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# Culture Wars: Christian Convictions in a Pluralistic Public Square

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## Introduction

Observers of the social arena tell us that American citizens are living in a battle zone! Culture wars are raging around us, threatening an escalation of violence, and there appears to be no end in sight. According to James Davison Hunter, the social observer who popularized the phrase *culture wars*, these conflicts are more than interesting differences of opinion arising from our much celebrated social diversity. Culture wars are battles that arise from "fundamentally different conceptions of moral authority, over different ideas and beliefs about truth, the good, obligation to one another, the nature of community, and so on."<sup>1</sup> In other words, we are a people who live out of fundamentally different moral visions that lead to serious conflicts about how we should order our lives together. We do not share a common vision of what comprises a good society, so we cannot agree about what kinds of policies ought to order public life. And because we do not agree, we find ourselves in a struggle for power, vying for the ability to impose our vision of goodness before someone else has a chance to impose one. It's a high-stakes battle—with truth and righteousness on the endangered list.

But what do the culture wars have to do with our Christian convictions, and what kinds of problems do they pose for Christians who are committed to a particular story and what it teaches us about being faithful to Jesus?

A heightened sense of awareness of cultural-values conflicts prompts two kinds of reminders: (1) Christians are reminded that our commitments contribute to the tension and conflict raging around us—especially when we consider our convictions relevant to public life and the ordering of human society for human well-being. This might get us to wondering: are we to blame for the culture wars? (2) The very existence of competing values and visions and their manifestation in culture wars remind Christians to ask how their convictions can seek social recognition when society is characterized by a variety of disparate fundamental convictions. Must God always be a stranger in the secular city?<sup>2</sup> Can Christians act for the public good without compromising their commitment to the transcendent good?<sup>3</sup> My own version of the question is this: How is it possible for Christians to engage in dialogue about public

morality that respects a diversity of moral convictions in the public arena while also maintaining adherence to the particularities of Christian faith?

My thesis is that it is possible to engage in public dialogue while still respecting people with a diversity of moral convictions, and that it is not necessary for Christians to compromise or apologize for their central moral convictions when they engage in conversation in a pluralistic public square. Taking this set of reminders and questions as the impetus for these reflections, I begin with an identification of three ways of relating Christian witness to public life that seem in the end to function as barriers to the integrity of Christian witness.

## **Barriers to Christian Witness**

### *1. A private/public distinction and the resulting spirit of moral relativism*

One can read much of the history of the relationship between religion and society as an ongoing attempt to strike an awkward but seemingly necessary balance that strives to keep religion from dominating public life. Lesslie Newbigin has provided a widely read account of the split between public and private life: When religious truth-claims are subjected to the plausibility structures of the modern scientific community we discover, alas, that they cannot be verified! And furthermore, if these canons of science form the criteria of what will be accepted as public truth, then, alas, the so-called religious truths are excluded. They are excluded from public life because in public life we only count certain facts as truth. Because religious claims are not verifiable, they do not qualify as facts. They can be retained, however, as values—but since values cannot be verified, so the thinking goes, they must remain within the constraints of the private realm. Here each person is free to follow her own preferences; free to conduct his life as he sees fit.<sup>4</sup>

The split has emerged as a response to religious endeavors that were seen as unfair infringements on public space. People do bad things in the name of religion, spurred on by religious zeal. So, what if we could contain these religious fanatics? Let them fight in their own houses, but do not let them bring their convictions into the streets. The split between our public and private lives was intended in part to quell the battle, and to some extent it has worked. In the midst of modern culture wars the separation of public and private is seen by many as the best strategy for peace. For example, "If you don't want to watch sex or violence on TV, turn it off, don't rent it, but don't impose your morality on the rest of us." Such familiar language makes the important transition that concerns me most. It is the transition *from* a separation between our private beliefs and our public life *to* a spirit of moral relativism. If what I believe is true for me, and what others believe is true for them (remember, that is the status of truth in the private realm), then there is (a) a moral corollary: I should

never dream of imposing my truth on anyone else. (b) There is also a policy corollary: I should never dream of trying to *legislate* my truth for anyone else. (c) And there is a corollary for public citizenship: there is no good reason to engage in public dialogue about matters of private morality. If my convictions cannot be proven by any publicly demonstrable means, then who am I to say that your version is any worse than mine? That is the refrain to the hymn—or should I say the praise song—sung in the spirit of relativism.

While the split between private and public is supposed to operate as a kind of imposed neutrality about values it in fact functions as an imposed devaluation of religious convictions, and consequently, as a functional ban on mixing religious convictions and public life. Permission to be Christian in private does not count for much when our beliefs are very clearly about a unified whole—creation, humankind, God's intentions for God's world. For Christians the split is an unhappy one.

## 2. *The separation of church and state as a functional marginalization of religious moral discourse in the public arena*

In his book *The Culture of Disbelief*, constitutional law scholar Stephen L. Carter argues that in their original intent, framers of the Constitution were looking for a way to forbid the imposition of religious belief by the state. They were not trying to disallow religious perspectives and religiously based moral considerations from playing a role in public life. The disestablishment clause intended to say that it is not the prerogative of government to establish any particular religion. To say this was particularly important at a time when Christians dominated the scene, because it provided a guarantee to religious minorities that the government would treat all religions as if they were equal.<sup>5</sup>

Along the way (and I must here allude to historical developments I do not detail) the scene has changed. Despite answers to surveys that portray the United States as a very religious nation, there is reason to suspect that secularism might now be the dominant feature of our social landscape. And with the rise of secularism, Carter suggests, we have seen a shift in the application of the doctrine of separation. Rather than protecting religion from government, the courts and the law have seen the requirement of a separation between church and state as a *guarantor of public secularism*.

But why would anyone want to guarantee public secularism? It has been said that there is no evil that has not been done in the name of religion—and that that evil has been more easily accomplished when there has been an alliance between religion and government.<sup>6</sup> If we accept these two claims as fact we can begin to understand the motivating force behind modern versions of the political doctrine we call "The Separation of Church and State." People who take religion too seriously are frightening! Moreover, our so-called Christian nation has been guilty of some regrettable moral atrocities. Not only does

religion fail to protect us from abusing one another, it may even contribute a rationale for such abuse. So it makes at least some sense that today, society does not feel a need to protect religion from government; it feels a need to protect itself from religion!

The new version of the separation of church and state goes hand in hand with what many fondly call "tolerance," perhaps the central and most universal virtue of this decade. This version of tolerance is primarily addressed to people with strong religious convictions and denies them any right to suggest that what someone else thinks is right is really wrong. A person with one set of convictions should not attempt to keep other people from acting on other sets of convictions—or from no convictions at all. The way to do this is to keep your religious convictions separate from the affairs of the state. If the separation of church and state is political doctrine, toleration is the corresponding virtue of political life.

### 3. *Proposals for conducting public debate on the basis of moral common ground*

If we do not like the protective fences that divide private from public or that separate church and state, is there a solution to conflicts between religion and the wider society that is based on unity rather than division? It might appear that proposals for a public ethic, an ethic that finds us meeting on common ground around a shared consensus would qualify. A consensus approach lets Christians have their convictions as long as we bracket our distinctive beliefs when others in the public square do not share them.

In their critique of John Rawls' attempt to describe an *overlapping consensus* "between persons and communities with distinctive perspectives and irreconcilable differences,"<sup>7</sup> Richard Mouw and Sander Griffioen provide a salient summary of one version of what it might mean to meet on common ground.<sup>8</sup> When persons or communities with distinctive commitments come together to determine what kinds of policies will govern their lives together—something we must do to avoid social anarchy—how can we talk to each other? If our accounts of the good are really incompatible, what will help us mediate between competing versions? How do we avoid letting our very particular and perhaps even peculiar commitments create a linguistic nightmare—where people talk past each other in languages that only the speakers can understand?

John Rawls proposes that such a nightmare can be avoided if we meet at the place where we can discover an overlapping consensus. Such a consensus is possible, according to Rawls, because it is possible to separate the good from the right. More precisely, it is possible to agree on principles of justice that are separable from any particular views of what is good. Now it is not quite fair to Rawls to suggest that he is unconcerned with the good. What he proposes is that we only need a *thin account of the good* (that is, an account restricted to the

bare essentials), in order to ground a social understanding of justice. This way we can agree upon a just way of ordering society that will still be agreeable to people who have vastly different understandings of what makes for human flourishing. We know from experience that we can still pursue our own version of human flourishing within a polity that respects our freedom to do so—even if our neighbor is pursuing a very different version of the good life. As Thomas Jefferson said, "it does me no injury for my neighbor to see that there are twenty Gods or no God."<sup>9</sup> As long as we reach the same conclusions, it is asked, why does it matter if we agree on the premises? If the practical solutions make us all happy, why do we even have to talk about the reasons we each support them?

Critics of common ground solutions to pluralism have identified two key problems with this approach. First, they contain a subtle self-deception. The contention that social order ought to be grounded in procedural rules that do not embody anyone's thick (that is, fully spelled out) account of the good *is itself* an account of the good that is far from neutral. The idea that justice looks like decisions made behind a veil of ignorance, for example, is based on the liberal dogma that things like personal identity, God's preferential option for the poor, or responsibility to particular communities and commitments are not legitimate reasons for the choices we make. Such common ground solutions do not really ask us to meet on common ground; they ask us to meet on someone else's ground.

Second, the kind of common ground solution Rawls and others advocate assumes that public civility can only be guaranteed if we leave our thick commitments behind. It is assumed that our deeply treasured commitments are threats to peace, as if only people who do not really care much about anything can treat each other with kindness and respect. In contrast to this, Glenn Tinder has suggested that civility can be based on more than rational self-interest. For Christians, it can arise from their allegiance to things they believe.<sup>10</sup> Consistent with Tinder's claim, I shall argue that civil public discourse does not require that Christians abandon their convictions to meet on common ground, where a thin consensus is palatable and digestible by everyone. Rather, it requires that Christians embody, in the form of virtue, a set of convictions that arise directly from their faith.

In response to the three barriers above, I offer some constructive responses that I hope are sensitive to both the integrity of Christian faith and to the reality of pluralism. But before I do so it is important to lay a little groundwork. The groundwork includes making some brief comments about what I mean by the public square, and what I intend by calling it pluralistic. Let's begin with the adjective.

## Pluralism

When I characterize the public square as *pluralistic* I intend to describe a diversity that goes beyond interesting differences of opinion. Our nation is a collection of people whose basic life orientations and patterns of behavior are fundamentally different. Described as *directional pluralism*,<sup>11</sup> these differences describe the fact that we enact conflicting choices about what is worth doing, worshiping, and aiming for, and concurrently, what kind of person it is important to be.

At the same time our differences are influenced by another kind of pluralism. Race, geography, class, and gender are forms of diversity that shape, for example, our religious sensibilities, even if we share a religious tradition. Thus it is overly simplistic to assume that pluralism means only that we look like a conglomeration of the world's religions. Living with a plurality of religions certainly complicates any social landscape, but other forms of so-called *contextual pluralism* allow us to slice the pie differently. Alliances may easily cross religious affiliations when race or gender highlights common interests. Such interests may divide religious groups even to the point of violence, as the American Civil War gives evidence. The surprising coalition of people who support or oppose abortion is a striking modern example.

As an adjective used to characterize the public square, "pluralistic" describes an irreducible and complex set of directional and contextual differences that yield not only unique but potentially competing convictions and ways of living in the world. The kinds of diversities represented in pluralism are much celebrated, especially by the media and by our contemporary emphasis on multicultural education. The positive dimension of pluralism is the opportunity it affords us to learn to appreciate, understand, and respect fully the variety of persons who inhabit our social space.

The social impact of pluralism also poses a challenge. With our increasing awareness of plurality there is often an increasing awareness of societal fragmentation. An increased consciousness of our diversity makes us wonder about the foundations of our unity, and perhaps even causes us to mourn the loss of the social cohesion we once seemed to have. And if there is no longer a center, a foundation which adjudicates our differences, we may even mourn the loss of the certainty we once had when moral authority was less contested. The high degree of anxiety pluralism may engender in these ways may have a profound impact on the responses we choose as appropriate. For example, the triumphalist yearning to reestablish something like Christendom is probably a symptom of our uneasiness.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the fact that Christendom might provide the comfort of social cohesion and unquestioned certainties, Christian witness does not depend on its existence. It depends, instead, on there being such a thing as a story of faith that can be told and a people of God who live it out. Thus our challenge, living

as we do "after Christendom" is how to engage in the telling of that story in the public square where a Christian consensus can no longer be presumed. How can we tell that story without allowing our anxieties about the demise of Christendom to demand something like its reestablishment? This is the challenge of a pluralistic public square.

### The Public Square

The nature of the space in which our story is told provides some clue to what moral obligations and constraints ought to come to bear upon its telling.

*What kind of space is the public square?*

(1) The public square is the social space in which we purposely make room for a wide range of proposed ideas, projects, and ways of ordering life together. In this sense it is *contested territory*, not like a piece of land two opponents fight over, so that one might gain possession of it, but like a sports complex. In this complex are many playing fields: a basketball court, a football stadium, a race track—and as many more as you care to imagine. Many different games are being played, and within them, different teams are competing. The sports complex exists to accommodate these contests, and to maximize their number. Losers are not ostracized, but are invited back to play again.

Alasdair MacIntyre has characterized traditions as ongoing conversations and arguments. Conversation and argumentation may be better images to describe the public square, but the image of the complex that intentionally makes space for them is still to the point. Because we value the freedom of traditions to have their conversations, to play their games, or even to seek victory, we are careful to provide space in which we all have these opportunities. Christianity is one of the traditions being played out on this field.

(2) The public square is also the space in which we *cooperate for the sake of our common good*. Oliver O'Donovan puts it this way: "it is the realm in which we pursue other than our individual projects and thoughts, and have things in common."<sup>13</sup> If we take the sports complex image to its extreme, we might try to create a field on which each one of us can play our own game—but in total isolation. Then the public square quickly becomes a checkerboard with an infinite number of private spaces which we are not supposed to cross, lest we step in someone else's toes. In their critique of extremes of individualism, Robert Bellah and his associates propose that the public square is the place where politics is conducted. Politics is the forum in which public discussion of a wide variety of interests brings forth specific forms of accommodation, of community, and social organization. The goal is to find a way to allow participants in the public square to follow their visions while retaining the quality of community through which both one another's lives and opportunities to flourish are enhanced. The public square thus combines competition and

cooperation, and neither must cancel out the other. To combine these requires skill, since the public square displays real and incommensurable differences. We cooperate despite such differences because we have a deep respect for those creatures of God who neither know nor acknowledge God in the same ways we do.

### Modes of Christian Engagement in the Public Square

With this understanding of the pluralistic public square, I can now identify three constructive suggestions for Christian engagement in it. This form of engagement requires what Richard Mouw has called "uncommon decency,"<sup>14</sup> but does not require Christians to keep their commitments private, separate, or watered down.

#### *From Private Faith to Public Discourse*

I have observed that the split between private and public leaves no room for Christian convictions in the public square. But in contrast, I have described the pluralistic public square as a place that should welcome a plurality of voices, a plurality that gives the public square a rich, rather than an empty plurality.

Christian voices make their public appearance when they contribute their convictions to *public discussion*—or if you prefer, to civil discourse or democratic deliberation. The public square is a conversation whose participants bring a variety of traditions. It is the space where these traditions encounter each other in their full integrity. On this reading, public is not the *opposite* of private; rather, public space is the meeting place for particular traditions. Here the conversation is about different and sometimes competing conceptions of what makes human life complete, and how society ought to be organized to accomplish this.

Having a tradition of public dialogue, however, does not necessarily make life easy. Robin Lovin suggests that the simple freedom to form one's religious identity and community is not always enough. Persons with religious convictions sometimes have a strong sense that they have a claim against society, that society ought to recognize this claim, and incorporate its meanings into social structures.<sup>15</sup> This is no simple conversation, like a few sports fanatics haggling over whether basketball is more exciting than golf, when each has ample opportunity to play or watch either one. It is more like someone claiming that everyone ought to golf, and that free lessons and golf courses should be available to all.

People with convictions are not always satisfied with dialogue. "Time for talk has come to an end" is a battle cry used to justify abandoning the discussion in favor of action. It is at this point that I believe *patience* is a virtue that sustains valuable public discussion. Patience demonstrates that we value three things.

(1) First, the existence of a space for traditions to come into dialogue fully clothed. The naked public square is the public square in which we take off our distinctive dress and meet on common ground. This is not what many people want of course—it would be preferable for everyone to put on *our* clothes, adopt our ways as public ways. And we are tempted to try to make people do this—to turn conversation into conformity. Patience allows competing ideas to compete.

(2) Second, the maintenance of our convictions. If our differences seem insurmountable we are tempted to abandon them in favor of an easier route to consensus. Privatization, relativism, and thin consensus may accomplish this, but at the cost of the public abandonment of our convictions.

(3) Third, the respect of other people's commitments even when they are not our own.

Patience has a lovely sound—but even as a virtue, it also has its limits! What if I am compelled to violate patience in the name of what is just and right? Martin Luther King argued that patience (in the form of a policy of gradualism) was a way of avoiding God's will. But he also argued that those who would not be patient must be willing to bear the cross rather than inflict it. This lesson teaches us that although the public square may be an important site for the gathering of our varied traditions, it is not an absolute constraint. As Christians, if patient pursuit of public dialogue appears finally to be a violation of our convictions, our only constraint is to shape our protest according to the powerful form of love demonstrated by Jesus.

### *From Imposition to Witness: Tolerance as Convicted Humility*

It is easy to tolerate just about everything if you really do not care much about anything. But if you care very deeply about such things as the sanctity of human life, the stewardship of the natural world, the health and well-being of people who are dispossessed and downtrodden, then you will feel there are clearly some things that ought never be tolerated.

Tolerance is supposed to solve the dilemma of Christian moral witness and be the key to civil peace. Rousseau, in advocating the give and take of polite dialogue among mutually respectful citizens, assumed that in order to tolerate our differences, religious differences must be left out of public debate. Over against that, I propose a version of tolerance that is grounded in Christianity rather than in relativism or indifference. Christians can tolerate a diversity of opinion in public debate because they are people who have learned to live humbly. Humility is the virtue that gives tolerance its Christian peculiarity and enables us to be simultaneously both deeply convicted and tolerant. It does not require us to sacrifice truth in order to tolerate persons whose perception of truth differs from our own.

Christian humility grows out of our acknowledgment that God's truth is always more than we can grasp. Therefore, Christians can express openness to

what seem like other versions of truth because they may be other dimensions of God's truth. Christian humility also grows out of a realistic sense about ourselves, and the constant reminder that our tendency to stray from God's way may often be reflected even in those things about which we feel most certain. We can never treat others as if they are absolutely wrong unless we know we are always absolutely right. No one schooled in the tradition of the Christian story of sin and reconciliation should ever have that sense of certainty.

When offered in humility, Christian convictions can take the form of *witness* rather than *imposition*. People who voice their convictions in the public square are often accused of imposing their morality on everyone else. Christians may see legislation as the logical conclusion of public dialogue, while non-Christians may fear that passionately articulated reasons to choose one moral path over another is simply an attempt to impose this path on others. Christians, however, should reject the idea that their only alternatives are "impose your views" or "keep them to yourself."

Christian witness does require the articulation of convictions and the implications of those convictions for public life—and Christians need to learn to do this in ways that are clear and compelling. But a compelling *witness* is not the same thing as compelling people to accept our witness. In fact, the former is apt to win commitment, while the latter engenders resistance.

My sense is that a pluralistic public square will allow Christians to speak, and perhaps even listen, when such speech is offered in the spirit of convicted humility. The latter allows us to have and to voice our convictions, but it reminds us to be civil when we do, because we see something of ourselves in those who appear wrong. The knowledge that God respects us when we are wrong teaches us to respect others whom we believe to be mistaken.

Still to be addressed is the problem that humility is often seen as a weak and wimpish virtue. The character Tevya, the father of three daughters in *Fiddler on the Roof*, enacts the kind of humility I am taking about through conversations he has with himself. As he thinks through whether or not to allow his daughters to violate the matchmaker-tradition of their Jewish faith he says, "On the one hand . . . on the other hand . . ." But as Richard Mouw has asked, what do we do when there is no "on the other hand?"<sup>16</sup> In this article my only response can be that a compelling witness with a humble spirit is not necessarily the whole story. But it is a part of the story we should not skip over as we rush to save the world with our own version of righteous living! Perhaps even in a stormy debate, if it is carried out in humility, we will learn how to love our conversation partner and opponent in those cases where we are compelled to violate tolerance in the name of a higher truth.

*From Common Ground to Grounded Compromise: How to be hospitable in the public square when you think you are right and others think you are wrong.*

Christians who speak in the public square are often expected to meet on common ground, which requires a form of bilingualism. While we may speak the language of faith in private, in the public square we need to speak a language that all can understand—a language that is devoid of the specific commitments arising from our faith. Common ground, it is assumed, is the only ground on which we can reach compromise, and that will allow for civil conversation between people who disagree.

It is possible for Christians to cooperate in efforts to further human welfare, even when those efforts are not fully consistent with Christian convictions. But compromise, in order to have integrity, must be grounded compromise. In the words of Oliver O'Donovan, it "must be compromise *in relation to truth*."<sup>17</sup> O'Donovan explains that compromise, by its very nature, is a partial embodiment of truth. In order to make clear how a compromise is a compromise, it is necessary for Christians to plead their cause in a way that makes it very clear what Christians believe they are giving up!<sup>18</sup> What good things are we sacrificing that makes this only a compromise? In order to say this, one cannot leave faith behind. Rather, as Stanley Hauerwas says, the church must always go out into public life *as the church of Jesus Christ*.

Richard Sennett describes civility as "treating others as though they were strangers and forging a social bond upon that social distance."<sup>19</sup> Social distance seems like a weak link; it says more about why we need a link than it does about where to find one. If the public square is a place where a plurality of communities are allowed to meet to hammer out policies that further their common life while permitting their distinctive lives, then the public square must be a place where *hospitality* is practiced. Hospitality does not come about by leaving the Christian story behind. It is a virtue Christians can bring to the public square because they come as Christians.

To be hospitable in the public square means to acknowledge that, while others are strangers, their voices are welcomed. Hospitality allows you to continue to be a stranger to me—it does not demand that you meet me at a common place. You may continue to be who you are, even if that is hard for me to understand. As my guest (or, as a guest in the public space we share) hospitality does not insist that you make sense to me; it insists that I make space for you. In that space I must work to come to know you in the fullness of your own tradition and identity. Otherwise I cannot claim to have known you at all.

Hospitality is not a description of the public square, as any informed inhabitant knows. But it ought to be a virtue Christians embody in the public square. Christians know what hospitality means because we have been welcomed as strangers. Our story is one of a people who are accepted as we are because God is gracious—and God's graciousness is expected to be reflected in

gracious hospitality to others. God treats us more generously than we deserve and provides us with space to question, rebel, and repent. Hospitality is our way of being God-like; our way of being as generous to others as God has been to us. It is the way we make room for others, not simply because we have to put up with them, but because we are willing to treat others as guests who share the same public space.

### Conclusion

I have attempted to show how some proposed ways to minimize the impact of Christian convictions on the culture wars are indeed ways of minimizing Christianity's public witness. In response, I have suggested that there are some distinct Christian virtues that ought to characterize the way we engage in public dialogue. These do not make Christian public witness easy. But they do make it Christian in this sense: not only the message, but also the message bearer demonstrates what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. When the message bearer is patient, humble, and hospitable, there is always hope that others will make room for the proclamation of that message, and will even be open to hearing it.

### ENDNOTES

1. James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (BasicBooks, 1991), 49.
2. Harvey Cox, "Citizens and Believers: Always Strangers?" in *In Gods We Trust: New Patterns of Religious Pluralism in America*, 2nd ed., ed. Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 449-450. Cox notices that the tension between secular and spiritual "runs straight through the soul of [each] individual," and therefore sharpens the question even further to ask: "What is the appropriate role of those persons who are at once both believers and citizens?"
3. Oliver O'Donovan, *Principles in the Public Realm: The Dilemma of Christian Moral Witness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 4.
4. Lesslie Newbigin describes the emergence of a separation between private and public truth from this perspective in *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986).

5. In addition, allowing religion to be free from state interference is a way of guaranteeing the kind of independence it needs to function as a voice of moral critique.
6. Stephen L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (BasicBooks, 1993), 83, 85.
7. Paul Lewis, "Toward a Nonfoundationalist Christian Social Ethic" (unpublished manuscript), 15.
8. The following summary draws largely on an account of Rawls in Richard J. Mouw and Sander Griffioen, *Pluralisms and Horizons: An Essay in Christian Public Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993).
9. Tristram Englehardt argues, in a similar fashion, that medical ethics requires a similarly "thin" consensus in order to respect the diverse moral commitments of both patients and health providers. If we can all agree that ethics is a means for resolving controversy about proper conduct without the use of force, then we will have to accept peaceable negotiation as the only appropriate means for resolving moral differences. Englehardt believes that this procedural agreement gets us a long way—and it doesn't require anyone who will live by it to endorse any particular view of the good. All it requires is that, while you have your own version of the good and an opportunity to pursue it, you also recognize the freedom of others to have their own version of the good and an opportunity to pursue it.
10. Glenn Tinder. *The Political Meaning of Christianity: The Prophetic Stance*. (San Francisco: Harper, 1989), 17.
11. See Richard J. Mouw and Sander Griffioen, *Pluralisms and Horizons: An Essay in Christian Public Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993).
12. See for example his book *After Christendom* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991). When writing about matters of church and state, Stanley Hauerwas seeks to find an approach to Christian witness that does not depend on the presupposition(s) of Christendom. Christendom in this context means a cooperative relationship between church, state, and culture that is generally uncontested, and in which it is assumed that the social order and the values underlying it are at the same time consistent with Christianity. One problem is that Christendom is no longer an accurate description of our situation, and

an ethics that presumes Christendom is based on an illusion. A second problem that is a pervasive strain in Hauerwas' work is that when the project of Christendom sets the agenda for the church, its own distinctive witness is compromised. Accommodations to the project of Christendom jeopardize a style of discipleship that reflects the story of Jesus.

13. *Principles in the Public Realm*, 3.
14. *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992).
15. See "Religion and American Public Life: Three Relationships," in *Religion and American Public Life: Interpretations and Explorations*, ed. Robin Lovin (New York: Paulist Press, 1986). I am obviously able to conceive of the public square in this way because we are heirs of a political tradition in which public dialogue has been a practice we can identify. This obviously begs some important questions, and may presume that there is (or if not, there ought to be) an identifiable practice called "public dialogue." Christians who live with the luxury of such a tradition can talk with some ease about joining the discussion without sacrificing their fundamental convictions.
16. *Uncommon Decency*, 123.
17. *Principles in the Public Realm*, 13.
18. *Ibid.*, 13-14.
19. Cited in Mouw and Griffioen, *Pluralisms and Horizons*, 69.