

The Orthodox Church in a Pluralistic World

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General Remarks

One of the greatest problems that the Orthodox churches are facing in the modern world is to understand what it means to be the Church of God in a pluralistic society once she affirms that the Church does not exist only for her members but for the salvation of the whole world. How does the Orthodox Church exercise her transformative role in a world where different religious, racial, ethnic, and cultural communities with diverse moral outlooks and ways of life demand public recognition and opportunities to influence the public sphere that they live in and share with others?

In the past, a particular culture had assumed a hegemonic primacy in defining social reality, that is, the public realm of life that people of different social class, race, gender, culture and religion shared with one another. Today all these different communities aspire to contribute equally to shaping the nature of public life, demanding that the state not only recognize their particularity, i.e. whatever differentiates them from the others, but also provide for the protection of such particularity from all possible threats of alteration, suppression, or forceful obliteration. The problem has been exacerbated by the fact that diverse cultural, religious, ethnic groups, societies, and civilizations previously more or less isolated from one another are now in regular and almost unavoidable contact. The voluntary or forcible migration of different racial, cultural and religious communities has led them to a situation of sharing the same living space by breaking down all the barriers of communication that kept them apart from each other. The advances in mass transportation and communication have also contributed to the compression of the world and its transformation into a »global village«. This experience has set in motion a two-fold simultaneous-paradoxical process by which the identities of people and of their communities are relativized by attenuating their differences, and in reaction to such an effect a process begins for the preservation, (re)creation, and stabilization of these vulnerable identities.¹ The effects of this twofold process are that people and communities are increasingly tolerant of difference, sensitive to the rights of the »other«, while »tribalism« experiences a resurgence in the form of nationalism, racism and religious or secular fundamentalism.

What does all this mean for the life and the witness of the Orthodox Churches? The Orthodox Churches, depending on their particular context, respond to this modern challenge differently. For example, in the United States the Orthodox Churches existing in a pluralistic and liberal state desire not only to be recognized and be respected by the society at large, but also to contribute the gifts of Orthodoxy for the development of the common good of the country. As the process gains fruition for the full integration of

¹ Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization*, London 1994.

Greece, an Orthodox country, into the European community, a federation of liberal democratic and pluralistic states, the role of the Orthodox Church in modern Greece inevitably will have to be re-configured so that it can take seriously the new social realities. Perhaps the experience of the Orthodox Churches of the Diaspora could be helpful on this matter.² If in a multicultural setting we are expecting the others not only to recognize our presence in that society but also to receive the gifts of Orthodoxy and its unique interpretation of life, how are we as Orthodox prepared to receive the gifts of others who have similar noble aspirations concerning the gifts of their particular culture, religious, or moral beliefs? In such a situation of mutual enrichment, no religious, cultural, racial or ethnic community desires to lose or compromise its particularity, but yet one may argue that their peaceful and interactive co-existence in the public realm of a modern democratic state transforms their understanding and appreciation of each other without obliterating their difference. In some instances, however, the different communities may recognize the incompatibility of their particular philosophies of life and moral outlooks and choose to distance themselves from one another without forcefully negating the right of the others to exist in their particularity within accepted parameters of a democratic state.

It is the purpose of this paper to explore the public presence of the Orthodox Church in a pluralistic world. By »public presence« I refer to those aspects of the Orthodox Church's life that can be seen and heard by everybody, having the widest possible public exposure and, furthermore, whatever we understand to be the world which is common to all and is distinguished from our private place in it.³ I will begin unfolding my argument by trying to understand the public realm of liberal democratic societies that professedly aspire to be secular and pluralistic, by examining the highly contested meaning of secularism and pluralism and the role of religion in that context. My aspiration is to demonstrate the irreducible pluralism of the modern world that may either lead to conflict through the resurgence of tribalism; to relativism and fragmentation through the exaltation of arbitrary subjectivism; or to a further expansion of our horizons of understanding through transformative conversation with others. I want to argue in this paper that Orthodoxy for theological reasons cannot embrace either tribalism or relativism. The Orthodox understanding of eschatology, the sanctity of the human person, the importance of communion and the universal dimension of the effects of the Christian gospel demand the public presence of Orthodoxy and its contribution to the advancement of the public good, based on its venerable tradition and on conversation with others. The effectiveness of such an active presence depends not only on what Orthodoxy has to offer to the modern world but also on how the Orthodox Churches interact and converse with the world.

² Metropolitan John (Zizioulas), *Communion and Otherness*, *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38 (1994) 348, insists that the mission of Orthodox Church in the West is not the conversion of Western Christians to Orthodoxy, but the much broader and essential task to be a witness of the special ethos of Orthodox tradition in the western world. Furthermore, the Orthodox churches in the West must interpret Western culture to other Orthodox churches living in other parts of the world, becoming bridges between historical Orthodoxy and Western christianity.

³ *Hannah Arendt*, *The Human Condition*, Chicago 1958, p. 50–52.

Secularization and the Church

The public presence of the Orthodox Churches in a pluralistic world requires a thorough critical study and theological assessment of the social realities that shape the human experience and understanding of this world. Although the Church has been co-instituted by the incarnate Word of God and the Holy Spirit, it is undoubtedly true that historical contingencies affect her ability to rightly discern God's active presence within the ambivalence of history. While Orthodox theologians express adequately the richness of Orthodox tradition, they are not always sufficiently informed about the complexities of the modern world that demand first to be understood and then to be theologically interpreted. If it is not done, then the Church may speak to the world and the world may look for the Church, but they would be unable to meet and communicate with each other.

For the Christian Church the total existence of the world is under the sovereignty of God. The »sacred« is actively present in all spheres of reality. This belief had solidified in the past the predominance of the ecclesiastical institutions as the agents of the sacred in determining the norms and patterns of communal and personal life.⁴ Modernity, spearheaded by the Protestant Reformation, the development of the modern state, market economies and science, set in motion the dynamic process of secularization that radically challenged the role of the »sacred« and of the ecclesiastical institutions in the life of the world.⁵ Secularization changed the relation of the sacred and the secular in the human definition of reality. The secular domain claimed independence from the sacred and the world wrested autonomy from the control of the ecclesiastical institutions. If before it was the religious realm that appeared to be the all-encompassing reality within which the secular realm found its proper place, now the secular sphere is the all-encompassing reality to which the religious sphere will have to adapt. The secular domain, after it gained its autonomy from the tutelage of the ecclesiastical institutions, was subject to an internal process of differentiation that gave birth to a variety of autonomous sub-domains (polity, law, economy, science, education, art, health, family) that aspire to regulate their internal coherence with an instrumental rationality that each one has developed for its own needs. The state and the market economy assumed a preeminence over all other spheres of secular life which aspire to condition the modern understanding and classification of the world. The individual in each of these sub-domains is expected to

⁴ In the Byzantine empire the sacred and the secular were overlapping realities. As *Donald M. Nicol*, *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium*, Cambridge 1979, p. 3, states: »In ... the Byzantine world, the distinction between things spiritual and things temporal was often blurred and seldom defined. Church and Empire were seen as two elements of one society, the soul and the body. In the fourth century Eusebius of Caesarea had declared that the Christian Roman Empire was the earthly reflexion of the Kingdom of Heaven. Just as there was only one God in heaven so there could only be one ruler on earth, and that was the Emperor of the Romans. The emperor was God's regent on earth, the visible head of the church and state, because the two were interdependent.«

⁵ On the concept of secularization see *Hans Blumenberg*, *The Legitimacy of Modern Age*, Cambridge 1983; *David Martin*, *Secularization: The Range of Meaning*, in: *The Religious and the Secular*, New York 1969; *Peter Berger*, *The Sacred Canopy*, Garden City, New York 1969; *Bryan Wilson*, *Religion in Secular Society*, London 1966; *Thomas Luckmann*, *Invisible Religion*, New York 1967; *Andrew Greeley*, *Unsecular Man: The Persistence of Religion*, New York 1972.

function according to the instrumental rationality that regulates the life of each sub-domain. He must abide by the »rules of the game« without any personal commitment or conviction. Who a person is and what he does are separated as autonomous domains of being and acting. Religion, aspiring to integrate and interpret holistically the life of the person, loses its importance in this case and the influence of religious institutions in society is significantly weakened. Some interpret this phenomenon as the beginning of the eventual disappearance of religion from the life of the modern world.

The progressive shrinkage, decline, and eventual obliteration of religion in the modern world became the prevailing interpretation of secularization. Sociologists began to challenge the untested assumptions of the secularization theory in the early sixties.⁶ They began to differentiate the ideology of secularism derived from the Enlightenment critique of religion from the theory of secularization that describes the modern process of differentiation and autonomy of the secular (state, economy and science) from the sacred and the tutelage of the ecclesiastical institution. The autonomy of the secular from the sacred and its internal differentiation into multiple autonomous sub-domains that contributed to the weakening of the influence of religion in the life of the modern world does not necessarily lead to the progressive erosion, decline, and eventual disappearance of religion. Secularization, according to Thomas Luckmann, refers to the loss of the traditional social and public function of religion.⁷ Religion in the modern society is privatized, situated in its differentiated marginal sphere of operation. Social scientists believe that secularization as a theory provides a helpful category for the interpretation of the modern world.⁸ It refers to a new system of classification and differentiation of the secular and the religious. The view that secularization signifies the progressive decline of religious beliefs and practices until their total obliteration is rejected as an unfounded ideological presumption. It is an interpolation of a mythical understanding of history as the progressive evolution of humanity from superstition to reason, from belief to unbelief, from religion to science.⁹

The Fragmentation of Human Consciousness

Individuals in an increasingly pluralistic modern society inevitably will perform many different and autonomous roles without any or little need to connect their performances with a holistic religious or secular understanding and outlook of life. They are irreducibly confronted with multiple options of possible courses of action and diverse options of possible ways of thinking about and acting in the world. They are challenged to choose in innumerable situations of everyday life how to act, what to believe, and what values and world views they must have. The plurality, however, of beliefs, values and world-views, the multiplicity of options that characterize life in modern world, and the pre-

⁶ The first critiques came from the work of David Martin, *The Religious and the Secular*; and Andrew Greeley, *Unsecular Man: The Persistence of Religion*.

⁷ Thomas Luckmann, *Invisible Religion*, New York 1967.

⁸ José Casanova, *Public Religion in the Modern World*, Chicago 1994, pp. 17–39.

⁹ Ibid.

cariousness of the modern social institutions force individuals to be more reflective than spontaneous in the process of making decisions at different levels of their personal and social life. This process of making decisions became more complex with the fragmentation and the weakening of every conceivable belief and value dependent upon social support that modernity caused through institutional pluralization.¹⁰ Thus the plausibility structures that define reality in the modern society – compared with those of premodern times – are unstable, unreliable, incohesive and fragmented. Modernity, as Peter Berger states, liberated human consciousness from the oppression of fate and its consequent social determinism and at the same time it caused human alienation, planting uncertainty in human consciousness.¹¹ Institutional segmentation fragmented the consciousness of modern man. The self is left free and alone to find ways to give coherence and meaning to its life. This can be done either by a reflective self-interpretation of life or by a voluntary association of the self with a religious or nonreligious community that offers a symbolic representation and interpretation of life in the world. In either instance, the human quest for meaning in the modern world is strictly a private affair. Individuals are on their own to patch together the fragments of their existence into a subjective and meaningful whole. Whether this can be accomplished is not a relevant question for the dominant economic and political institutions who exercise political power, so long as it does not adversely affect their efficient function. Institutional religion for them is not needed and anyway it can no longer integrate the increasing functional differentiation of modern society. Religion, therefore, becomes de-politicized, being irrelevant and marginal to the functioning of the modern society. Individuals in the modern world without any interference from the State have a choice to be religious, agnostics, unbelievers or whatever else they choose to be. Freedom of choice leads to a consumerist attitude towards religious options. Individuals confront a wide assortment of »religious« representations, traditional religious ones, as well as secular new ones, manufactures, packaged and sold by specialized service agencies out of which they can construct or reconstruct a necessarily precarious private system of ultimate beliefs and meanings. Christian Churches in pluralistic society are now and will continue for the foreseeable future to be in competition with other religious and secular options that desire to interpret reality. The critical nature of the public realm and the challenge to the Church's role from other religious and secular communities make the churches who desire communication with the modern world to be sensitive to their public image. In the process of being connected with the public, the churches must rely primarily on that irreducible aspect of their lives that justifies their existence in the modern world as unique subsystem.

¹⁰ *Peter Berger, The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*, Garden City, New York 1979, p. 19.

¹¹ «Liberation and alienation are inextricably connected, reverse sides of the same coin of modernity. To want the first without the second is one of the recurring fantasies of the modern revolutionary imagination; to perceive the second without the first is the Achilles' heel of virtually all conservative viewpoints.» *Peter Berger, The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*, New York 1979, p. 23.

The Public Role of Religion

Social scientists, while they acknowledge the marginalization of religion in the modern world, continue to debate about its new social location. Depending on their understanding of the nature and function of religion some argued that religion in the modern world has become a »private affair«. Others maintained that some generalized cultural principles of religion that most people can agree on remain operative in the public life while the non-generalizable principles become private. The generalized principles of religion that all can agree on provide the basic values necessary for the integration of society. Such a civil religion does not offend the pluralistic sensitivities of the modern liberal democratic states that preclude any particular religion from becoming publicly binding for all the people. Civil religion has been criticized as to whether it is adequately religious, with its highly generalized and undemanding principles, and whether it can be a substitute in the public realm for the privatized religions since it lacks any institutional expression. Regardless of the outcome of the debate concerning the social location of religion in modern society, religion, with its universal claims of truth, is considered by liberal democratic political theorists to be a threat to the right of privacy and the freedom of conscience that all people in democratic states must have. In their view, religion is located in the private sphere of life because its universal authoritarian claims are not compatible with the spirit of tolerance that liberalism advocates. The relocation of religion from the public to the private sphere is also favored by some endogenous forces within the churches that opt for a piety of individual salvation or in the midst of such fragmentation have opted to safeguard the coherence of the Christian story while refusing to come to terms with the fragmentation of the modern consciousness. For such people the modern world is irredeemably fragmented, and the task of the Church is to be a countercultural movement and community with a coherent moral vision and a meaningful interpretation of life in constant opposition to the predominant forces of this world. This view, despite its appeal, is a political expression of the christological heresy of Nestorianism that denies the event of incarnation, refusing to acknowledge God's active presence in and operation through and the world and its history.

Should the Christian Churches accept their relocation to the private sphere of life? The answer to this question will depend on the understanding of public and private life, a helpful and necessary distinction for the proper classification and order of human life in the modern world. Regardless to the particular definition by which we ascertain some aspects of human life to be private and other to be public, we must always remember that the boundaries of such distinctions are always porous, highly contested and constantly shifting. As a result of this the meaning of such terms is constantly changing.¹² The root

¹² Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization*, London 1994, pp. 72–73, describes in the following manner the complexity of this important differentiation of public and private: »Privatization refers to the fact that religion is a matter primarily of *individual* disposition. Individual choice, however, is not a characteristic of modernity only when it comes to religion, the family, and voluntary associations. Career choices, economic consumer choices, and political preference are also matters of individual choice. The private sphere, from this vantage point, is evidently also a vital part of the public sphere. Moreover, if what is specific about the public sphere is functional rationality, then modern religion and families are also not without public traits ... Institutions in the

of this differentiation originates in the dualistic conception of the ancient city into *oikos* and *polis*, and the differentiation of individual and society.¹³ »Private« primarily refers to matters pertaining to the individual, especially in whatever aspects of his or her life cannot be shared by others. The »Public« sphere as described by Charles Taylor is »a common space in which the members of society meet through a variety of media (print, electronic) and also face-to-face encounters, to discuss matters of common interest, and thus to be able to form a common mind about those matters«.¹⁴ The multiplicity of different forums and encounters in which matters of common interest and concern are discussed in modern society constitute a common space, since all of them are in principle intercommunicating. This public space is a central and crucial feature of a modern democratic society. Such a space where people freely form their opinion about matters of common concern and craft their common mind is a constitutive characteristic of a free and democratic society. The public opinion that people develop in a democratic society is not the summation of the different views that people hold about an issue. It is rather a reflective opinion that emerges from a critical deliberation that engages all the citizens concerning their common good. For this reason, it has a normative value for those who exercise political power, i.e. the state whose purpose is according to democratic polity to govern by serving the common interests and concerns of the people. The public space loses its significance and credibility as the locus of democratic discussions about the common good whenever it is controlled or manipulated either by money or the government or even by some collusive combination of both. It must be always a space outside of power whose purpose is to supervise those in power by providing a definition of the common good. The *public opinion* about the common good in a free democratic society is substantially different in three significant ways from *the opinion of mankind* that regulated the life of the people before modernity. »*The opinion of mankind* is seen as (1) unreflected, (2) unmediated by discussion and critique, and (3) passively inculcated in each successive generation. *Public opinion* by contrast, is meant (1) to be the product of reflection, (2) to emerge from discussion, and (3) to reflect and actively produced consensus.«¹⁵ It is my strong conviction that the church must resist simultaneously her relocation in the private sphere and the temptation to be identified voluntarily with the power of the government or of market economy. She must recognize her location in the »evil society«, the social realm that links the private and the public spheres of life. The civil society is a host of voluntary associations of people that exists outside of the political realm, contributing to the sustenance of community by bringing people together for matters of common concern and affirmation beyond their strictly private needs and concerns. The importance of civil society is such that »no society can be called free in

public sphere have privatized features; and those in the private sphere have public ones. Such equivocal references make it difficult to use the public/private distinction in a consistent and clear way. In this form, it is therefore ambiguous and incomplete; but it is not useless.«

¹³ Hannah Arendt, *The Public and the Private Realm*, in: *The Human Condition*, Chicago 1958, pp. 22–78.

¹⁴ Charles Taylor, *Liberal Politics and the public Sphere*, in: *Philosophical Arguments*, Cambridge 1995, p. 259.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 261. For a detailed exploration of this important development see the work of Jürgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, Cambridge 1989.

which these voluntary associations are not able to function, and the pulse of freedom will beat very slowly where they are not being spontaneously formed».¹⁶ Neither the private sphere nor the public, especially when it is understood in its narrow sense of being identical with the state or the economy, can be the locus of the Church's operation in the world. The Church as a voluntary association of people with particular insights and vision about life and the future of the world must be involved actively in the public debate concerning the common good. The Church in her dialogical interaction with others in the public sphere offers her salvific truth to all and at the same time, as a result of her dialogue, has the potential to become more fully aware of her identity in the present world.

How can we conceptually understand the place and the role of religion in the highly differentiated and fragmented social reality? The functional differentiation and pluralism of modern society does not leave space for any particular religion to be a positive force of social integration as in the past. Religion in the modern world lost its hegemonic place in the public realm, but not its public voice. Modernity itself does not deny the public role of religion, but it reconceptualizes the relation of the sacred and the secular through the process of differentiation. In that context, religion cannot claim or be recognized to have *a priori* any predominance in the public domain by virtue of its authority but neither is it possible to exclude religion's presence from it. Once religion has accepted the fundamental rights that democratic states grant to all citizens, specifically freedom of conscience and rights to privacy, it is possible for religion to assume a public form.

Religion in the modern world, when it assumes a public form and presence, must not try to do what science, economy, or the state is expected to do in the world. It must, rather, provide to the modern world a service that not only supports and enhances the religious faith of its adherents but also have far-reaching implications outside the religious realm. Religion can be a source of inspiration and empowerment to movements of social and political transformation. Such movements can communicate a particular religious service necessary for everyone that is not the same as or similar to what is offered, for instance, by the economic or scientific subsystem. Religion offers uniquely to its followers a narrative that grants »ultimate meaning« to the lives, »altruistic concern and love for the other«, »compensation for unavailable rewards«, and »transformative power« that empowers their lives in history. Religion can participate actively in the deliberations of the public sphere for the common good, defending religious freedom, human rights, and the very right of a democratic civil society to exist against an absolutist, authoritarian state. It can also raise questions concerning the claims of the state, the academy, and the market economy to operate without any regard for values, moral norms, or human considerations. These kinds of intervention could raise the consciousness of the people, mobilize them against all oppressive and dehumanizing conditions that threaten the very life of the world and foster a public debate about such issues. The impact of such critique must not be measured by the criterion of whether the religious communities were successful in imposing their universal claims or agenda upon others, but from whether the intervention of religion in the public realm provided

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 258.

an opportunity to question the normativity of modern facticity and thus contributed to the sustenance of civil life, the protection of people's rights, and the moral responsibility that people have for one another.

The Function and Performance of Religion

Social Scientists have made an important distinction between the *function* of a subsystem that describes how it relate to the society as a whole and its *performance* that refers to its relationship to other subsystems.¹⁷ In the case of religion, *function* denotes all aspects of devotion, worship, pastoral care, personal enlightenment, salvation, and to all pure »sacred« acts and duties that justify the autonomy of religion in the differentiated modern society. *Performance*, by contrast, describes the effects of religion on other subsystems addressing the unresolved issues generated by them. Such issues can be economic poverty, political oppression, familial estrangement, environmental degradation, human alienation, etc. *Function* and *performance* are two inseparable aspects that characterize the life and relation of every sub-system in the modern society. Recently these two aspects have been clearly differentiated and even conceived to be autonomous. What this mean is that, for instance, science, economy and religion primarily pay attention to their own internal life, *function*, without recognizing the need to connect *function* with *performance*, their impact on other subsystems. This approach leads inevitably to fragmentation of the social fabric, since each of these subsystems function without any reference to other subsystems that comprise modern society. In reaction some try to redefine the *function* of a subsystem from the perspective of its *performance*. Such an approach carries in itself always the risk of bypassing or ignoring important and functional elements of each subsystem that dilute its internal cohesion. How does this apply to religion? It has been stated that »the functional problem of religion is actually a performance problem«. ¹⁸ In other words if there is a problem for modern man to participate in the Church's functional life, it is because he or she has lost the ability to discern the implication and importance of such participation for his/her life in history. The most appropriate response of the Church to modernity is neither more emphasis on her *function* nor on her *performance*, although both aspects are necessary components of the Church's vitality. A mere emphasis only on the Church's *function* carries in itself the danger of religious isolationism and comfortably locates the Church in the private sphere. On the contrary, attention only to her *performance* carries in itself danger of desacralizing the gospel, reducing Christianity just to a movement of social and political transformation and surrendering the unique and irreducible aspects of the gospel. Rejecting both options lead us in a third possible response, which in my judgement is the most promising. The church should try to find many different and efficient ways to reconnect her *function* and *performance*. In theological language, the Church is challeng-

¹⁷ Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization*, London 1994, p. 80; Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society*, New York 1982, pp. 238–242.

¹⁸ Ibid.

ed to find ways to be simultaneously mystical and prophetic, spiritual and socially active, uniting theology with ethics, liturgy with life. Such an approach, while it recognizes the importance of *function* and *performance* for the vitality and relevance of the Church's life, suggests that only in their unity or effective integration the Church would be able to overcome her privatization.¹⁹ Refusal by the Church to accept this challenge will mean that she has passively accepted the fragmentation of modern society into multiple and unrelated systems of operation by limiting her operation to an aspect of her people's life, i.e. the religious, being unable to inform the rest of their life as they participate in or perform in other subsystems of the modern society.

The jurisdictional claims of each subsystem unavoidably makes the integration highly conflictual. It carries in itself the potential that the differentiated rationality of other subsystems may influence and alter *function* of the Church but at the same time the *performance* of the church may effect the *function* of these subsystems through the ethical restraints and challenges that it may raise for them.²⁰ The fear of the potential danger that the functional rationality of the other subsystems may influence the *function* of the church cannot be an obstacle towards the effective integration of the Church's

¹⁹ The collaborative work on Ecclesiology and Ethics between Faith and Order Board and Unit III (Justice, Peace, and Creation) of WCC is in my judgement an attempt to develop this kind of theological and ethical witness that we have described here. See: *Thomas F. Best and Martin Robra (eds.)*, *Ecclesiology and Ethics: Costly Commitment*, Geneva, World Council of Churches 1995; *Thomas F. Best and Wesley Granberg-Michaelson (eds.)*, *Costly Unity: Koinonia and Justice, Peace and Creation*, Geneva, World Council of Churches 1993; Faith and Order Paper no. 151, *Church and World: The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community*, Geneva, World Council of churches 1992. For Orthodox attempts see: *Ion Bria*, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy*, Geneva 1996; *George Lemopoulos (ed.)*, *Your Will Be Done: Orthodoxy in Mission*, Geneva 1989; *Savas Agourides*, *The Social Character of Orthodoxy*, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 8 (1962–63) 7–20; *Demetrios J. Constantelos*, *Byzantine Philanthropy and Social Welfare*, New Brunswick 1968; *idem*, *The Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*, in: *God and Charity: Images of Eastern Orthodox Theology, Spirituality, and Practice*, ed. by *Francis D. Costa*, Brookline 1979, pp. 75–87; *Paul Evdokimov*, *The Social Dimension of Orthodox Ecclesiology*, *Theology Digest* 18 (1970) 43–52; *George Fedotov*, *The Church and Social Justice*, *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 7 (1963); *Georges Florovsky*, *Christianity and Culture*, vol. 2, in the *Collected Works*, Belmond, MA 1974. In particular the chapters on «Faith and Culture», «Antinomies of Christian History: Empire and Desert», «Christianity and Civilisation», and «The Social Problem in the Eastern Orthodox Church»; *Stanley Harakas*, *The Orthodox Theological Approach to Modern Trends*, *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 13 (1969) 198–211; *idem*, *The Church and Secular World*, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 17 (1972); *idem*, *Orthodox Church-State Theory and American Democracy*, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 21 (1976) 389–401; *Georges Khodr*, *Christianity in a Pluralistic World*, *Sobornost*, Series 6, No. 3, 1971, pp. 166–174; *idem*, *The Church and the World*, *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 18 (1969) 33–51; *George I. Mantzarides*, *The Witness of Orthodoxy to the Contemporary World*, *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 17 (1973) 170–180; *Nikos A. Nissiotis*, *Church and Society in Greek Orthodox Theology*, in: *Christian Social Ethics in a Changing world*, ed. by *John C. Bennet*, New York 1966; *John Romanides*, *Remarks of an Orthodox Christian on Religious Freedom*, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 8 (1962–63) 127–132; *idem*, *The Orthodox Churches on Church and State Relations and Religious Liberty*, *Journal of Church and State* 6 (1964) 178–189; *Dumitru Staniloae*, *Christian Responsibility in the World*, in: *The Tradition of Life*, *Studies Supplementary to Sobornost*, no. 2, ed. by *A. M. Allchin*, London 1971; *Nikolai A. Zabolotsky*, *Diakonia and Social Responsibility of the Church*, *The Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* 9 (1980) 68–77.

²⁰ The multitude of subdomains of the secular must not always be in conflict and in an adversarial relationship with the sacred. It is possible to move beyond the polarization of conflictual historical conditions and critically integrate the positive contributions of secularism as well as of religion while we denounce the ideological, oppressive and alienating abuses of both.

function and *performance* that we have discussed. The Christian Church has the potential to liberate herself from any possible alienation from her true being by again and again putting the totality of her life under the judgement of the gospel and the eschatological realities that she actualizes in her liturgical life.

The Church in Dialogue

Christian Churches and other religious communities have responded differently to the challenge of modernity and their relocation to the private domain. Some, based on their internal authority, have refused to accept the modern differentiation of society and continue to operate without any recognition of the new social realities opting for a total separation from the world. Others do not discern any incompatibility between the secular and the sacred. They accept the modern differentiation of society, respecting the autonomy of each subsystem and being able without any difficulty to perform in each of these sub-systems without any substantial conflict between the different functional rationalities that regulate the life of each of these subsystems. It is possible for instance for some people to be a good Christian every Sunday, Marxists in their political ideology, and cruel capitalists in their entrepreneurial adventures, and to be all of these without feeling the slightest incompatibility that each of these performances may have with the other. Others have become so infatuated with modernity that they have adopted completely a »secular« value system with some religious or Christian references. And still others, without surrendering their Christian and religious identity because they have refused to be blinded to the new social realities of the modern world, have accepted the challenge to reconfigure the public role of religion in a modern pluralistic world.²¹ The option that reflects some continuity with the Orthodox ethos is the last one, which in my opinion is both intellectually honest and morally consistent. Of course such an approach requires deep awareness of the complexity of the modern world and faithfulness to the Orthodox tradition with a willingness to communicate and bring Orthodoxy into conversation with the modern world.

Christians should be actively involved in the political deliberations of the modern pluralistic society, offering to the world the truth of the gospel as it relates to the concrete problems and life situations of the world. This basic Christian affirmation does not merely reflect aspects of the prophetic tradition that we find in Scripture, but it also

²¹ Christians in America have understood differently the nature of the Church's public responsibility. A. James Reichley, In *Religion in American Public Life*, Washington DC 1985, p. 3, discerns the following approaches on this significant matter: »*Separationists* hold that churches should confine themselves to nurturing spiritual and moral values, leaving individual Church members to apply these values to concrete public issues. *Social activists* agree that Church and state should be kept institutionally separate, but argue that moral imperatives springing from the Judeo-Christian tradition, which provides the common religious heritage of most Americans, require that religious bodies work actively to promote virtuous causes in public life. *Accommodationists* insist that religion should maintain at least symbolic presence in most areas of public life (...) and that the Church should help set the moral direction of civil society. *Direct interventionists* recommend that the Church, or at least its leaders, should plunge into the deals and stratagems of practical politics, winning for the Church and its constitutions a share of the benefits that issue for public power.«

reflects the ethos of the Church Fathers who did not preach about an exotic religion but strove to transform the Greco-Roman culture of their time by the saving message and the new life that God granted to the world through the incarnate Word.

The pluralistic democratic context of modern societies elevates dialogue as the only option that people presently have to persuade others concerning matters that affect their common life. The basic soil of such conversation is the shared commitment of the interlocutors to certain thin political and moral norms or premises that makes their communication possible despite their disagreement and conflict. These shared grounds may be many and quite determinate or few and quite indeterminate relative to the issues. Dialogue has the potential to generate further shared new premises that reinforce the communal bonds of those involved in the dialogue. Depending on the social circumstances, people through dialogue either reaffirm what they hold in common and try to reach a consensus about its embodiment in concrete policies or they attempt to diminish possible dissensus and/or understand better the nature of their disagreement. Commitment to dialogue is a political and moral option that aspires as much as possible to resolve conflicts discursively rather than manipulatively, coercively and violently. It transcends both the skeptical view expressed in the position »that there is no point in going on discussing the issues that divide us« and also the realist position which assumes that conflicts and difference among people and communities can only be resolved through the use of power and coercion. It rather affirms that dialogue is neither futile nor conclusive, but that it helps conflicting communities to sustain their unity in the conversation process. If the interlocutors in a conversation do not resolve their differences through the achievement of agreement, they will reach a possible convergence that mediates their conflict at least temporarily and enable them to see their conflict from the perspective, not of their irreconcilable differences but from what they already share with each other. Dialogue advances the common good of a given society, provided that all will be free to participate in the process of deliberation and to contribute equally to the convergent expression of the common good that binds people of different persuasions together. Dialogue cannot resolve all the political and moral conflicts that arise in a pluralistic society. Its basic aim and test of success is not primarily the achievement of agreement but its ability to sustain and enhance community in the midst of differences and conflicts. It creates the necessary space in which citizens and communities meet one another in the public sphere for the purpose of deliberating about their common good and about how it can be embodied in policies that equitably regulate their political life.

The question that needs to be addressed is whether the different Christian Churches, religious or moral communities that comprise the modern pluralistic society share enough basic beliefs to make political and moral dialogue a realistic possibility. Despite the different outlooks on life that each community may have, it is important to acknowledge the enormous number of common beliefs, values, and attitudes that each shares and holds in common with others. In the modern world different cultures, subcultures, and fragments of cultures constantly meet with one another and exchange or modify practices and attitudes. Consequently, there is no virgin culture, untained or unaffected by the influence of the other. Each culture, despite its difference, contains elements that bind it with other cultures. Furthermore the recognition that another person

despite his or her difference is a genuine human person or that the life of a community is an expression of a particular culture implies that we recognize in the other, person or community some shared elements of common humanity or culture. Thus in the modern society there are as many contested beliefs as there are shared tacit or explicit assumptions. Modern pluralistic society is just as faction-ridden as it is coherent. The coherent aspect of modern pluralistic society becomes the basic of the overlapping consensus about the common good that enables all communities to deliberate about policies that reflect as much as possible whatever binds them into a community of common life. The common good of such society is crafted by drawing insights from all systems of belief and ideologies without being identified with any of them. It is broadly defined, so it can be maximally inclusive and representative of all who comprise the pluralistic culture. Ronald F. Thiemann rightly points out that the conception of the common good must not only reflect the maximum shared assumptions of a pluralistic society, but it must necessarily include provisions respecting and safeguarding the rights of each particular community, creating space for the expression of dissent within clearly defined parameters.²² From a political perspective the coherence of a given society is relatively safeguarded by its constitution that prescribes how life in common is to be lived. The constitutional norms, despite their contested interpretations in conflictual situations, provide the minimal fundamental legal and moral norms that regulate the life of a political community.

Is there a space in the living conversations of the political community for the witness of the Christian Churches or other religious communities who aspire to speak about the common life of the world by using a particular religious language and symbols? Furthermore, are the Christian Churches or other religious communities adequately prepared with sufficient conversational skills and mechanisms to participate in a political deliberation that aims to achieve a convergence on the common good that a pluralistic society can endorse? Liberal political tradition, developed in the aftermath of the post-reformation religious wars in Europe, is negatively predisposed against the admittance of religious arguments into the political public realm. Liberalism is partly a response to the cruelty that intolerant people commit in defense of their ideological or religious creedal commitments:

»Liberalism's origins are in the terrible tension within Christianity between the demands of creedal orthodoxy and those of charity, between faith and morality. The cruelties of religious wars had the effect of turning many Christians away from the public policies of the Churches to a morality that saw toleration as an expression of Christian charity... Others, torn by conflicting spiritual impulses, became skeptics who put cruelty and fanaticism at the very head of the human vices; ... In either case the individual, whether the bearer of a sacred conscience or the potential victim of cruelty, is to be protected against the incursions of public oppression ... liberalism's deepest grounding is

²² Ronald F. Thiemann, *Religion in Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy*, Washington 1996, p. 125.

in place from the first, in the conviction of the earliest defenders of toleration, born in horror, that cruelty is an absolute evil, an offense against God or humanity.²³

The fact that modern society is irreducibly pluralistic is another strong consideration against the acceptance of the predominance in the public sphere of the beliefs of any particular religion. The universal juridical claims of religion about the world and its proper order are believed to be incommensurable with the need of the modern pluralistic societies to craft through deliberation their understanding of common good and the basis of just policies by drawing insights from all who cohabit their space. Recognizing the validity of the expressed fears and objections against the admittance of religious arguments in the public sphere, we need to study how we can introduce religious arguments in the public realm without contributing to factionalism and civil strife.

A Theological Appreciation of »otherness«

Before we proceed to explore the language and the message that the Church brings to the public square, we must understand theologically the Others with whom Christians are in conversation about the common good of their immediate world. The uniqueness of the Church's discourse in the public sphere depends on her particular understanding of and relationship with the others based on her basic tenets of faith and liturgical life. The whole doctrinal tradition of the Church and liturgical life provides important insights on how to reconfigure and relate otherness and communion so that the differentiation that exists in God's creation is not the cause of divisiveness and fragmentation but a manifestation of God's diverse blessings. The public and the private relationship that Christians must have with the others in order to be unique expressions of the Orthodox ethos must be primarily reflections on how the other is understood in the doctrinal and liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church.

Human life in history is actualized in the tensive relationship of difference and community. Whenever either difference or community are exalted or conceived apart from each other, human society becomes either totalitarian in nature or extremely individualistic and fragmented. The self and the other as well as interaction that they have with each other in the private or public realm reflect to a great extent expressions of their historical situation. Neither the self nor the other can be understood apart from the communities of family, gender, race, social class, national, religious or any other kind of associational belonging that decisively formed their respective identities. Today more than ever we have come to recognize the historicity of the other as well as of the self and of their mutual interdependence. Relationships constitute decisively people's identities. This recognition creates a space in the human conception of reality for differentiation, recognizing that people because of different relationships, places, times, experiences, education, gender, social status and religion may perceive reality differently. This in turn effects the formation of people's identities that we cannot ignore or misrecognize without

²³ Judith N. Shklar, *The Liberalism of Fear*, in: *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. by Nancy L. Rosenblum, Cambridge, MA. 1989, p. 23.

inflicting harm upon them, the others, since our relationships with them contribute to the formations of their identities. The reverse is also true that others through their relationship with us contribute to the formation of our own human identities and culture. Thus, it is important to establish the right relationships with the others in their difference and the others with us since human identities are social constructs, event of communion. While communities without space for difference, dissent, and conversation stifle human creativity and authentic personhood, it is important to recognize that societies where absolute difference is celebrated without any regard for the community suffer from fragmentation, alienation, and social anomy. In both instances, there is a refusal to recognize the otherness of the Other whether this otherness reflects the diversity of people who live in such societies or the common good that binds different people into a living community. The common denominator in both instances is a general fear of the others except if they are identical or similar with us. The others with whom we would like to identify or relate must think, act, believe and live in a similar or identical way as we do. Whoever is not similar to us in appearance, social status, beliefs and moral outlook, is rejected simply because he or she is different, even if that difference does not threaten us in any way. Difference is identified with division and »when difference becomes division, communion is nothing but an arrangement for peaceful co-existence. It lasts as long as the mutual interests last, and may be easily turned into conflict and confrontation as soon as these interests cease to coincide«. ²⁴ In other world people relate to others simply because they are like them, and in this way they reveal their distaste for others in their otherness. The other becomes a friend to the extent that he or she does not threaten our privacy and in so far as he or she contributes to our individual happiness.

How can we explain theologically the fear of the others that characterizes life in this world? Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) understands this fear and rejection of the other to be rooted in the human rejection of the Ultimate Other.

»There is no doubt that this is a direct result of what in theological language we call the »Fall of man«. There is a pathology built into the very roots of existence, inherited through our birth, and that is *the fear of the other*.

This is a result of the rejection of the Other par excellence, our Creator, by the first Man, Adam – and before him by the demonic powers that revolted against God. The essence of sin is the fear of the Other, which is part of this rejection. Once the affirmation of the »self« is realized through the rejection and not the acceptance of the Other – this is what Adam chose in his freedom to do – it is only natural and inevitable for the other to become an enemy and a threat.« ²⁵

The fear of the other is an implanted pathological infirmity that pervades human understanding as fear of all otherness. Difference becomes a source of divisiveness and conflict. Difference (Diafora), when it is perverted to division (Diairesi«) or fragmentation (Diaspasi«), ultimately brings death to the self and to the others and more broadly to authentic human communion. Is there any possibility for humanity to transcend this

²⁴ Ibid., p. 350.

²⁵ Metropolitan John (Zizioulas), Communion and Otherness, *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38 (1994) 349.

pathological condition? The reconciliation of otherness and communion is much more than a moral problem that we can resolve through some ethical principles. As a phenomenon of the fallen world, it can only be overcome through a new birth, an ecclesial existence that reconciles all with the Ultimate Other and the whole of Creation. Of course this theological truth cannot be an excuse for the Church to avoid her political responsibility as a power and presence of reconciliation and healing in the fragmented and conflictual world. It rather strongly reminds the Church and all of us that in history we are constantly subject to the risk of reducing difference to divisiveness and fragmentation, and that our responsibility is to help the world and its people sustain their relationality by instilling in the world the transformative power of the gospel.

The unity and the diversity that characterizes the Trinitarian life of God, the relations that Jesus established throughout his ministry with the others, especially the publicans, the tax collectors, the harlots and the poor, the presence and operation of the Holy Spirit in the world as an event of communion, and the eschatological nature of the Christian faith provide important insights on how to conceive the reconciliation of difference with communion.²⁶ The trinitarian relations and unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit become the basis for a positive affirmation of otherness. The recognition of difference is a necessary precondition for an authentic Communion. It is in relationships, in community, that the awareness of otherness emerges and community ceases to exist when all otherness is reduced to sameness. The incarnation of the eternal Word of God and the life of Jesus Christ reveals how God communicates and relates in love with the totality of the world. Jesus Christ in his ministry accepts and relates in love to others as they are and brings to all the transformative love of God that heals their infirmities and changes them to what they are supposed to be. Such mode of relationships however cannot be realized without the experience of the cross. It is only from the powerlessness of the cross that we can communicate the authentic love of God for the world and be credible expressions of His presence in the world. The Holy Spirit as the active presence of God within history and the world makes all the differentiated aspects and elements of this world relational. It is only in relations that we develop an awareness of the specificity of our human identity and realize the fullness of our humanity. The Holy Spirit by bringing the eschaton in history and by opening the world to the eschatological realities of God's future becomes the foundation of the Church's public witness as a source of renewal and constant transformation of the world through the coming realities of God's future. In human relationships, Christians because of the eschatological faith relate to others not on the basis of one's past but on the basis of one's future. »Every ›other‹ is in the Spirit a potential saint, even if he appears to have been or continues to be a sinner.«²⁷ Finally, an important issue that needs to be addressed is whether the Church excludes otherness in her eucharistic communion or even whether baptism itself is an act of exclusion from Christ's body of the others who have not yet accepted the gospel of Jesus

²⁶ Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) in his article »Communion and Otherness« (see note 25) has begun to reflect on this important issue. It is however an inherent weakness in Orthodoxy the translation of such theological principles to practical aspects of people's life in history although there is no space in Orthodox tradition for separation between faith and life.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 354.

Christ. In ecclesiological terms, it is important to reflect whether the particularity of Christian Church limits God's salvific love only to those who are baptized. John Zizioulas would state that »there is only one kind of exclusion that eucharistic communion permits; it is the exclusion of the exclusion.«²⁸ The Church in history found necessary to draw canonical boundaries in order to safeguard her particular understanding of faith with all its practical implications as a service to the world and not to exclude the rest of the world from the salvific love of God. When the particularity of the Church is disconnected from the universality of God's love, the Church seriously damages the authenticity of the Christian gospel.

The Public Discourse of the Church

The recognition of the particularity of religious language by which a historically situated community with universal claims communicates its beliefs about the world is not an argument against its use in the public sphere. Every language expresses a particular experience, interpretation, and communication of reality by a historically situated community. The possibility of a universal language is a delusion. Religious communities abandon their claim that their particular story and language illuminates human life in the world whenever in their anxiety to communicate with others abandon the specificity of their language and symbols and begin to use the »neutral« language which is predominant in modern society. Religious communities must enter the public realm through the particularity of their stories and language. If religious beliefs are not advanced in a political argument that a religious community raises then such an argument is not religious and such beliefs do not affect the public realm or have any religious claim.²⁹ The potential of sectarian exclusiveness and divisiveness of such language is limited by the awareness that its proper role is primarily to contribute its particular insights and inform the social debate on issues of public policy and not to dictate public policy. Religious public arguments in a pluralistic society intent to contribute towards the development of an overlapping consensus that reflects the moral insights and beliefs of all people and communities who comprise the pluralistic society. This overlapping consensus becomes the basis of the formulation of just and fair policies that regulate the common life of all people. As John Coleman states: »The most important place of theological symbols in public debate is more as an ethical horizon and set of value preferences than in specific and concrete policy discussion.«³⁰

The political arguments of the Christian Churches in the public realm of a pluralistic society must be grounded on the particular story of the Christian gospel and be

²⁸ Ibid., p. 356.

²⁹ Orthodox anthropology, the theology of personhood, would remain a private belief until we begin to develop political arguments based on the Orthodox insights about the nature and the destiny of humanity; the meaning of human suffering, corruption, and death; the significance of human relationships, creativity and actions; and what as human beings and communities we can offer to the world and what should we expect to receive from it.

³⁰ John Coleman, *An American Strategic Theology*, pp. 194–195.

communicated on grounds that others who are not members of the Church can also accept. Thus, the public arguments of the Church do not exhaust the authoritative standards that regulate her internal life. In other words, while religious communities in their internal life function with specific standards of authority when such communities transgress their boundaries and perform in the public realm they adhere to the political norms without these norms exhausting standards of moral and political conduct which are authoritative for them. For instance, the transcendent dimension of the Christian faith is a catalyst against all the self-enclosed systems and ideologies that stifle the life and thought of the world. It seriously challenges all the absolute claims that social systems may claim to have, it protects human creativity from social inertia and instills in the public life of the world a sense of responsibility and care for the welfare of the others.³¹ Such attitudes can be advanced in the public realm through the narration of the gospel story and the dialogical explication of its significance for the life of others of different religious or ideological beliefs who comprise the pluralistic society. The logic that elevates religious faith to an ongoing political critique demands that Christian churches must also be subject to a self-critical reflective examination, since sacralized structures may become rigid and selfexalting, stifling the dynamism of the Church's life.

In addressing controversial political issues, the standards of judgement of the political community that the Church must also accept if it desires to participate in the political deliberations for the common good are often indeterminate. They cannot resolve social conflicts although they provide a basis for moral and political rationality. If such standards did not exist it would not be possible to articulate even elemental agreement or disagreement on any issue of common concern. The indeterminate character of the intersubjective criteria or grounds of judgement permits persons who submit contending interpretations to participate, through the open forum of public square, in the continuous reestablishment of the values that stand as their common property and their guarantee of real (political) community.³² For instance, if there is a disagreement concerning the ideal of freedom of religion, it will not be possible to resolve it if only one of the parties was committed to the idea. Based on the idea of religious freedom, governmental policies that require persons to pledge allegiance to religious doctrines that they do not share can be rejected. This may be the uncontested core of the principle, but in some circumstance there will be a disagreement by people who accept the principle of religious freedom as to whether a particular policy violates the principle. In such circumstances the ideal of religious freedom becomes the basis and focus of a dialogue that aims to diminish the conflict whenever such a disagreement may arise. Such a dialogue has the potential to enrich the political community with a shared interpretation of authoritative principles or even to contribute to the development of new premises that strengthen the bonds of the political community.

³¹ Charles Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society*, *Northwestern University Law Review* 81 (1987) 718–728.

³² Michael J. Perry, *Love and Power: The Role of Religion and Morality in American Politics*, New York 1991, p. 96.

The quality of dialogue depends not only on its clear goals and focus but also on whether the interlocutors are fully and accurately informed about the various arguments and facts relevant to the issue. They must have the cognitive competency before they begin their conversation or acquire it in the course of the dialogue. Respect and empathy for one's interlocutors is also presupposed. As David Tracy eloquently states: »Conversation is a game with some hard rules: say only what you mean; say it as accurately as you can; listen to and respect what the others say, however different or other; be willing to correct or defend your opinions if challenged by the conversation partner; be willing to argue if necessary, to confront if demanded, to endure necessary conflict, to change your mind if the evidence suggest it.«³³ This kind of conversation, if it is accepted as the mode of the church's presence and participation in the public conversation, means that the Church accepts the challenge to reformulate or even to further develop her moral beliefs.³⁴ It is the vocation of the Church not only to live the gospel but to proclaim it through communication to the world. In such dialogical context, it is possible to envision possibilities of development in Orthodox moral understanding by accepting diverse appropriations of the Christian faith to complex and ambivalent historical situations. This diversity may reflect different perceptions of the actual historical situation, or the fact that believers have chosen to relate a particular situation with different elements of Christian faith. This kind of pluralism is in my opinion unavoidable. There is, however, a danger that this particularity may become a source of confusion concerning the Church's moral vision. For Orthodox theology, the differentiation that freedom instills in every human person makes inevitable the possibility that people will choose to express their faith, and who they are in a differential way reflecting their unique expression of being, understanding, and willingness to act. The parameters of such moral pluralism, however, are set by the unity of faith that characterizes the ethos of the Orthodox Church. In the past, it was expected from the Church to express magisterially her views on social problems. Today, it seems to me that the Church must focus efforts towards the development of moral habits, finding ways to connect beliefs with actions, insisting on the universality of the Christian gospel that embraces and interprets the private as well as the public dimension of human life in history.

The Church cannot participate in public deliberations offering her particular story and moral outlook of life by using an esoteric and obscure language which is incomprehensible to others. In the public square of a pluralistic society the political discourse of the Church, as of every other community, must be attentive to the cardinal virtues of public intelligibility and accessibility. An argument is broadly intelligible and accessible in the public square when others who do not share the particularity of our language and

³³ *David Tracy, Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*, San Francisco 1987, p. 19.

³⁴ The mind of a Christian community on ethical issues can be shaped by an internal and external deliberation. An internal deliberation of its members who share the same faith but differ in their experience and perception of the modern world may provide an opportunity for the Church to differentiate ways that the principles of the same faith can be applied to concrete life situations. Such an exercise can be furthered expanded by the contact and conversation that the Church may have with others who address the same social issues but they do not share the same faith. They can suggest insights or aspects of the issue that we could not discern without their particular insight. Thus, conversation expands and transforms our understanding of social reality.

the communal imaginary representation of reality are able to discern its rationality and recognize its potential contribution on matters pertaining to the common life of a pluralistic society. Thus, the Church cannot contribute its unique insights in the public life of a liberal democratic state through a series of monologues in a language that only theologians can understand, premised on grounds, persons, or institutions that others in the public square do not share. On the contrary in the liberal democratic society, a high value is placed on a broad accessibility of public arguments. As Ronald F. Thiemann states:

»Arguments whose premises are open to public examination and scrutiny contribute to the democratic goal of peaceful and reasonable resolution of conflict and disagreement. Such arguments also contribute to the mutual understanding and respect so essential to the development of the pluralist citizen. Opponents who *understand* one another's reasons may not be *persuaded* by them, but they are more likely to remain in communal solidarity with one another than opponents who believe they are being deceived or manipulated. Consequently, public accessibility should be *encouraged* in all arguments that seek to contribute to the democratic process of building an overlapping consensus.«³⁵

Public intelligibility and accessibility are basic communicative principles that give to an argument its public nature. Those who desire to be involved in the public conversation of a liberal democratic state must develop the habit of trying to satisfy these important communicative principles along with their commitment to remain in dialogue with the others who comprise the pluralistic society even if disagreements over a particular public issue seems to be insurmountable. It is also important to recognize that political arguments gain credibility in the public life of a democratic society by the moral integrity of its communicators. Political arguments must be embedded in moral convictions and not in any kind of expediency. The language of arguments must be consistent, regardless of the context and the conversation partners. For instance we cannot speak about the violation of human rights by other communities, states, or religions and simultaneously use different language trying to justify possible violations of the same rights by our own religion, state, or community. Political arguments will gain the attention that they deserve when the speech of the communicator is consistent with his actions. It is also important for citizens to apply consistently their moral principles across a variety of public issues. You cannot, for instance, defend the sanctity of life in the crusade against abortion and simultaneously oppose policies that intend to ensure the children's proper feeding, nurturing, and education. Moral integrity demands that citizens seek consistency in their speech, action and moral principles.

The dialogic process of resolving social conflicts cannot take effect in any society if tolerance does not characterize its life. The life of a pluralistic society is always pervaded with disagreements over issues of public significance. These disagreements have the potential to be a source of violent conflict, if the citizens do not acquire the habits of the heart by which they opt to resolve their difference through non-coercive means and live peacefully together when these disagreements cannot be resolved. Tolerance is a virtue of the heart that every pluralistic society needs to cultivate in its citizenry. A dialogue of

³⁵ Ronald F. Thiemann, *Religion in Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy*, Washington, DC 1996, p. 135.

mutual transformation and enhancement cannot occur if any of the interlocutors is intolerant, he or she cannot tolerate difference or is not willing to recognize the possibility that the other in his or her difference has the potential to enhance his or her understanding of reality. Tolerance therefore is a necessary precondition of any authentic dialogue that requires people to grant to those with whom they disagree the same consideration and respect that they themselves would hope to receive.³⁶ This kind of toleration and mutual respect that I suggest must not be confused with relativism, the refusal to make judgements of right and wrong, true and false, good and evil about a belief or action. On the contrary, it entails the possibility of making such judgements (even publicly) while at the same time refraining from coercing others on the basis of such judgements and refraining from the use of the state apparatus for the realization of such a purpose. In other words it is possible to differentiate ethical objectivity from moral and ethical authoritarianism. Moral objectivity and intolerance are not necessarily connected, and neither is true that only moral skepticism is conducive to tolerance. The awareness that every human belief of action is situated in a coherent comprehensive system of beliefs which is historically situated is not an argument in defense of moral relativism. It is possible, while we recognize the historicity and communal context of particular moral beliefs, to judge such beliefs to be inadequate, just as others have the right to judge positively or negatively our own beliefs of actions. »The coherentist conception of rationality is in no way inconsistent with critical reflection on the beliefs of other persons, or communities. Just as our beliefs can be inadequate to the world, so too can the beliefs of others be inadequate to the world.«³⁷ The public nature of such judgement in liberal democratic society oblige people who denounce the possibility of using coercive methods for the imposition of their views upon the others to continue their common deliberation towards the formation of a possible convergence that transforms their previously held understandings.

In modern pluralistic society, it is not realistic to believe that it is always possible to resolve our differences through dialogue, and there would be situations that particular beliefs or actions will not and must not be tolerated. The basic faith convictions that define the identity of religious people may be in conflict with the emerging consensus of a liberal democratic state on a particular issue. The conscience of these people may demand dissent from such a consensus. This dissent may be manifested in a variety of forms, from a mere expression of dissatisfaction to an active civil disobedience. Dissent dictated by human conscience is a fundamental human right that a liberal democratic state grants to its citizen and protects it against possible infringements. It expresses the moral integrity that a pluralist society grants to its citizens. Those who exercise dissent in a democratic society have the responsibility to communicate the moral reasons behind their actions of dissent to the broader democratic public. »While they may vigorously oppose the practices, behavior and policies of those with whom they disagree, they should avoid behavior that denies the moral agency of their opponents. To dehumanize

³⁶ Ibid., p. 136.

³⁷ Michael J. Perry, *Love and Power: The Role of Religion and Morality in American Politics*, New York 1991, p. 64.

one's opponents in the process of dissent is to undermine the moral integrity of the very conscience that motivates these actions.³⁸ Furthermore, it is imperative for those who are engaged in politics of dissent to be actively involved in the political process. You cannot criticize something that a democratic society has adopted without your active participation and commitment to the political process. The »dialectic between commitment and critique is the identifying feature that distinguishes acts of dissent that display genuine moral integrity from those that represent more expediency or self-interest.«³⁹

Having affirmed the right of people to dissent against policies, practices and behavior that conflict with their conscience, we must reflect on the criteria that citizens or communities living in a pluralistic state will use to judge whether to accept such dissent or instead to coerce these people to modify their beliefs and behavior by forcing them to do something that they do not desire to do or to refrain from things that they want to do. Several considerations counsel against the pursuit of coercive political strategy. A principal consideration is the fact that human judgement is fallible. As history demonstrates, some moral judgements that we tried to enforce through coercion in the past eventually proved to be in error or unnecessarily restrictive of the possible appropriation of ideal beliefs to particular historical situations. A positive appreciation of the pluralism that characterizes the life of a modern society may be a strong warning against the proclivity to condemn choices, behaviors, and ways of life that are different from one's own. Opposition to the use of political coercion for the enforcement of our own beliefs and moral view is also dictated by the need to protect our own self-interest in case the balance of political power changes and others gain control of the state apparatus. It must never be forgotten by anyone that extreme coercion causes extreme suffering and resentment that tears apart the fabric of public civility, which is essential to civil politics. It engenders alienation from community, lack of respect for its structures of authority and suspicion for the intentions of its political leadership that ultimately seriously undermines whatever coercion tried to enact.

If radical intolerance in modern democratic societies is an implausible option, the orderly function of such a society demands the rejection of radical tolerance or the view that we should never coerce. Political coercion is defensible when it attempts to safeguard and enforce the minimum moral code necessary for the healthy functioning of the social order. In any pluralistic society, the boundaries and the content of that minimal moral code is and will always be a highly contested issue, subject to constant revisions through political deliberation. Religious communities who aspire to have a public presence must actively participate in such deliberation, defending those human values and agencies that sustain and enhance the potential for all people to actualize the fullness of their humanity.

³⁸ Ronald F. Thiemann, *Religion in Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy*, Washington, DC 1996, p. 139.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 140.