Democracy and Tradition

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Chapter 4

SECULARIZATION AND RESENTMENT

Resentment is easy. Theology is hard.
—John Bowlin

IN THE 1960s Christian theologians made news by extolling the virtues of the secular city. Nowadays, however, they often denounce secularized political culture in vehement terms. John Milbank and his fellow proponents of "radical orthodoxy" hold that "for several centuries now, secularism has been defining and constructing the world. It is a world in which the theological is either discredited or turned into a harmless leisure-time activity of private commitment." The only appropriate response, they conclude, is a theology that "refuses the secular." This means rejecting both "secular reason" and the "secular state" as spheres of discourse not essentially "framed by a theological perspective."[1] While Richard John Neuhaus is more favorably disposed toward modern democracy than Milbank is, he nonetheless bemoans "a religious evacuation of the public square." He declares that "secular humanism has had a pervasive and debilitating effect upon our public life," and warns that "the notion of the secular state can become the prelude to totalitarianism."[2]

Theological resentment of the secular deserves attention from theorists of democracy not only because it gives voice to an animus felt by many religiously oriented citizens, but also because it reinforces that animus and encourages its spread. Radical orthodoxy is currently the hottest topic being debated in seminaries and divinity schools in the United States, and thus a significant part of the subculture within which future pastors are being educated. Neuhaus's journal, *First Things*, takes the case against secularized political culture to an audience that reaches well beyond the seminaries.

In chapter 3, I discussed two forms of liberalism that unwittingly fuel the resentment of the secular expressed in the writings of Milbank and Neuhaus. Rawls's political liberalism holds that religious premises may be used in democratic deliberation and debate of essential matters, but only if they are eventually supplemented by reasoning that appeals to a freestanding conception of justice. Rorty's pragmatic liberalism holds that introducing religious premises into political argument is more or less guaranteed to break off the discussion and therefore best avoided. Milbank and Neuhaus would reject both of these positions as secularist. That liberalism is secularist in this sense may be a reason for religious believers to reject it

as an ideology or political theory. But is this also a reason for them to reject the political culture of which liberals propose to give a theoretical account? Only, I suggested, if that theoretical account is *descriptively* adequate, which it is not.

In this chapter, I want to focus on ambiguities surrounding the notion of secularization and their implications for theological and religious expression. There is a sense in which the ethical discourse of most modern democracies is *secularized*, for such discourse is not "framed by a theological perspective" taken for granted by all those who participate in it. But secularization in this sense is not a reflection of commitment to *secularism*. It entails neither the denial of theological assumptions nor the expulsion of theological expression from the public sphere. And it leaves believers free to view both the state and democratic political culture as domains standing ultimately under divine judgment and authority. That believers view the political sphere in this way does not entail that others will, of course. But this just means that the age of theocracy is over, not that the anti-Christ has taken control of the political sphere.

How Ethical Discourse Became Secularized and What This Means

Many religious traditions inculcate habitual deference to the expert interpreters of scriptural texts on questions of moral, religious, and political practice. The experts' claim to authority on these questions consists in their ability to interpret and apply the relevant texts. In Judaism, for example, each rabbi establishes his authority to interpret the texts by learning Hebrew, studying Scripture and the commentaries for many years, and debating the fine points of interpretation with others who have spent a significant portion of their lives engaging in these activities. In Catholicism and Islam, priests and imams enjoy a comparable sort of authority. But all of this assumes, first, that particular texts, if properly interpreted, include authoritative answers to the sorts of questions being addressed. Second, it assumes that some interpreters are in a better position to interpret those texts than others are.

Now consider the early-modern debates among Christians of various types over moral and political questions. Here we have numerous groups, all of which were committed to treating the Christian Bible as an authoritative source of normative insight into how such questions should be answered. Yet they did not differ only on what this text says and implies. They also differed on who is entitled to interpret it, on whether it is the sole authoritative source of normative insight into such matters, and on who is entitled to resolve apparent conflicts between it and other putative sources of normative insight. Because they differed on all of these points, they

eventually found themselves avoiding appeals to biblical authority when trying to resolve their ethical and political differences. The reason was simple; the appeals did not work. So the differing parties increasingly tried to resolve their differences on other grounds. In this respect, their ethical discourse with one another became secularized.

A case study can illustrate how and why this sort of secularization took place. In his study of appeals to the Bible in seventeenth-century English politics, the distinguished historian Christopher Hill asserts that the Bible passed from a position of considerable authority in political debate, cited by virtually all parties, to a position of diminished authority and centrality as the century unfolded. By the end of the 1650s, the Bible had essentially been "dethroned."[3] Among many other signs of this decline, Hill reports that in 1657 members of Parliament laughed at one M.P. for repeatedly citing Scripture in support of his conclusions. Why did the other members find him ridiculous? It could have been for any number of reasons. It is unlikely, however, that each jeering M.P. had ceased to ascribe infallible authority to the Bible in forming his own commitments and no longer respected anyone who did. As Hill puts it, "Twenty years of frenzied discussion had shown that text-swapping and text-distortion solved nothing: agreement was not to be reached even among the godly on what exactly the Bible said and meant" (EB, 421). The change seems to have had less to do with each individual's process of commitment-formation than with what they were able to take for granted in their public discourse with one another.

Imagine that you ascribe infallible authority to the Bible and consult it regularly in forming your own opinions. Suppose further that all members of your society are similarly committed to conforming their opinions to what the Bible says, and you know this. It does not follow that it will make sense for you to appeal to the Bible in settling disputed questions in a public forum. Why? Perhaps you know that members of your society do not have compatible views of what the Bible says on political and economic matters. You notice that when members of the group use reasoned discussion to forge consensus on questions of biblical interpretation, they almost always fail. You therefore conclude that it will be unwise for any of you to appeal to the Bible as an infallible authority even though each of you believes that it is. Any such appeal, in this sort of setting, is going to be useless, and anyone who makes it is going to appear foolish.

So we have two things that might be meant by the Bible's authority. The first is a matter of how individuals form their commitments. If a given person is prepared to defer to whatever the Bible says on a moral or political question, call this the Bible's authority over an individual's conscience. The second is a matter of what individuals can reasonably appeal to as an arbiter in disputes with other groups. Call this "public discursive author-

ity." Now that I have drawn this distinction, I want to recommend putting more weight on the second than on the first in telling the story of secularization in general and the story of the Bible in seventeenth-century English politics in particular. Only a few of Hill's examples give clear evidence that the Bible's authority over individual consciences declined. They do not settle the question of how widespread that decline was. But even if the decline of the Bible's authority over conscience was limited to relatively small segments of the English population, as I suspect it was, it still seems plausible to conclude that the Bible's public discursive authority had virtually disappeared by the end of the century.

On the assumption that only a few intellectuals and radical groups abandoned the Bible as an infallible authority in forming their individual consciences on various matters, why did the Bible's role as public discursive authority decline so rapidly and thoroughly? The answer to this question should already be clear. It is that the members of English society were unable to find means of reaching rational agreement on questions of biblical interpretation, and in the absence of such means, the Bible could not play the public role of arbiter it had played earlier in the century. But this answer begets another question. Why was it so hard for these particular people to reach rational agreement on the interpretation of this document?

Hill's examples give hints about how to answer this question. English Protestants ascribed authority to the Bible because they took it to be a book authored by God. It was the word of God, and it could be trusted as an infallible authority because God is both morally perfect and omniscient. Many of them had downgraded church tradition to the status of fallible authority or nonauthority on the ground that it had obviously been corrupted, so they were unable to settle issues of interpretation by appeal to tradition. This left them appealing for interpretive guidance to what Milton called the "supreme authority . . . of the Spirit, which is internal and the individual possession of each man." But while this sort of appeal might leave each individual convinced that he or she had been guided by the Spirit toward infallibly correct conclusions, it did not provide a public means for resolving differences between one person's conclusions and another's. Moreover, the explanation one would be inclined to give for such differences was that anyone disagreeing with one's own conclusions must have been guided by some force other than the Spirit, most likely a demonic one. That sort of explanation of disagreement tends to undermine the rationale for trying to resolve differences by exchanging reasons. It encourages the thought that one's opponents need to be fought rather than offered reasons.

Another consequence of viewing the Bible as an infallibly authoritative book authored by God is a requirement of consistency. Internally, each biblical passage will need to be read in such a way that its sense can be

reconciled logically with the sense of all other biblical passages. Apparent inconsistency within the book as a whole—for example, with respect to the birthplace of Jesus—will need to be explained away. Yet there can also be a requirement of external consistency. Each biblical passage will need to be read in such a way that its sense can be reconciled with whatever one is firmly committed to regarding as true. The idea that what the Bible says *must* be true exerts pressure on the interpreter to read the Bible in such a way that it does not conflict with his or her strongest commitments. The strongest proponents of biblical authority therefore often have the strongest reasons, from their own point of view, for being what we might call "strong" readers of the biblical text. They proclaim the primacy of the Bible at one moment and then a moment later push the text hard in the direction of truths with which it must in the end prove compatible, given that God is no author of falsehoods.

The need for external consistency acquired new force in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as the idea of the "Book of Nature" became central to the projects of astrologers, alchemists, and champions of the new science. For here was another book authored by God, and therefore equally certain to disclose only truths to those who interpret it correctly. It followed that a correct interpretation had to make everything in both books add up to a set of consistent propositions, no matter how much the interpreter was required to go beyond or against the so-called plain sense of Scripture. Even those not captivated by the idea of a second divinely authored book often found themselves giving readings apparently at odds with the plain sense of the biblical text in trying to address the problems of internal and external consistency. They then either had to abandon the Protestant commitment to the priority of the Bible's literal sense or they had to engage in special pleading while stretching the plain sense beyond recognition.

Different individuals responded to this set of problems in different ways, as Hill's examples make clear. A few, like Samuel Fisher, abandoned the idea of the Bible as a divinely authored book and formed their own opinions without relying on it essentially. Others, like the radical woman known as M. M., continued to rely on it while drawing a distinction between the essential truths revealed in the text and the merely human vessels into which the divine wine had been poured. The truths were divinely authored, then, but not the book itself, at least as we have it.[4] Both of these moves were meant to dissolve, rather than solve, the problems caused by the quest for internal and external consistency. And both moves relieved the pressure to supply typological and allegorical readings that can be made congruent with the plain sense.

It is not at all clear that most people made these moves. Many people just went on trying to solve the problems that Fisher and M. M. tried to

dissolve. The important point, however, is that the plain sense was no longer the sort of thing *anybody*, even a die-hard, Bible-thumping literalist, could appeal to in settling a public dispute over what the Bible meant. The reason for this was not that most people agreed with M. M. or Fisher. Two other reasons appear to have been involved. The first was that the appeal to inner persuasion was not publicly persuasive. The second was that the plain sense had already been stretched beyond the breaking point by the quest for consistency. Readings supposedly grounded in the plain sense of Scripture had multiplied so rapidly that the plain sense could no longer function as a publicly effective constraint on interpretation. And once this had happened, the Bible's public role as arbiter was gone.

My account of secularization concerns what can be taken for granted when exchanging reasons in public settings. A setting is public in the relevant sense if it involves no expectation of confidentiality and if it is one in which citizens address one another qua citizens. What makes a form of discourse secularized, according to my account, is not the tendency of the people participating in it to relinquish their religious beliefs or to refrain from employing them as reasons. The mark of secularization, as I use the term, is rather the fact that participants in a given discursive practice are not in a position to take for granted that their interlocutors are making the same religious assumptions they are. This is the sense in which public discourse in modern democracies tends to be secularized.

Notice that secularization in this sense does not reflect a commitment to secularism, secular liberalism, or any other ideology. It is true that modern democratic discourse tends not to be "framed by a theological perspective," but this does not prevent any of the individuals participating in it from adopting a theological perspective. They are free to frame their contributions to it in whatever vocabulary they please. What they cannot reasonably do is expect a single theological perspective to be shared by all of their interlocutors. But this is not because the discourse in which they and their interlocutors are engaged commits everyone involved to relying solely on "secular reason" when thinking and conversing on political questions. Nor does it involve endorsement of the "secular state" as a realm entirely insulated from the effects of religious convictions, let alone removed from God's ultimate authority. It is simply a matter of what can be presupposed in a discussion with other people who happen to have different theological commitments and interpretive dispositions.

In my previous work, I have referred to the secularization of public discourse as an effect of the "kinematics of presupposition."[5] To avoid misunderstanding of this point, however, it is necessary to draw a distinction between two senses of the term "presupposition." Suppose Martin Luther King, Jr., asserts that God is love. In making this assertion, King presupposes, but does not explicitly say, that God exists. So it makes sense to say

that commitment to the existence of God is one of King's presuppositions. Presuppositions in this first sense are either assumptions that individuals self-consciously make when saying certain things or assumptions that must be true if what they are saying is to make sense.

Now suppose that a Unitarian addresses an argument about same-sex marriage to someone she knows to be a Catholic bishop. Obviously neither the Unitarian nor her interlocutor can in this case take for granted the details of a common theology. They cannot argue with one another on the basis of that as a given. We can put this by saying that the discursive exchange going on *between* these two parties does not presuppose a theology. The exchange no doubt has some presuppositions, which might include the proposition that God exists, but they do not include agreement, for example, on God's triune nature or on the interpretation of his commandments. If an atheist, a Muslim, and an orthodox Jew were now to join the discussion, the overlap in theological assumptions would diminish further, and the discussion would be able to presuppose still less. Here we are talking about "presuppositions" in a second sense of the term. Saying that the Unitarian is now participating in a discursive exchange that lacks theological presuppositions does not entail anything about what theological commitments she herself has made, how important they are to her in her personal deliberations, whether she is justified in accepting them, or whether she is free to express them.

My account of secularized discourses employs the second sense of "presupposition." Secularized discourses, as I am defining them, do not necessarily involve or produce participants who lack religious commitments. Most U.S. citizens profess some sort of belief in God, but their public ethical discourse is secularized in the sense I am trying to specify. This is a major advantage of my account over accounts of secularization that focus on an alleged loss of religious belief or on "disenchantment" of the world. The theory I offer is an account of what transpires between people engaging in public discourse, not an account of what they believe, assume, or presuppose as individuals. It has nothing to do with their experience of the world as a disenchanted universe, emptied of divine intentions and spiritual meaning.

Public ethical discourse in modern democratic societies tends not to presuppose agreement on the nature, existence, and will of God. Nor does it presuppose agreement on how the Bible or other sources of religious insight should be interpreted. As a result, theological claims do not have the status of being "justified by default"—of being something all participants in the discursive practice are effectively obliged to defer to as authoritative or justified. And this consequence of theological plurality has an enormous impact on what our ethical discourse is like. It means, for example, that in most contexts it will simply be imprudent, rhetorically speaking, to intro-

duce explicitly theological premises into an argument intended to persuade a religiously diverse public audience. If one cannot expect such premises to be accepted or interpreted in a uniform way, it will not necessarily advance one's rhetorical purposes to assert them. And if theological premises therefore receive little discursive attention for this perfectly understandable reason, why would anyone have just cause for resentment of the resulting type of secularized discourse? When people want to exchange reasons with others who differ from them theologically, this type of discourse is likely to increase drastically in significance. Resentment of this fact is indistinguishable from resentment of religious diversity.

It is useful in this context to keep in mind the distinction between saying that a person is justified in believing a claim and saying that a claim is justified. A *person* is justified in believing a claim if he or she is entitled to be committed to it, given his or her discursive context and cognitive conduct. A *claim* is justified in some discursive context if *everyone* in that context is justified in believing it (either because they have no relevant reasons for doubting it or because it has already been successfully defended against all relevant reasons for doubting it). In modern democracies, theological claims tend not to have the default status of being justified in the latter sense when uttered in public settings—for the simple reason that these settings tend to be religiously plural. It is also the case, however, that most modern democracies are liberal in the innocuous sense of treating individuals as (defeasibly) entitled by default to make whatever theological commitments they see fit to make and free to express those commitments in speech or in action.[6]

Ethical discourse in religiously plural modern democracies is secularized, according to my account, only in the sense that it does not take for granted a set of agreed-upon assumptions about the nature and existence of God. This claim pertains to presuppositions in the second sense. It means that no one can take for granted, when addressing a religiously plural audience, that religious commitments have default authority in this context. It does not entail any limitation on what an individual can presuppose in the first sense. To the contrary, the discursive practice in question is secularized, according to my theory, precisely because many of the individuals participating in it do have religious commitments that function as presuppositions in some of their own deliberations and pronouncements. It is because these commitments vary from one citizen to another that they cannot qualify as presuppositions in the second sense. But this leaves open the possibility that citizens who hold one or another set of religious commitments could be rationally entitled to those commitments.

Some theologians hold that the citizenry's common discourse on ethical and political topics suffers from incoherence in the absence of commonly held theological assumptions. They conclude that we should all therefore

accept a common stock of theological assumptions in order to restore our shared discourse to coherence. But whose assumptions shall we adopt? And by what means shall we secure agreement on them? The crux of the issue is that nobody currently knows how to bring about by acceptable means what the theological opponents of secularized discourse are suggesting. Their proposals are unrealistic if pursued without resort to coercion and morally harmful if pursued coercively. Some of my critics say that I overestimate the dangers, but the only dangers I am referring to here are the dangers that *would* obtain *if* an antisecularization strategy were pursued by coercive means. These are the same dangers that did obtain during the state-forming wars of early-modern Europe and today still plague nations where civic trust, tolerance of religious differences, and constitutional democracy have yet to establish themselves. Since my critics are not proposing coercion, my issue with them has more to do with the fact that their program is unrealistic than with any dangers that might be involved. I am not saying that it is dangerous nowadays in the United States to employ religious premises in political reasoning. That is a different issue completely.[7] Neither am I saying that theologians, as individuals, should abandon their theological commitments. That, too, is a different issue, which involves a different sense of secularization.[8]

Our society is religiously plural, and has remained so for several centuries despite constant efforts on the part of its religious members to appeal to their fellow citizens with reasons for converting to a single theology. So when people discuss political issues with one another publicly—say, by addressing a school board meeting or participating in a debate of presidential candidates, as opposed to taking part in a colloquy of co-religionists—the religious differences among them will make it impossible for them to take theological propositions for granted. In such a setting you could of course make a theological assertion, and in making it implicitly commit yourself to a theological presupposition in the first sense. But you could not rightly assume that theological presuppositions in the second sense are already in place, tacitly agreed upon as the framework within which discussion proceeds. What shall we do, then, to achieve the coherence that some theologians believe we lack? I fail to see how the sea change these theologians are calling for is going to happen. There is no point in trying to wish the social reality of religious diversity away, or in resenting this diversity as long as it lasts. Until it does go away, our public discourse will be secularized, in the sense I have specified, whether we want it to be or not.

Radical Orthodoxy's Refusal of the Secular

Because theologians like Milbank see the secularization of political culture as a reflection of secularism—an ideology—they have a story to tell about its emergence that differs significantly from the one I have been telling.

My story focuses on what can reasonably be taken for granted by ordinary speakers under conditions of religious diversity, whereas their story focuses on the social and discursive consequences of an intellectual error. As William T. Cavanaugh tells the story in *Radical Orthodoxy*, the secularist error involves both "the progressive stripping away of the sacred from some profane remainder" and "the substitution of one *mythos* of salvation for another."[9] It "proceeds logically from the anthropology of individual *dominium* on which the liberal state is based" (RO, 193). The secular state, in this view, is essentially dedicated to replacing the Christian account of salvation with a secularist one. Secularized discourse under the auspices of such a state is therefore *secularist* discourse, a violent disruption of what was once a single scheme of participation in the divine and an attempt to usurp the soteriological function that the church has always claimed for itself. Yet, says Cavanaugh, "the state has failed to save us" (RO, 192), and necessarily so, for a secular state is ill-equipped to save us from anything, least of all the violence implicit in the social contract itself.

Cavanaugh clearly strives to put the "secular state" in the worst possible light. He achieves this objective in part by unfairly omitting mention of the fact that most liberal theorists have taken pains to deny that the state is appropriately seen as a vehicle of salvation. But the story being told here is also flawed in the sort of historical significance it attributes to liberal theory. From what source does the "secular state" derive? From a deeply mistaken "mythos." And this mythos, according to radical orthodoxy, can itself be traced back to a mistaken conception of the secular instituted in late-medieval thought when theological voluntarists got the upper hand and a genuinely participatory outlook went into eclipse. The problem is, at root, a theological error and is to be corrected by theological means—specifically, by a *radical* recovery of Platonic-Augustinian *orthodoxy*.

I find the intellectualism in this account of secularization extremely implausible. Intellectual errors do sometimes have significant social and political consequences, but history rarely works in the theory-driven way that philosophers and theologians imagine. One reason for doubting that the mythos or ideology of secularism is what caused the secularization of public discourse is that its proponents have never had the numbers or the clout to change the world as dramatically as Cavanaugh's story supposes. The irony here is that radical orthodoxy appears to be taking over the basic elements of what was originally a secularist theory of secularization. According to this theory, modernity is a progressively secularizing force in the sense that it tends to produce increasing levels of disbelief and disenchantment. The trouble is that this theory now lies in shambles, having had nearly all of its predictions falsified over the last four decades.[10] If there is no sociological reason to suppose that secularization, in a sense that involves increasingly widespread acceptance of secularist ideas, has been occurring at all, there is also no reason to accept an intellectualist account of

how the process of secularization works and what set it in motion. The story that radical orthodoxy tells about secularization is about as credible as the story that Heidegger tells about the origins of the age of technology in the onto-theological tradition. I have been trying to tell a story of a more down-to-earth sort.

According to my account, secularization was not primarily brought about by the triumph of a secularist ideology, "first constructed," as Milbank puts it, "in the discourses of liberalism" (TST, 4). Nor did it result from a thoroughgoing disenchantment or desacralization of the world. What drove the secularization of political discourse forward was the increasing need to cope with religious plurality discursively on a daily basis under circumstances where improved transportation and communication were changing the political and economic landscape. Secularization of the kind I have described did, however, give rise to desacralization of the political sphere and to secularist ideology as an attempt to explain and justify it. It is not that these latter things are mere fantasies, lacking a substantial effect on the social order. They are present, to be sure, even if they do not have the causal significance that a now discredited sociological tradition and radical orthodoxy have assigned to them.

Medieval political theology was in a position to take for granted that its own Christian vocabulary was the one required for explaining what it meant for the ruler of a Christian political body to be Christ's vicar.[11] Political theology essentially made explicit the norms according to which a kingdom or principality in Christendom stood under God's authority. That these norms obviously needed to be made explicit in theological terms made it natural for all concerned to view the political community as sacralized. But under circumstances in which a theological vocabulary proves an obstacle to the rational resolution of political differences, and most political agents begin relying largely on nontheological vocabularies when making their political arguments, the political community itself can appear to have been removed from its former sacralized status. Political theology will in that event inevitably come to seem somewhat less essential to the task of making explicit the norms to which appeal is being made. Intellectuals will then attempt to make those norms explicit in some nontheological way. This is the context in which liberal secularism can arise as an ideological explanation and justification of the new form of political order.

As we saw in the previous chapter, however, it is a mistake to assume without argument that ideologies accurately reflect the social formations they are intended to serve. Secularized political discourse has given rise to various competing philosophical accounts of itself. Among the least plausible of these, descriptively, is liberal secularism. So we must at least entertain the possibility that secularized political discourse in modern democratic

societies can to some large extent be disentangled from the antireligious animus of some of its ideological defenders.

It remains the case, nonetheless, that secularization has deposed political theology from the social role it became accustomed to performing in Christendom. There is thus a sense in which the political community appears to have been desacralized in modern democratic societies. For rather than being thought to possess authority directly from God as vicars of Christ, rulers are now thought to possess authority directly from the people. The consent of the governed, respect for the rights of the people, and proper concern for the common good are all recognized as conditions for the possession of such authority in modern democracies, but none of them is explicitly theological. Where, if at all, does God's authority over all of creation figure into this picture? This is a central question for political theology in societies where political discussion has been secularized.

Radical orthodoxy answers it, as we have seen, by taking secularism's account of modern democracy at face value and then refusing the secular as essentially antitheological. To restore a proper sense of God's authority over the political community, political theology must renounce the form of political community whose essence it is to deny God's authority over it. This is one possible answer. But its descriptive premise is, to say the least, questionable. If secularization of the kind I have described can occur even in a community whose members agree that God has the *ultimate* authority to judge all creation, including all political orders, then it is not clear that rejection of a secularized political community is theologically necessary. Every Christian is free to affirm God's ultimate authority over every political community, including his or her own, whether or not others agree. Indeed, Christians who make this affirmation are bound to infer that Christ is now ruling democratic political communities providentially, no matter who acknowledges or fails to acknowledge his authority. The central task of contemporary Christian political theology is to discern how Christ's rulership of such communities manifests itself. Radical orthodoxy's refusal of the secular seems to imply a simple answer to this question—namely, that Christ in his capacity as judge declares such communities utterly vitiated by their lack of true piety and their refusal to participate in the gracious outpouring of divine love in the church.

In giving this answer, Milbank claims fidelity to Augustine's *City of God*. But in making good on it, he finds himself struggling against Augustine's evident ambivalence toward pagan "virtue."[12] The question of how the relevant passages in Augustine should be interpreted will receive much attention from Christian ethicists and historical theologians in the next decade. For our purposes, however, we can bracket the issue of fidelity to Augustine and highlight three properly theological questions that Milbank's refusal of the secular tends to suppress:

- is it not possible to discern the workings of the Holy Spirit, and thus some reflection of God's redemptive activity, in modern democratic aspirations?
- is there nothing in the political life of modern democracies, or in the lives of those who are struggling for just and decent arrangements within them, that a loving God would bless?
- if the plentitude of God's triune inner life shines forth in all of creation, cannot theology discern some such light in democratic political community?

These questions must be high on the agenda of any Christian political theology that hopes to acknowledge the sovereignty of God while transcending both resentment of, and absorption into, the secular. It is unfortunate that Milbank tends to respond to them only indirectly, when issuing his summary verdicts on the political theologians of the modern period. The hero of his critique of recent Catholic political theology (TST, chap. 8) is Maurice Blondel, whose work is said to represent "a new philosophy which goes beyond both positivism and dialectics so as to anticipate a postmodern 'discourse about difference' " (TST, 209). Much of the account is devoted to tracing the ill effects of Karl Rahner's theology among the Latin American liberationists and such Germans as Johann Baptist Metz and Helmut Peukert. Milbank holds Rahner responsible for a conciliation with Enlightenment philosophy that spoils whatever it touches. The entire discussion is carried out at such an abstract level, however, that the three questions I have identified are never addressed directly.

Milbank grants that the liberationists were right to see "the whole concrete life of humanity [as] imbued with grace" and to infer from this that "it is surely not possible to separate political and social concerns from the 'spiritual' concerns of salvation" (TST, 206–7). But they ended up committed to "another effort to reinterpret Christianity in terms of a dominant secular discourse of our day" (TST, 208). Milbank expresses support for genuinely Christian socialism, and distances himself from "reactionaries in the Vatican." His point is that theology should itself determine what Christian socialism means. If Milbank means by this only that Christian political theology must take pains to be true to its belief in divine sovereignty when interpreting what the ideal form of socialist practice would be, let us grant the point for the purposes of argument. The methodological implication he wishes to draw follows straightforwardly—namely, that theology, when fulfilling its own tasks, must not allow some form of secular thought to dictate an understanding of the political sphere. "Mediating theology," as exemplified in Rahner's work, is too eager to defer to secular philosophy and social theory, and must therefore be rejected if Christian orthodoxy is to be maintained.

But suppose we descend from the methodological level and inquire into the implications of Milbank's admission that "the whole concrete life of humanity is imbued with grace." Does this not include the political life of humanity in modern democracies? And if Christian socialists, understanding themselves in terms drawn from Blondel's "supernaturalizing of the natural," join forces with socialists of other kinds to ameliorate the condition of workers and the unemployed, what is political theology to say about the non-Christians in the coalition? If Milbank is prepared to declare them unwitting collaborators in God's gracious rulership of the world, while granting them the freedom to interpret the shared socialist project in their own terms, then one wonders why the resulting political theology should advertise itself as a "refusal of the secular." For the secular would then be understood not as a domain outside of the realm of divine sovereignty and grace but simply as a domain of political action and discourse that is secularized in the sense I have specified. On the other hand, if Milbank wishes to take a less charitable line on non-Christian socialists, he needs to explain what his theological reasons for doing so might be.

It is at this level that political theology makes a difference. The practical issue is whether Christians, for their own theological reasons, may join hands with others in the struggle for justice—and do so without holding their noses in the presence of their comrades. If Milbank thinks they may, then he is implicitly granting the legitimacy of what I am calling a secularized political sphere, and his conclusions are much less radical than they are made to seem. If he thinks they mustn't, then he has little to offer besides nostalgia, utopian fantasy, and withdrawal into a strongly bounded enclave. In that event, he would owe his readers reasons for avoiding the conclusion that his theology has restricted divine sovereignty and inhibited charity toward the non-Christian other. In the absence of a persuasive argument, readers will probably conclude that Rahner was right about "anonymous Christians" after all.

Now consider Milbank's summary verdicts on modern social theorists. Take, for example, the case of John Ruskin.[13] Milbank portrays Ruskin as the supreme social theorist of the nineteenth century, and presents him as a worthy rival of both liberal and Marxist forms of secularism. But he goes out of his way to quarantine him from the fallen secularity of modernity by declaring him "a relatively isolated prophet" (TST, 200). Milbank makes clear that Ruskin's critique of capitalism is centered in his understanding of the virtues, and briefly considers his version of medievalism in order to distinguish it from the more vulgar varieties. He does not mention Ruskin's influential precursor, William Cobbett, or, a more proximate influence on Ruskin, Thomas Carlyle. He mentions William Morris only in passing (TST, 188), though Morris was surely among those most strongly influenced by Ruskin. By omission of these examples, Ruskin can be made to

seem relatively isolated. But in fact he was nothing less than a major representative of a major tradition of social criticism in the modern period—a tradition centrally concerned with character and the virtues in relation to politics, the economy, and architecture. By the turn of the century, his influence was considerable, not least of all in the labor movement, in which Christian and non-Christian socialists collaborated actively. Again, what does radical orthodoxy imply about such collaborative efforts and about the agnostics and atheists who participate in them? Milbank doesn't say.

Neither does he look closely at the details of Ruskin's normative thinking. Certain strands of Ruskin's work may deserve retrieval, but the task of disentangling those strands from attitudes that deserve rejection would be a delicate operation. On a general level, the issue to be confronted is essentially this. Marxist and liberal forms of secularism are currently under attack, for good reason. What, then, shall we make of earlier religious and romantic forms of social criticism, which seem necessary in saying what bothers us about the inhumanity of the capitalist global economy, but which also often seem implicated in noxious attitudes concerning race, gender, and hierarchy? Philosophers and theologians have not yet done well with this question. But to pose it honestly, one needs to acknowledge the democratic commitments that make it hard for most of us to swallow certain features of Ruskin's thinking. Presumably, Milbank would revert here to Blondel's theology as a framework for making sense of his own democratic commitments. But how did it come to pass that a theologian like Blondel, writing at the end of the nineteenth century, came to abandon the hierarchical thinking he inherited from Catholic theology? Where did the democratic tendency in his thought come from historically? Milbank's massive treatise on theology's relation to social theory in the modern period leaves democracy almost entirely out of the picture. Blondel's abandonment of hierarchy appears as if by miracle out of thin air.

Now consider the case of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Milbank (TST, 4) places Coleridge in a tradition that amounts to "a kind of counter-modernity," which "continues to shadow actual, secular modernity." None of the writers in this tradition is allowed to count as a counterexample to the proposed theory of modern secularity, however. They are instead redefined in advance as essentially not belonging to their own setting. Milbank does not portray them as comprising a modern tradition of thought and practice that has been able to have an influential voice in a secularized political community, but rather as a countertradition criticizing "the secular" from a perspective wholly at odds with it. By framing his story in this dichotomous way and then proceeding through his narrative at breakneck speed, Milbank allows himself to evade all sorts of important complications and ambiguities.

He tells us nothing, for example, about Coleridge's complicity in the injustices of a regressive monarchical regime in the years after turning his back on the revolutionary hopes of his youth. We hear nothing of Coleridge's greatest critic, William Hazlitt, who sought to reconnect Romanticism with the democratic sympathies he inherited from his father's dissenting Protestantism. Nor does Milbank's story make reference to self-consciously religious figures on the other side of the Atlantic, like Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau, who sought in their own ways to democratize the Burkean Romanticism of Coleridge and Wordsworth. If one tugs a little on Milbank's references to Ruskin and Coleridge, the whole tale begins to unravel. The democratic vitality of the modern period has been eclipsed by "the secular" writ large.

Beyond Resentment

If Milbank hopes to overcome the "false humility" of modern theology by reasserting its claim to stand in judgment of other discourses, Neuhaus is engaged in a more mundane endeavor. He is a lieutenant in the culture wars, with a zeal for fighting it out in the ideological trenches. If he is nostalgic, it is not for medieval theocracy, but for a relatively recent past, when American leaders and intellectuals were nearly unanimous in affirming the need for Christian faith as a source of virtue and solidarity in democratic political community. In the 1960s Neuhaus was a Lutheran pastor heavily involved in the Civil Rights movement and a leader of the religious Left's opposition to U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. But in the 1970s he became a neoconservative and eventually converted to Roman Catholicism.

Neuhaus holds that what Pope John Paul II calls "the culture of death" may also aptly be called the culture of secular liberalism. Disrespect for living persons, he argues, grows from the twin root of a secularist denial of the necessity of religious foundations for moral and political order and a liberal elevation of individual freedom above all other human values. America remains a religious country at the grass-roots level, but has been ruled by secular liberals for half a century. The result is that many religious Americans have been conned into acceptance of secularist practices. Political speech has been hollowed out. Neither sin nor the common good receive mention. The public square has been stripped of all symbols that once directed attention to a transcendent source of divine judgment and moral order. The sacred canopy that used to hang over the public square has been torn down.

A thinker like Wolterstorff would applaud Neuhaus's critique of secularism, while remaining suspicious of the conservative political implications he draws from it. Many to Neuhaus's left worry that he is not so much

hoisting a traditional sacred canopy over the public square as he is wrapping it around the shoulders of the politicians who have made life worse for poor people at home and the victims of U.S. militarism abroad. George Hunsinger, to my mind the most interesting of Neuhaus's critics, argues the case as follows:

> The litmus test . . . of just what Neuhaus wants to legitimate is whether he can countenance a systematic critique of America's role in the name of democratic ideals. The fact is that he cannot. Anyone with serious doubts about America's current influence for good is accused not of poor judgment but of disloyalty. Neuhaus implies that such persons are guilty of betraying their country. Denial of the overall benevolence of American influence is taken as though it were a betrayal of democracy itself. By resorting to rhetoric of disloyalty and betrayal at the crucial point, Neuhaus displays a striking incapacity to differentiate between the American system and democratic ideals, thereby indicating how thoroughly he equates them. In any case, whether the object is America or democracy or both, religion appears here strictly for purposes of legitimation.[14]

These are strong words, but they carry theological authority in part because Hunsinger is equally disturbed by similarly ideological uses of Christian theology on the Left. He proposes as his alternative to Neuhaus's 1981 antisecularist manifesto, "Christianity and Democracy," the "Barmen Declaration" of 1934, written primarily by the great Swiss theologian, Karl Barth, and approved courageously and unanimously by a synod consisting of delegates from Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches.

In the Barmen Declaration, according to Hunsinger, we have a clear example of what it means for the confessing church to maintain the integrity of its theological commitments without defaulting on its urgent obligation to join with others in the struggle for justice and peace. The Declaration says in no uncertain terms that theological commitments must determine the church's political stance in the world, that nothing stands outside the Lordship of Christ, and that theology may not be subordinated to secular programs or ideals. Barth's language is no less compromising than Milbank's. But while the Declaration, in Barth's retrospective view, was somewhat lacking in specificity, its "No!" to Nazism was clear enough to set the confessing church on a "collision course" with the state in Germany. Barth was not content with mere refusal of the secular. He committed himself to a definite program of progressive politics consistent with orthodox Christian doctrine. Hunsinger argues that a similarly bold progressive politics is required of Christians today if they wish to avoid the idolatry of American power he believes to be at work in Neuhaus's writings.

Hunsinger's critique of Neuhaus might seem to be little more than another contribution to the culture wars, but it is not. I find it encouraging not only because the politics being proposed is to my liking, but also be-

cause it is serious about political theology in a way that Milbank appears not to be. Radical orthodoxy has benefited from the widespread impression that its refusal of the secular is the only theologically acceptable alternative to Neuhaus's neoconservatism, on the one hand, and to liberalism and liberation theology, on the other. Hunsinger's appeal to Barth and to the politics of resistance that flowed from the Barmen Declaration illuminates another alternative. It is no less orthodox than radical orthodoxy, but much more concrete in its political implications and much more direct in addressing the theological questions I have charged Milbank with neglecting. The result is a theologically rich account of what it means for Christians to be involved in modern, secularized political communities.

As we have seen, Barthian political theology resembles radical orthodoxy's refusal of the secular insofar as it emphasizes both Christ's actual rulership over the domain of secularized politics and the necessity, for Christians, of acknowledging the authority of "the authentic, scriptural voice of Jesus Christ" over their political decisions. But after affirming these principles, Hunsinger immediately goes on to say that they do "not imply that nothing good, beautiful, true, or worth noticing exists outside of Scripture or the church."[15] The secular world is not to be feared or merely refused by anyone committed to charity and justice in dealing with others. It is rather an arena in which a Christian can hope to proclaim God's word and observe the transfiguring effects of God's love on the lives of his creatures. The spirit of Hunsinger's political theology is most concisely expressed in Barth's dictum that "God may speak to us through Russian Communism, a flute concerto, a blossoming shrub, or a dead dog."[16] If God may speak through godless Communism, why not, then, through the words both Christians and non-Christians speak when holding one another responsible democratically for the justice and decency of their institutional arrangements?

Hunsinger pursues this theme in the epilogue of his book, *How to Read Karl Barth*, which explicates the relevant passages in volume 4, part 3 of *Church Dogmatics*.[17] This is where Barth provides orthodox Christian theology's most fully developed response to the questions about the secular world that radical orthodoxy evades. The boldface thesis with which Barth begins his discussion comes from the Barmen Declaration (IV/3, 3, 86). Barth once again affirms that Jesus Christ is *the* Truth and *the* Light and that all else stands under his authority.

To those who complain that the "arrogance" of such an affirmation "makes quite impossible the discussion and interchange between those who champion it and those who cannot or will not accept it, that it leads to the breakdown of communication and even in the last resort of fellowship between Christians and non-Christians," Barth says calmly that Christians "have no option in this matter" (IV/3, 89–90). A Christian is one who

accepts Jesus Christ as *the* Truth and *the* Light. To say less than this is to affirm something other than Christian doctrine. To view this affirmation as intrinsically capricious or intolerant is thus to eliminate the possibility of a discussion that includes Christian affirmation from the outset. But Christians, in affirming Christ as *the* Truth, are not properly claiming to possess Christ. To the contrary, if Christ is *the* Truth, then a Christian who affirms him is not *the* truth. Rightly understood, the affirmation enjoins humility. "The only necessary concern of the community and Christians is that they do not make [the affirmation] in any other way but in the submission and humility enjoined upon them, too, by what it says" (IV/3, 91).

Christians who openly affirm Christ as *the* Truth speak truly, according to Barth. They utter *a* truth. The difference between the definite and indefinite articles matters greatly in this context. The church is one place where truths are spoken. It is also, however, a place where many falsehoods are spoken. And it is not the only place where truths are spoken. It does not follow from affirmation of Christ as the one Word of God "that every word spoken outside the circle of the Bible and the Church is a word of false prophecy and therefore valueless, empty and corrupt" (IV/3, 97). What follows is that "the Word spoken in the existence of Jesus Christ" is distinct "from all others." "When we think of these others, we do well to include even the human words spoken in the existence and witness of the men of the Bible and the Church. *In distinction from all these*, Jesus Christ is the one Word of God" (IV/3, 99; emphasis added).

Thus, when Christians are considering the question of where truths—in the plural—are to be found, they must be prepared to look both inside the church and outside of it. Wherever they look, they must be suspicious and critical, as well as open to the possibility of needing to change their minds. Wherever they find important truths being spoken by other human beings, they must take themselves to have been addressed by Christ himself, by *the* Truth, *the* Light, *the* Word. Barth refers to true words spoken (or true lives lived) outside the church as secular "parables of the kingdom" (IV/3, 114). As in the case of the New Testament parables, Jesus Christ is their ultimate source as well as the criterion a Christian must use to appraise them.

> Does Jesus Christ speak through the medium of such words? The answer is that the community which lives by the one Word of the one Prophet Jesus Christ, and is commissioned and empowered to proclaim this Word of His in the world, not only may but must accept the fact that there are such words and that it must hear them too, notwithstanding its life by this one Word and its commission to preach it. . . . Can it be content to hear it only from Holy Scripture and then from its own lips and in its own tongue? Should it not be

> grateful to receive it also from without, in very different human words, in a secular parable, even though it is grounded in and ruled by the biblical, prophetico-apostolic witness to this one Word? . . . Has it any good reason to refuse this kind of stimulation and direction, whatever its origin or form? . . . Does it not necessarily lead to ossification if the community rejects in advance the existence and word of these alien witnesses to the truth? (IV/3, 115)

Barth concludes that Christians "can and must be prepared to encounter 'parables of the kingdom' in the full biblical sense, not merely in the witness of the Bible and the various arrangements, works and words of the Christian Church, but also in the secular sphere" (IV/3, 117). There must not, then, be any simple refusal of the secular, for this would be tantamount to denying Christ's freedom to fashion secular parables as he sees fit; it would involve turning one's back on a sphere in which God's Word is being spoken through the words of human beings. "For we must not forget that, while man may deny God, according to the Word of reconciliation God does not deny man. Man may be hostile to the Gospel of God, but this Gospel is not hostile to him. . . . How can it be any less probable, or even impossible, that it should actually be exercised and demonstrated in relation to him too?" (IV/3, 119)

Why is all of this a matter of life and death, from Barth's point of view? First of all, because the affirmation of Christ as the truth concerns the one who rules over life and death. But also because mere refusal of the secular shuns the Christian's obligation to discern the difference between true and false words being lived and spoken outside the church, and in doing so places the lives and hopes of innocent human beings at risk. It is to remind his readers of this that Barth begins his discussion by quoting from the Barmen Declaration. Mere refusal of the secular in Germany in 1934 and in most other contexts amounts to complicity in falsehood and evil. Christians must always be prepared to enter a broader discussion in which various words will be spoken. Their utterances in that domain should display the courage of their convictions. They must speak the truth as they see it, which means affirming Jesus Christ as the truth, and be ready to pay the price for saying what they believe. They should resist any form of pluralism or relativism that would be incompatible with the practice of making truth-claims or with their own commitment to this particular truth-claim. All parties involved in the discussion will have their own affirmations to offer. Without truth-claims, there would be no communication, no exchange of reasons. No one can make declarative statements without implying that those who deny the propositional content of those statements are committed to falsehoods. This, by itself, is not arrogant. But as Hunsinger says, the "truth is where one finds it."[18] It would therefore be arrogant to assume

that one knows in advance which human voices are speaking truly. This is what secularists assume when they rig the rules of discussion to exclude religious voices. And it is also what Christians assume when they treat the church as the only source of truths.

THEOLOGY, THE PUBLIC SQUARE, AND THE ENCLAVE SOCIETY

In chapter 3, I argued that we would all benefit from fuller expression of whatever ethically relevant commitments our religious and nonreligious neighbors harbor. In a religiously plural society such as ours, it is even more important than in other circumstances to bring into reflective expression commitments that would otherwise remain implicit in the lives of the religious communities. Members of a religious communion can benefit from such expression by learning about themselves and putting themselves in a position to reflect critically on their commitments. Outsiders can benefit from listening in, so as to gain a better grasp on the premises that our fellow citizens rarely have an opportunity to articulate in full. This is one of the ways in which we can overcome the caricatures of religious believers that dominate the rhetoric of the culture wars. The vocation of theologians, as Hans Frei once said, is akin to the calling of Geertzian ethnographers. Their main expressive task, of course, is to make explicit the commitments implicit in a community's practices as an aid to reflective self-understanding.[19] But their contribution to discourse outside of the church consists in a kind of thick description that allows fellow citizens to correct prejudice and misunderstanding concerning what believers think and care about.

Clearly, no theology in our setting can expect to bring into expressive equilibrium the commitments and practices shared by all members of a modern democratic society. But this is not a limitation that theologians alone have to accept. All defenders of what Rawls calls comprehensive doctrines are in the same position, because a religiously plural democratic culture no more shares atheistic commitments than it shares theological ones. When it comes to religious questions, intellectuals in our setting can bring their own commitments, as individuals, into expressive and critical equilibrium. They can perform a similar service for a particular group to which they belong—their fellow Catholics, Muslims, Conservative Jews, fans of Wordsworthian natural piety, village atheists, or whatever. But when they do this, there is no point in pretending that they are articulating the implicit commitments and practices of their fellow citizens as a whole. This implies no limitation, however, on whom they may address or who might wish to listen in.

The recent debate over "public theology" is beset by confusion over what this phrase means. There is clearly little hope for public theology if this means the attempt to bring into expressive equilibrium the theological

commitments all members of our society share, for there are no such shared commitments. A theologian can give up this ambition as unrealistic, however, without giving up the hope of addressing a public audience—an audience that includes citizens who are outside of the church. Needless to say, some intellectuals are simply uninterested in theology, while others express hostility toward it or are inclined to ridicule it. There are also theologians who describe atheists as despicable fools who have willfully, half-knowingly, and selfishly turned their backs on religious truth. But why let these people keep the rest of us from achieving some mutual understanding?

Part of the problem derives from thinking of the public sphere as a place, as in Neuhaus's image of the public square. It is not a place. One is addressing the public whenever one addresses people as citizens. In a modern democracy, this is not something one does in one place or all at once. Wherever two or three citizens are gathered whom one might address as citizens, as persons jointly responsible for the common good, one is in a potentially public setting. Suppose you address a few members of the civic nation in their capacity as potential political actors, and do so in the full expectation that your claims might someday enter into their ethical reasoning or be circulated by them to other members of the body politic. Then you are, in the only relevant sense, speaking publicly. A private communication, in contrast, would either not pertain to matters of concern to the people as whole, or involve an expectation of confidentiality. If you express theological commitments in a reflective and sustained way, while addressing fellow citizens as citizens, you are "doing theology" publicly—and in that sense doing public theology. The theologian who realizes that it would be foolish to try to systematize the religious convictions of all citizens in a single "public theology" need not, for that reason, retreat altogether, qua theologian, from public discourse.

I have suggested that democracy would profit if more citizens engaged in the "lengthy, even leisurely unfolding" of their commitments. Our ethical discourse has become rather thinned out—for understandable reasons, which my account of secularized discourses sets out to explain. We often find ourselves wanting to persuade various others unlike ourselves to agree with our conclusions, so we adopt a thinned-out vocabulary that nearly everyone can use, regardless of their religious differences. This tends not to be a theologically inflected vocabulary, because any such vocabulary will tend to embody assumptions that some of our fellow citizens will have religious reasons to reject. And so we reason publicly from premises likely to have the greatest appeal to the greatest number. But even if we win the day, this kind of reasoning sometimes does little to make explicit the language and premises we used when first reaching the conclusion for which we wish to argue.

The reasons we offer to others unlike ourselves, when trying to persuade them to accept a conclusion we care about, are not necessarily the same reasons that led us to reach the conclusion in the first place. The more that public giving of reasons thins out in this way, the less fellow citizens tend to understand one another's languages of personal deliberation. Public discussions can then easily degenerate into a series of attempts to manipulate the populace for unstated reasons. When this happens, cynicism about political speech can spread rapidly, and individuals may prefer to withdraw into smaller, more uniform communities, where a language of personal deliberation is shared. But discussions confined to members of the subgroup can easily degenerate in these circumstances, as suspicion deepens concerning the unspoken motives of other subgroups. The wider society's pluralism will then come to seem inherently vicious. Once cynicism and suspicion begin to take hold in this way, they can be extremely difficult to overcome, because the mutual withdrawal of citizens into the various enclaves available to them tends to block access to the kind of evidence that might restore trust and mutual respect.

Such trends are currently being exacerbated by changes in the technology and economics of information-exchange. Talk radio, cable television, and the Internet have significantly increased the proportion of information that the average individual receives from sources entirely within his or her particular enclave.[20] It is therefore increasingly difficult for claims and arguments circulating within one enclave to get an undistorted hearing in another. For it is typically in the interest of the ideologues and corporations in control of a given information outlet to keep the enclave for which they serve as providers of news and opinion both sharply differentiated and intact. Indeed, it is in their interest to undermine, insofar as possible, the respectability and economic viability of outlets meant to provide news and a sampling of political discourse to the public as a whole. It should hardly be surprising, then, that much of the ideological content of some infotainment providers is intended to portray such outlets as the *New York Times*, National Public Radio, and public broadcasting as tools of a biased establishment. If trust in these institutions can be destroyed, the enclave-oriented providers will benefit financially, as more and more individuals withdraw into enclaves and various forms of marketing and persuasion are devised to manipulate and satisfy their desires and opinions. But there is also a political benefit, because the individuals thus gathered generally constitute a discrete voting block in which candidates for public office are likely to take an interest.

So there are reasons to be alarmed about the current condition of public discourse. But if I am right about the historical causes of secularization and the material conditions of contemporary fragmentation, the school of resentment in theology is actually making things worse. Theologies

designed to articulate, defend, and reinforce resentment of the secular are symptoms of the disease they are meant to cure. They are the ideological expression of the enclave society. Their social function is to legitimate identification with the enclave as the primary social unit. The main means they employ to generate solidarity within the small group is the bashing of liberals, practiced as a form of ritual sacrifice.[21] The ritual comes in two types, depending on whether the scapegoats are selected from inside or outside the enclave. The former type makes a negative example of believers, especially theologians, who have identified with movements of democratic reform in the broader society. The latter type holds up nonbelievers as symbolic representatives of the secularism that supposedly defines the broader society. In both cases, the effect of the exercise is to define the enclave boundary and discourage others from crossing it.

Of course, radical orthodoxy does not officially prefer the enclave as a social form. It sometimes speaks—ever so briefly and abstractly—about the possibility of a Christian socialism. Otherwise, it wavers between nostalgia for Christendom's theocratic vision and a utopian dream of "eucharistic anarchism" that promises government without states.[22] Milbank says that the church has "misunderstood itself" when it draws boundaries around "the same' " and excludes "the other."[23] But radical orthodoxy's critique of the secular tends, under current circumstances, to reinforce the sort of boundary-drawing it officially opposes. It rejects the existing public sphere for failing to recognize the need for evangelical obedience to the rulership of Christ—that is, for failing to be the sort of political community that ceased to be possible when Christendom gave way to secularization. But both nostalgia for Christendom and the utopia of eucharistic anarchism, if not supplemented by a political theology more like Hunsinger's, threaten to condemn the world outside of the church to utter darkness. From within radical orthodoxy's refuge of aggressive like-mindedness, prophetic denunciation of the secular "other" and the unmasking of liberal theological error ritually reinforce the enclave boundary, rather than healing the world.

Thinkers committed to exercising the vocation of theology in a democratic context often experience a tension between the virtue of open-minded charity in listening well to others and their calling as expounders of the commitments of their ecclesial community. Their ecclesial office may demand charitable habits of listening, but it also imposes an obligation not to abandon what makes the community's commitments distinctive. Many are the academic theologians who have felt this tension acutely when, in dialogue with others, they have felt the force of reasons at odds with their confession of faith. Van Harvey coined a term for those who resolve the tension in one way when he spoke of the "alienated theologian." Alienated theologians remain preoccupied with God-talk but abandon some or all of the basic commitments of their faith communities. As a result, their

communities have trouble treating them as spokespersons. In extreme cases, they speak for themselves only, and become theologians in a different sense. The obligations of an ecclesial office then cease to apply. An alienated theologian's role in the culture is no different from that of anyone else who develops a distinctive set of answers to important questions. This involves expressing one's own commitments, not making explicit commitments that are shared by a group.

Alienated theologians should be welcomed into the democratic conversation along with all citizens of good will. Their intellectual honesty and independence can contribute much. Theologically, most of them are moving in the direction of heresies that I embrace, so I welcome their company. But democracy will suffer greatly, I fear, if orthodox Christians are unable to find a way to maintain their own convictions while also taking up their responsibilities as citizens. Theologians who are not alienated from their faith communities therefore have a crucial role to play in responding to our current crisis.

Hunsinger is hardly an alienated theologian. He is someone wholeheartedly committed to his ecclesial office as an expounder of a religious tradition's "final vocabulary." Like the rest of us, he is not in a position to argue for that vocabulary in a noncircular way. Admitting this is part of the point of using Anselm's phrase, "faith in search of understanding," as a Barthian theological motto. It means that he is arguing from premises he does not know how to argue for in a straightforward, linear way. But he does take full responsibility for explaining and defending the inferential and practical commitments implicit in his final vocabulary. He explicates and tests his premises in a self-critical spirit. And he puts himself in a position to converse with, and learn from, Christians and non-Christians who see things differently.[24]

It is a good thing that Hunsinger is speaking his mind, in a distinctively theological idiom, about issues that matter to people both inside of and outside of the church. Persuaded by Barth's claim that the "boundary between the Church and the secular world can still take at any time a different course from that which we think we discern," he is pleased to gain a hearing on both sides of that boundary.[25] It would of course be pointless to demand that a conversation across such a boundary have Christian theological presuppositions (in the second sense I have defined). But this does nothing to diminish the integrity of the message Hunsinger articulates (which obviously has theological presuppositions in the first sense). He neither anxiously imitates some form of thought outside his own tradition, nor resents the existence of the secular world. No aspect of the created world, in his eyes, has ever been outside the reach of God's grace or ever will be. That includes the secularized practices of a modern democratic society. His ar-

guments imply that mere refusal of those practices, from a genuinely orthodox point of view, must be deemed an offense to the sovereignty of God.

Does Hunsinger see any grounds for hope among Christians in the United States? He does indeed—above all, in "the vitality of the black church," which has always done much "to keep the rest of us honest." In contrast, he believes the white church has split "into an unfortunate, self-perpetuating, and ugly division between fundamentalism without justice and liberals without doctrine." But there are other positive signs, including "spiritually grounded civil disobedience" of various kinds:

> Forces of spiritual renewal—among Roman Catholics, groups like Pax Christi; among Protestants, groups like World Peacemakers—bear fruit in actions of resistance. Good Friday vigils through the streets of Manhattan ending in civil disobedience at nuclear-weapons research institutes; Peace Pentecosts in which Christians singing gospel songs and praying for peace are dragged in arrest from the rotunda of the Capitol building while within earshot Congress debates funding for the *MX* missile program—these could be seeds of a confessing church tomorrow.[26]

Democracy and orthodoxy will both be well served if this message gains as much attention from Christians in the next decade as the school of resentment has received in the last.