preconditions for the viability of civil society in a world no longer bifurcated by the logic of "private belief" and "public service." This calls for a public theology that would take seriously Charles Taylor's characterization of modern consciousness as framed by reflexivity in the face of pluralism; but would work actively and constructively within such a context as a site not only of religious exchange but of a shared purpose to rejuvenate the theory and practice of common citizenship.

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[35] Tracy D. The analogical imagination: Christian theology and the culture of pluralism (London: SCM Press; 1981), p. 112.
[36] Doak M. Reclaiming narrative for public theology (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press; 2004), p. 3.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., p. 15.

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