

## ABSTRACT

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Of late a literature has developed with a more negative view of the role of religion in promoting citizenship. This literature reflects three main themes. First, concern about the spillover of illiberal values into public life due to socialization infused with patriarchy. Second, a concern for individual autonomy due to uncritical adherence to inherited beliefs and minimal exposure to a broad range of alternative views. Third, a concern for the cultivation of democratic values due to a kind of radical sectarianism that places them at risk. Arguments that advance these themes have focused on religious groups that are fundamentalist and isolationist. While most authors note that not all religious groups are like this, the overall effect of this literature has been to permit fundamentalist and isolationist groups to stand for religion generally via assumptions that they differ from other groups merely in being more extreme and via the failure to consider the educational implications of alternative religious orientations.

In this dissertation I argue the following claims regarding this negative view of the civic importance of religion: 1) it does not provide a convincing account of the relationship between private associations and civic virtue; 2) it ignores the broad acceptance of “free faith” by most religions (a commitment related to autonomy); 3) it ignores religious traditions that emphasize civic responsibility, tolerance and social justice as articles of faith (commitments related to democratic character and democratic governance).

This dissertation explores a religious orientation whose educational implications for civic virtue differ quite significantly from isolationists and fundamentalists: the prophetic Christian tradition. I assert that the strand of faith encountered within the prophetic tradition necessarily implicates involvement within the political dimension of life in all its aspects – cultural, economic, and governmental; and that it sustains a vision of citizenship that constitutes a religious vocation for believers qua citizens that is broadly compatible with and supportive of central liberal democratic values – namely reciprocity, mutual respect, tolerance, and justice.

POLITICAL LIBERALISM, RELIGION, AND THE PROPHETIC TRADITION.

By

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## Acknowledgements

In a past life I was an Architectural Engineering major. Among the many practical things I came to realize about buildings was this: while the stained-glassed windows, lofty spires, Corinthian colonnades, and flying buttresses (I was partial to churches/cathedrals) tend to be what evokes the awe and admiration of onlookers, the most important elements in any structure are those that often get overlooked, although they are occasionally in clear view. Like mortar and nails, Kenneth Strike's influence on the quality of this dissertation is inconspicuous, but it is what holds all of the constitutive parts together. I do not wish to overstate the degree of his impact, but neither do I wish to be derelict in giving him his just due. The guidance he provided toward the development and completion of this dissertation is immeasurable. The standard of intellectual rigor he imposed upon me refined my ability to think and to write and to transform. Most importantly he has cared for me as a developing human being and not merely as a young scholar, and I am eternally grateful to him for this. Obrigado Ken.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Education for citizenship<sup>1</sup> poses a dilemma for liberal democratic societies. One horn of this dilemma involves the interest such societies have in socializing individuals for membership. Liberal societies reproduce themselves by creating citizens capable of supporting liberal political values with a view toward the common good. Despite the fact that some individuals may abstain from the practical responsibilities of citizenship – for example voting or democratic deliberation – or withdraw from the dominant political and social culture, state institutions like public schools must nevertheless attempt to cultivate the virtues and capacities that enable citizens to competently participate in and contribute to socio-political life. The state’s responsibility to create liberal citizens becomes even more salient in the face of conflicting differences in citizens’ conceptions of the good. Minimally, it is important that citizens develop a critical moral perspective on their own behavior considering its potential impact on the rights of others (Hlebowitsh, 2001, 51).

The second horn of the dilemma regards the fact that liberal societies are also committed to providing the widest possible range of freedom for individuals and groups to live their lives as they see fit. This commitment makes them hospitable to a broad scope of ideological diversity. The citizenship demands placed upon liberal democratic citizens tend to be minimal because liberal societies promote a view of justice compatible with an assortment of views. Citizens are granted the maximum

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<sup>1</sup> I will use the phrase ‘education for citizenship’ interchangeably with the terms ‘political education,’ ‘political socialization,’ and ‘civic/citizenship education.’ For my purposes, the unifying theme that connects each is the intentional effort to cultivate a range of capacities and virtues deemed requisite for active participation within a given society.

amount of feasible freedom to live a life of commitment to whatever beliefs are most compatible with their conscience (W. Galston, 1995). Therefore, state legitimacy is constructed upon the uncoerced will of the people, and dissent or consent from citizens that pours forth from a free conscience greatly contributes to that legitimacy.

These two commitments can easily conflict insofar as the liberal state must, to some degree, tolerate those groups whose views are not fully liberal. In order to maintain legitimacy, liberal societies must achieve their aims for citizenship without compromising their defining principles and values – governmental neutrality, freedom of conscience, and fairness being among those in greatest need of constant consideration. The tension produced by this dilemma is especially acute with respect to religion.

Religion is afforded a high degree of protection in liberal democratic societies. For instance, the First Amendment of the United States Constitution forbids the government to establish a state religion as well as assures all citizens the free exercise of their personal beliefs. Former Supreme Court justice Robert H. Jackson offers an explanation for religion's peculiar status in liberal societies:

"[T]he effect of the religious freedom Amendment to our Constitution was to take every form of propagation of religion out of the realm of things which could directly or indirectly be made public business, and thereby be supported in whole or in part at taxpayers' expense. That is a difference which the Constitution sets up between religion and almost every other subject matter of legislation; a difference which goes to the very root of religious freedom....It was intended not only to keep the state's hands out of religion, but to keep religion's hands off the state."<sup>2</sup>

Jackson's comments essentially suggest that regardless of whether fair democratic procedure resulted in the majority deciding to establish a particular doctrine as

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<sup>2</sup> Dissent in *Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing TP.*, 330 U.S. 1 (1947)

orthodox in regard to public observance (or to eliminate the observance of one by a select group), the constitution unequivocally removes religious freedom and matters of the spirit outside of the scope of issues which the government or popular vote can tamper. In other words, religious liberty trumps democratic decision making.

Religion is so integral to personal identity that to coerce belief, to bully conscience, is to in a sense violate the essence of the self.

Justice Jackson's comments also hint at another reason why religion and government are kept at a sufficient distance: to prevent state authority from becoming the puppet of religious caprice. If liberal societies permitted unqualified entanglement between state authority and religion, then the stability of the political rights and democratic norms we now take for granted would continually be vulnerable to the commands of one of the many extant doctrines affirmed within our society. Political liberalism would consequently morph into varying expressions of ethical liberalism wherein the political conception of justice would derive its legitimacy from a particular comprehensive doctrine, placing it at odds with a range of reasonable doctrines citizens endorse (Rawls, 1993). Since the United States is, and has been, home to religious groups that endorse illiberal convictions and promote illiberal<sup>3</sup> practices, the thought of the political conception of justice mirroring them is not a comforting one. Such a political environment would oppress and exclude those individuals whose reason led them to reject the reigning doctrine.

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<sup>3</sup> There are at least two ways in which groups might be thought of as illiberal: (1) they can be illiberal with respect to practices within the group (although they may promote liberal values as political values); (2) groups can be illiberal with respect to the espousal of illiberal values as political values. An example of the former might be the Catholic Church's refusal to admit women to the priesthood. An example of the latter might be the anti-Semitism of some Christian identity groups.

Although citizens of liberal societies are unlikely to ever experience this sort of psychological oppression as an effect of de jure governmental establishment, many may experience it within parochial private associations and communities. Therefore, despite the amount of protection the liberal state affords religion, it must nevertheless uphold the responsibility of protecting its citizens from private as well as public despotism and exploitation. This means that liberal societies must occasionally entertain the question of when to intervene in the affairs of religious groups in order to prevent them from oppressing individual members. One illustration of this point concerns the education of children within illiberal groups; they who, effectively, are involuntary members.

*Isolationists* and *Fundamentalists*<sup>4</sup> represent two distinct religious orientations that tend to challenge the degree of forbearance and tolerance a liberal state would ideally seek to uphold with regard to balancing religious freedom against its interest in citizenship. Generally speaking, isolationists seek separation from mainstream society in order to pursue a consecrated way of life that is absent corrupt worldly influences. Fundamentalists are viewed as believers who hold a literal interpretation of the “fundamentals” of their faith’s doctrine, considering them to be inerrant. One might consider believers who reflect these two orientations as expressing anxiety about how the escalating pluralism within modern societies threatens the continuance of their treasured values and ways of life. Liberal societies are generally suspicious of isolationists and fundamentalists because in resisting the unsettling features of the pluralism they would rather not confront, such groups often deny their members

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<sup>4</sup> I use these two terms very generally because of the difficulty of defining such groups with any precision. Furthermore, the terms can easily describe persons who endorse non-religious doctrines.

opportunities to freely consider a wide range of views about the good or to choose an alternative way of life that might better suit them. Isolationism and fundamentalism signify characteristics that arouse significant concerns about religion's influence on the development of civic virtue.

One central concern liberal states have regarding citizenship and the believers of these orientations is more internal in nature. It regards how little they appear to value critical reasoning and the life of the mind. Theoretically, liberal democracies rest upon reasoned consensus that is the outgrowth of inclusive deliberation and individual choice. Consequently, they require citizens that possess the capacity to adequately engage in this deliberative process. Yet, isolationist groups, like the Amish for example, attempt to sustain a sectarian subculture in which their values can be taken for granted in isolation from others. This usually requires tight social control over members, and often in ways that undermine their autonomy and capacity to reason critically because exposure to alternative beliefs is severely restricted and criticism of the group's beliefs is prohibited. Extreme forms of isolationism might breed psychological captivity.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, because fundamentalists generally hold an inerrantist view about their religious beliefs, their hostility to doctrinal criticism tends to shield members from exposure to views that challenge the validity of those beliefs.

A second central concern of liberal societies regarding the relationship between these two orientations and citizenship is more external in nature, and can be considered a possible consequence of the first. It regards the impact of authoritarian attitudes and coercive practices on other citizens. Fundamentalists generally share the

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<sup>5</sup> By this I mean members who are unable to avail themselves of any opportunity to exit the group because they lack adequate skills and capacities to thrive intellectually and emotionally independent of it.

isolationist's anxiety about their inability to preserve coveted values. But rather than isolate themselves many instead seek avenues through which their religious beliefs can secure a dominant influence across the entire society. A more benign means by which this is done is through lobbying for the enactment of laws. The political activities of the right-leaning religious associations that comprise the Christian Coalition founded by Pat Robertson exemplify such efforts. Among the more malevolent means these groups have used to secure the influence they seek have included harassment and terrorism. Extremist groups like the Ku Klux Klan, traditionally advocates of cultural and racial discrimination, have burned crosses and murdered racial minorities as a means of imposing the influence of their quasi religious beliefs by creating a climate of fear. In either case the groups remain integrated in society, but from a stance of moral contempt, begrudged tolerance, and authoritarianism. These practices and beliefs are not only illiberal, but threaten to continually socialize the young to behaviors that spill over into public life.

But lest we forget, spillover from religious beliefs has become an expected and welcomed occurrence in light of its historical contribution to civic virtue and political stability. I imagine a faith-motivated obligation to show charity through service guides religiously affiliated private organizations such as The Salvation Army or The Red Cross, both of which have had a longstanding positive impact on poverty and public health domestically and internationally. Similarly, what motivated many Abolitionists in their effort to dissolve the system of slavery was a deeply held religious conviction that the entire human family was created free and in God's image. Thus, the mere presence of illiberal characteristics does not mean a priori that

values and capacities beneficial to liberal democracy are not also present, and exerting a stable and dominant influence, within these and other types of religious groups.

Membership in religious associations often serves to infuse meaning, purpose and hope in the lives of individuals by promoting values integral to good conduct and healthy interpersonal relationships; among them love, mutual respect, social responsibility, faithfulness and commitment. “Groups informed by particularistic values are essential to human development. They are the source of views about human flourishing as well as of love, belonging, and solidarity. They are essential to the nurturance and education of children” (Strike, 2001a, 35).

Religious groups also encourage serious thought about the good society and develop behaviors conducive to citizenship. For example, the religious command to give alms to the poor, to render to political authorities what is owed, to live moderately, and to love one’s neighbor promote practices and virtues (like charity, law abidingness, sharing, sacrifice, and mutual respect) that mirror the ideals of liberal citizenship and that reasonable people desire to see spillover into civic life. Evidence of religion’s positive influence on civic virtue is apparent in Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have A Dream” speech.

“I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked place will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together....This will be the day when all of God’s children will be able to sing with a new meaning, “My country, ‘tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim’s pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring”” (King & Washington, 1991, 219).



Employing the particularistic language of his Judeo-Christian faith, King metaphorically projects a yet-to-be-realized vision of human society rooted in Old Testament prophecy. This religious vision echoes, and more importantly places in sharp relief, the supposed solidarity and inclusiveness those entitled to mouth the words of the Star Spangled Banner – American citizens – *should* feel. By juxtaposing his sectarian beliefs with a commonly known civic artifact like this song, King reveals religion’s (Christianity’s) compatibility with liberal values by implying their shared vision of justice. Precisely because religious associations have demonstrated an abundance of “positive spillover” and the capacity to shape good liberal citizens, it is important that the liberal state not allow its very legitimate concern about the negative characteristics of a few religious groups to distort and unfairly stereotype all of religion.

Despite evidence of positive spillover, acknowledgment of the beneficial civic and social functions of religious associations is rarely found within the literature regarding religion and citizenship. Consequently, religious associations are not readily viewed as providing a suitable context for preparing liberal citizens. I would argue this perception is largely due to variations on the “correspondence argument” (Rosenblum, 1998).

The correspondence argument asserts that because liberal democratic character is more likely to be produced within groups whose views and practices compliment liberal principles, liberal societies have an interest in regulating the affairs of private associations. Since there is no uniform respect for tolerance, reasonableness, gender equality, and social justice (among other liberal values) across

all religious associations – and many aggressively and sometimes violently display the opposite – their overall “track record” is suspect regarding congruency with liberal principles. More than likely the attention given to the beliefs and practices of overtly illiberal religious conservatives has overshadowed the peculiar theological and, perhaps, cultural attributes that might distinguish other types of religious believers who exhibit civic-like characteristics.

While suspect in its own right, a popular view of common schools<sup>6</sup> is that they provide the best context for creating liberal citizens. Ideally they provide a political education that promotes a view of citizenship consistent with liberal democratic virtue, and that emphasizes reciprocity, tolerance, social justice and a view of others as free and equal. However, there is some empirical evidence that casts doubt on whether education for citizenship is seriously addressed in most public schools.

“To be sure, enculturation is not limited to denominational schools. Enculturation occurs in public schools, even though they do not have religion classes or appear in their efforts to form a coherent social life. For example, Philip Cusick and Christopher Wheeler report that ”reformed” high schools convey a distinct vision of a society in which individuals strive for personal success while pursuing their self-interest. Institutional norms are competitive, individualistic, and materialistic. Although the private visions of individual teachers may be broader and more humane, it is the institutional norms that are continually reinforced by daily school life....Such studies highlight education as a cultural enterprise and remind us that at the center of any culture are understandings about human nature and human relationships. Public education is not value-neutral; its values mirror our larger society. The vision conveyed in the public school is one of *homo economicus*: rational men and women pursuing their self-interest, seeking material pleasures, guided toward individual success. Without deliberate thought or serious debate, this vision of the individual and of the good life has been gradually adopted as the enculturation aim of public schools over the last half century” (Bryk *et al.*, 1993, 318-319).

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<sup>6</sup> “The term “common school” came to have a specific meaning: a school that was attended in common by all children and in which a common political and social ideology was taught,” in Spring, Joel, *The American School: 1642-2000*, Fifth Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 104.

This passage underlines a tension in public education between the market and the state. The common school ideal of binding diverse citizens together along some sense of their common fate seems to have taken a backseat to the more market-focused, consumerist orientation of public education in contemporary society. K-12 administrators and educators would do well to consistently appraise the degree to which the dominant cultural values that pervade public schools are compatible with the constitutional values it is assumed students internalize as a consequence of the political socialization offered by those schools.

Devout believers are apt to be critical of the predominant influence of corrupt cultural values (e.g., consumerism, nationalism, violence, sex, individualism) within public education. More specifically, they resist the oppressive and unjust effects of the hegemonic influence such values have on public life in general and on their ability to be faithful to a religious worldview that promotes an alternative conception of the good life. The criticism religious parents levy against public schooling tends to bemoan how the staunchly secular ethos within public schools disparages, or at least trivializes, a sense of the transcendent in human life. They generally critique curricula content and the educational aims and practices public schools deem sufficient to equip children for their interminable encounter with a convoluted and decadent modern world. Most elect to withdraw their children in favor of the emphasis parochial religious schools tend to place on character.

Realistically, private associations have shared much of the burden of creating liberal democratic citizens and have done so in ways that state institutions simply could not. What tends to distinguish these organizations is that they embody

purposes and concerns that their members value, but that are not expressly civic (or at least political) in character. For example, religious associations tend to shape members by incorporating them into a network of traditions, practices, and commitments that sustain a vision of human flourishing and social harmony – albeit sometimes rooted in disturbing formulas for “winners” and “losers” – that often contrasts significantly with that of modern secular social reality. The fulfillment of this vision contributes meaning and purpose to members’ personal lives. Since these associations are not agencies of the state, their beliefs and practices are, understandably, less likely to explicitly cohere with liberal values.

Yet, one should not presume that liberal principles are not at work throughout the associational life of these groups nor, in such cases, to a substantial degree. One might argue that liberalism is a kind of secularized version of Protestantism – or at least is much influenced by it. Given this, Christian as well as other doctrines quite possibly possess the moral capital that enable groups organized around them to be reliable contexts for cultivating the character appropriate for liberal citizenship. History has painstakingly demonstrated that creating liberal democratic citizens is, and has been, an ambiguous and contentious process, and one which is inexorably shared by the state at every level from the home to the government.

This dissertation is a philosophical analysis of the structure of faith which constitutes a Christian view of citizenship. My purpose is to examine the stance that Christianity takes with respect to the political dimension in life. Specifically, I mean a view of the world concerning society and human vocation. I use the term political dimension in its broadest sense: as that dimension which encompasses social and

economic, as well as narrowly “political” relations. It represents what people of faith might deem the secular dimension of life. I have chosen to emphasize a particular structure of Judeo-Christian faith, the prophetic tradition, because the literature that addresses religion and citizenship mostly ignores it and strands similar to it.

I will introduce a theory of religion and citizenship by working out the educational implications of the theology of the prophetic tradition. The roots of the prophetic Christian tradition are located in biblical portrayals of Old Testament prophets whose primary interest was critiquing oppressive institutionalized arrangements for the purpose of preserving human dignity. In doing so, biblical prophets would also arouse the remembrance of a normative memory (i.e. a commonly understood morality). This was done in the hope of revitalizing a community’s impetus to continually transform social reality such that it conformed to the standards of humaneness established in its sacred covenant with Yahweh, wherein the tradition derives its purpose.

My central task is to examine in what way, if at all, the prophetic strand of faith implicates involvement in the political dimension of life. That is to say, is involvement in the political dimension of life an inextricable aspect of the religious life and, if so, in what sense might it constitute a religious vocation for believers qua citizens? I assert that the structure of faith encountered within the prophetic Christian tradition necessarily implicates involvement within the political dimension of life in all its aspects – cultural, economic, and governmental. I also assert that this structure of faith sustains a vision of citizenship consistent with liberal democratic values. In order to contextualize its vision of citizenship, this study emphasizes expressions of

the prophetic tradition within the theology and practices of the Protestant Black Church in the United States, but does not limit itself to it.

By developing a prophetic view of citizenship I hope to increase understanding regarding how religious training<sup>7</sup> positively contributes to preparing liberal citizens, and simultaneously challenge prevailing views that perceive religion as having a negative influence on creating liberal citizens. In recent years, various authors writing in the philosophy of education have expressed reservations concerning the relationship between religious training and education for liberal citizenship. They have claimed that autonomy and democratic character are essential to liberal citizenship and that religious training inhibits the development of both. I would like to make two points regarding views consonant with this perception.

First, in making these arguments, these authors generally focus on religious groups that are either isolationist or fundamentalist. I find it of little surprise that the religious orientation of fundamentalists and separatists evoke concerns about autonomy and democratic character. When focus is restricted to groups whose beliefs and practices appear to be the most incongruent with liberal democratic values it produces an incomplete and therefore flawed notion of the relationship between religion and citizenship; and one which is capable of undermining much of what can be understood regarding how religious education might be a positive force in the socialization of liberal citizens.

Within the discipline two Supreme Court cases – *Yoder v Wisconsin* and *Mozert v Hawkins* – have strongly influenced how religion is understood. They

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<sup>7</sup> I will use the terms “religious training” and “religious education” interchangeably. Both are intended to suggest a conscious process of instruction in a doctrine with the purpose of instilling a partisan point of view or set of beliefs.

involve religious believers who personify conservative beliefs. These cases have shaped the contour of perceptions about religious believers in general and the obstacles they present regarding citizenship. For example:

“Many religious conservatives do not want to encourage their members to express and foster their individuality....They do not want their members to examine their lives critically; they want their members to obey the dictates of their religion. Religious conservatives want to insulate their members from others, to some degree at least, so they will not be tempted to leave the religion. They frequently want their children to attend school with other believers; and they typically want to speak the language of faith among fellow believers, not a secular language accessible to all their fellow citizens. They rarely believe in equality. Rather, they often believe that men should be in charge, with women taking on subservient roles in their communities. Religious conservatives want to shield their members from the influence of nonbelievers. By doing so, the community protects itself and the souls of its members”(Spinner-Halev, 2000b, 3).

Hence, the isolationists and fundamentalists dominate the literature and are discussed as if they represent religion generally (Brighthouse, 2000; Burtt, 1995; Callan, 1996; Gutmann, 1987; Weithman, 1997).

Second, while most authors at least note that not all religious groups are like fundamentalists and isolationists, the overall effect of the philosophy of education literature has been to permit these groups to stand for religion generally via assumptions that they differ from other groups only in being more extreme and via the failure to seriously consider other religious traditions. This is an error which has not only led to a superficial understanding of religion, but even, I believe, of religious groups that hold controversial theological views. Despite both being theologically conservative, the Amish and Hezbollah are very different!

In many instances when religious groups other than those highlighted by these court cases are mentioned at all they tend to be viewed as though they are merely less

virulent versions of these groups. Consequently, the substance of alternative groups is trivialized and their potential relevance to citizenship is essentially overlooked. However, alternative religious orientations very likely represent differing implications concerning liberal citizenship. The presence of a wide range of diverse religious groups complicates any simplistic characterization of religious belief and religious education. Thus, the reputation of religious education should not be derived strictly from the traits of specific groups.

Fortunately, the compass of moral intuition points most individuals toward moral principles compatible with the bedrock of liberal democratic virtue.<sup>8</sup> John Rawls (1972) offers a theory regarding the development of a sense of justice that has a strong communitarian strain. He believes private associations play a vital role in developing a sense of justice – a perception that could be interpreted as them having a positive influence on civic virtue. This idea has some credence with respect to many religious associations insofar as social justice is among the sacred values advanced by their comprehensive doctrines. Other virtues commonly shared among the major religions that contribute to civic virtue are compassion, reconciliation, forgiveness, redemption, charity, humility, and repentance – all instrumental toward wholesome cooperation, decency and social justice.

Consequently, the religious training offered by many groups might actually represent one of the more reliable sources of character development that is congruent with the common aims of political socialization in liberal democratic societies. Any

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<sup>8</sup> I use the term “liberal democratic virtue” very loosely because liberalism has no special claim to concepts such as tolerance, equality, freedom, justice or individual rights. As a political doctrine liberalism affirms them but no more authentically than many of its sectarian and/or philosophical counterparts.



attempt by state supported schools to foster the virtues listed above would likely be perceived as controversial by a secular audience (even if those means did not violate any criteria for religious establishment). As a result, liberal religious groups may hold an advantage in creating citizens capable of enhancing the prevailing conception of justice in society given the moral resources they would bring to an overlapping consensus were they willing to contribute to one.

The underlying point is that the liberal state need not allow its paranoia about constraining “fundamental-isms” to impair its ability to intelligently appraise diverse expressions of religious belief or to recognize the practical and instrumental significance of the spiritual and civic purposes religious private associations seek to fulfill. For example, through the neo-scholasticism of Jacques Maritain, post Vatican II Roman catholic religious education has embodied the personality of a prophetic church by predisposing the character of members toward virtues like love, social justice and critical reasoning in light of “the dispositions of mind and heart essential to the sustenance of a convivial democratic society” (Bryk et al., 1993, 35). Similarly, Quakers are generally in opposition to hierarchal structures, sacraments, and oath taking within their societies, believing that the “inner light” within all members provides access to divine revelation. Quakers are also renowned for their pacifism and commitment to social justice, as evidenced in their past efforts to emancipate slaves.

Ultimately, the more that can be understood about religious groups aligned more towards the political “left” or even the center of religious expression in our society, the better the state will be able to balance religious liberty against its own

interests; and to perhaps entertain the possibilities religious training may provide for equipping individuals with the virtues befitting liberal citizens. This study should be interpreted as concerning itself with the socialization received through religious education broadly speaking, and not just specifically through religious schools.

In this dissertation I argue that the Judeo-Christian prophetic tradition implies a form of religious training that adequately equips citizens with the virtues and values befitting their role in public life. The prophetic tradition emphasizes a concern for liberation and justice and its Christian expression can be traced to the Exodus account of the Israelite community in Egypt. Prophetic believers express what they consider a biblical worldview, but one which also sustains an ideal of social justice that fosters political engagement. They generally hold liberal political views and are not theocrats. While the prophetic tradition has Jewish, Protestant and Catholic variants, I will emphasize its expression through the Black Church in the United States.

I will argue three things about the prophetic tradition. First, I will claim that its central feature is its insistence on standing in judgment of state policy and secular cultural norms in the name of God and on behalf of the poor and oppressed, calling for justice and liberation from oppression. The tradition expresses a prophetic message to the secular world – in the sense that adherents critique those who violate God’s prophetic values (e.g., love, justice, peace, freedom) – while requiring that its adherents remain integrated within that world. Second, I will claim that the prophetic tradition poses no threat to either autonomy or democratic character. Indeed, the prophetic tradition has historically been essential to the development of a liberal

democratic outlook. Third, I will claim that the prophetic tradition advances virtues that contribute to the development of liberal citizens.

There are two features of the prophetic tradition that may still be seen as problematic. First, the prophetic tradition, as represented in the Old Testament, views the relationship between the Nation of Israel and God as a covenantal relationship. Old Testament prophets spoke to the Nation not only as spokespersons for God, but admonished the Nation to honor the terms of a covenant it had entered into with God. America is neither a covenantal community nor a theocracy. How then should the civic implications of the prophetic traditions be articulated when one attempts to justify the exercise of political power to those who are subject to it? Can adherents of the prophetic stance interpret the core norms it advances as consistent with liberal democratic principles?

Second, the prophetic tradition often brings religious language to the public square. Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech is a case in point. It might be argued that both features are illiberal. The first is essentially theocratic in character. However, expressions of the prophetic tradition in the black church generally do not endorse a vision of a theocratic political society. The second seems inconsistent with the expectation that the citizens of a liberal democracy will utilize a neutral public language in discussing civic matters.

The fact that we might accept that open ethical dialogue about the common good should not be grounded in the authority of sectarian belief is heavily influenced by our understanding of two clauses in the Bill of Rights: the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise clause. These two clauses effectively erect a "high wall"

between the so-called public and private spheres, and have historically informed legal deliberation in matters regarding a conflict of interest between religious believers and the state. The idea of a separation between spheres gives shape to the general focus of Chapter 2. There I provide a discussion of the relationship between religion and public education in the American context and review attitudes about political education that have resulted.

What is common about many of those attitudes is that they advance the idea that the values and principles that animate both private associational life and liberal democracy must be mutually supportive. While the core of Protestantism historically dominated this outlook, more explicitly political values presently reign. This ‘correspondence’ argument basically suggests that liberal citizens are more likely to be produced by associations that conduct their internal affairs in a manner that advances liberal values, and that the state’s legitimate interest in producing liberal citizens may require it to regulate private associations.

The formal content of education for citizenship in US public schools is influenced by the tenets of liberal and democratic theory. The values they endorse are foundational to the vitality of the state. Consequently, many proposals for political education offered by educational theorists in some form or another endorse critical reasoning (or personal autonomy) and the character and capacities necessary to ensure that the institutions of the state remain stable and just. Due to the appearance of incongruence between liberal democratic values and the obligations of faith, the socialization and training that occurs within religious associations is often considered a threat to the development of autonomy and the cultivation of democratic

character in children. Chapter 3 examines doubts about religious education from a liberal democratic perspective.

Chapter 4 sketches a kind of typology of religious attitudes that have widespread expression in American society. Many caricatures of religious believers exist within popular culture and, unfortunately, those that are the most threatening to a modern secular society are often exploited and come to stand for all religious believers and forms of religious expression generally. I attempt to distinguish among types of religious believers by highlighting three broad expressions of religious belief identified by Nancy Rosenblum (2000) in her discussion of a political orientation she labels “integralism.” Rosenblum describes integralism as a challenge to democratic government in the name of faith which results from attempts to honor the mandates of religious doctrine within a secular public culture. I consider how these three general types of integralists might reconcile their identities as both believers and citizens. In extreme cases this could mean that one of these identities is essentially abandoned. I use the typology I create to locate, in a very general way, the political orientation of believers who fall within the prophetic Christian tradition. I then discuss the origins of this tradition, its substantive concerns, and religious expressions in American society.

In Chapter 5 I attempt to develop a view of citizenship from a prophetic Christian perspective. In doing so I address the following: (1) how the Prophetic tradition shapes citizens; (2) the role of the citizen in the Prophetic tradition; (3) the issues concerning liberal democratic doubts about religious education raised in Chapter 3; (4) and issues regarding what might be a theocratic orientation within the

Prophetic tradition (e.g. the nature of the covenant and the use of religious speech in the public square).

The prophetic tradition has been given religious expression in several groups: Quakers, “dissident” evangelical groups, Jewish traditions connected to Exodus and Passover, as well as Latin American (Roman Catholic) and African American (Protestant) Liberation Theology movements to name a few. In Chapter 6 I will focus on expressions of the prophetic tradition within the Black Church and discuss its vision of citizenship as religious vocation. I plan to examine: (1) the birth of the Black Church as a prophetic act through conscious departure from white Protestant cultural norms and racial presuppositions; (2) the Black Church as nurturer of prophetic imagination through sermons, hymns and spirituals; (3) citizenship as religious vocation: from appropriation of prophetic values to the transformation of America’s racist society.

Chapter 7 will discuss general conclusions regarding my guiding research questions.

### *Significance of the Problem*

Any argument regarding the relationship between religion and citizenship that is predicated upon a distortion of religious education is remiss. The challenge though of attempting to persuade skeptics that all religious believers are not alike is evident in the likelihood that they’ll agree. However, they are apt to suggest that while believers may differ in the degree to which they exhibit certain traits, they are all the same in kind: intolerant and fanatical purveyors of myth and superstition whose

convictions translate into conservative political agendas – or something analogous to this. While your distinction pertains to essence, theirs probably hinges on type.

Much of the literature on religion and citizenship seems to view religious education and the religiously devout with grave suspicion at best. Fundamentalist- and isolationist-like characterizations are conspicuously present in the language various authors use to describe religious believers, as if these two orientations represent an archetype against which every believer and every group *must* be measured. To be sure, groups of these two orientations have a history of exhibiting “illiberal” characteristics; therefore the skepticism is to some degree understandable. However, filtering our appraisal of all religion through the profile of some caricature thought to perfectly capture the essence of every believer or group seems a bit procrustean, if not irresponsible. Religious groups whose traits are distinguishable from fundamentalists and isolationists are likely to differ not only in degree but also in kind; not merely qualitatively, but substantively. Thus, for all intents and purposes, is it not reasonable to assume that the implications such groups have regarding citizenship will also differ substantively?

But rarely is this line of reasoning persuasive. It does not easily assuage images of children forced to make a permanent choice (but who seem psychologically ill equipped to do so) between the faith-strengthened bonds of their community and extrication to an alien modern world. Nor does it easily assuage the perception that a 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian “crusade” is in effect, led by right-leaning politicians, lobbyists, and “holy-rollers” who champion bills saturated with sectarian morality. Or, lastly, images of generations of adult women in theocratic and andro-centric societies

forbidden (by men) to appear unveiled in public or with men who are non-relatives, as if they are the ones who most lack discipline and discretion. The idea that people of faith are more or less “mild” to “extra spicy” variants of fanatics is easy to accept as truth.

But conservative religious belief is not a 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon. It’s been just as much a strand of the American fabric as voting. America’s founders were not unmindful of the threat illiberal religious convictions posed to the common good. Though, contrary to many contemporary political leaders, it appears that they held more reverence for the sovereignty of conscience and the scope of liberty sufficient for reason to navigate its own way to truth and the good. Although there is much disagreement on this point, from this author’s point of view the Founders’ understanding of the relationship between religion and the state held that although the public good was of extreme importance, the uninhibited conscience was of ultimate importance.

Thomas Jefferson observed:

“Our country has been the first to prove to the world two truths, the most salutary to human society, that man can govern himself, and that religious freedom is the most effective anodyne against religious dissension: the maxims of civil government being reversed in that of religion, where it’s true form is “divided we stand, united we fall”” (Hutson, 2005, 137).

John Jay noted:

“Adequate security is also given to the rights of conscience and private judgment. They are by nature subject to no control but that of the Deity and in that free situation they are now left. Every man is permitted to consider, to adore, to worship his Creator in the manner most agreeable to his conscience. No opinions are dictated, no rules of faith prescribed, no preference given to one sect to the prejudice of others. The constitution, however, has wisely declared, that the “liberty of conscience thereby granted shall not be so construed as to excuse acts of licentiousness, or justify practices inconsistent



with the peace or safety of the State.” In a word, the convention by whom that constitution was formed were of the opinion that the gospel of Christ, like the ark of God, would not fall, though unsupported by the arm of flesh; and happy would it be for mankind if that opinion prevailed more generally” (Hutson, 2005, 135).

The Founders were well aware of illiberal religious groups and felt that when such groups violated constitutional laws that they should be punished. Yet, during their time, the life of faith in and of itself was never culturally untenable; never broadly perceived as some exotic expression of irrationality. In light of their historical experiences in Europe, the Founders wanted to play no part in permitting matters of the spirit to be at the mercy of government (or vice versa). On the contrary, most of the Founders felt faith should be freely chosen and that they needed to provide the most feasible amount of liberty for religious exercise.

Here I have tried to make three basic points regarding a popular perception of religion in America. One, extreme religious groups have been allowed to represent religion as a whole. Two, all citizens of faith are subsequently viewed as if they are variations on the radicals whose religious training negatively impacts citizenship. Three, the educational implications of groups that differ from extremists therefore tend to get overlooked. Taking this problem into account, I would like to offer what I consider to be two significant, yet less apparent, effects of permitting fundamentalists and isolationists to stand for religion generally.

In the first place, doing so diminishes the instrumental importance of religious associations. Membership in faith communities often serves to foster values integral to human flourishing and the common good. Michael Walzer (1995) argues that small, particularistic groups possess a ‘heroism’ that enables escape from the

deprivation, inferiority, alienation, and general insecurity that individuals experience in society in some form or another. It is in these groups that loyalty, civility, cooperation, and social trust are cultivated. “People are unlikely to treat their fellow citizens with justice or decency, they are unlikely to forge common bonds with them, unless their local culture forms and sustains such bonds cognitively and affectively” (Strike, 2001a, 42).

While the state may possess a strong concern for the welfare of children, it primarily focuses on an aspect of the person that parental concern is less motivated by: their political self and the development of what John Rawls (1993) describes as a capacity for a sense of justice. One might think of the state being principally motivated by the potential consequences if individuals are unreasonably or involuntarily attached to a particular culture or community at the expense of their identification with the broader society and its political norms for justice and social cooperation. Conversely, one might consider religious parents being principally motivated by the potential consequences if their children are sufficiently *unattached* to their culture’s and/or religious community’s values when confronted by a kaleidoscope of ‘worldly’ and often abhorrent attitudes, customs and practices within the larger society that tempt youngsters and compete for their child’s servitude and devotion.

The parental concerns of the devout need not be directed toward any specific doctrine, philosophy, or group. There is something identifiable within the general ethos of the larger society (be it excessive materialism or an unhealthy competitiveness) that I think many citizens experience discomfort with at some level.

And very few people, particularly parents, are willing to allow these psychological forces to have free reign on someone they feel responsible for. Although state educational institutions tend to focus on remedying the most recalcitrant forces within society, they cannot substitute the role often played by religious associations, which do a good job of sparring with the more subtle and often negative forces that tend to assail one's sense of significance and trivialize one's conception of the good.

Secondly, to the extent that the general ethos of the larger society either tacitly or purposely promotes the belief that radicals stand for religion generally, this attitude is oppressive to religion – particularly reasonable<sup>9</sup> groups – for at least two reasons. One, this kindles a prejudicial suspicion regarding believers' allegiance to liberal political values. For instance, religious malevolence, in contrast to religious munificence, is granted a superfluous amount of attention by the mass media. I assume that such an imbalanced focus, particularly in an increasingly secular general public, decreases the probability that non-believing citizens will query beyond what they see and hear regarding citizens of faith. Two, I also believe this partiality symbolically endorses a less refined view of reciprocity<sup>10</sup>: retributive backlashes, or (more colloquially) an "eye for an eye." In a sense, it legitimates a chain of reactionary deeds that inevitably prompt an equally reflexive and provincial response. In a society whose ethos funds the profiling of religion, what kind of reaction would one expect from the religiously devout (particularly the most extreme among them)? Within such an environment citizens of faith have to cope with the unlikelihood they

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<sup>9</sup> I use a Rawlsian notion of reasonableness (i.e. amenable to constitutional norms and political principles of justice).

<sup>10</sup> Here I refer to John Rawls's idea of public reason, which pertains to how speech should be used in dialogue concerning fundamental political questions of justice.

will be treated civilly by a general public unwilling to reconcile their true nature with a distorted conception of religion.

The failure to recognize reasonable religious groups is a form of silencing and oppression that diminishes the practical significance of religion in liberal democracy and undermines the ties of civic friendship so vital to reciprocity and tolerance. It is a form of partisanship that in effect adds legitimacy to the implicit claim of religious fundamentalists that they represent the authentic voice of God and speak for all adherents of their respective faiths.

The significance of this dissertation is that it offers a response to this problem by illuminating the doctrine of one of the many extant reasonable religious traditions; and specifically, explores that which anchors its allegiance to constitutional norms and liberal democratic ideals of justice. The prophetic tradition represents a venerable religious voice concerning matters of justice. My hope is that by exposing how reasonable religious orientations like the prophetic tradition secure their adherents' allegiance to political values – and, hence, strengthen liberal institutions – through the process of association as well as through doctrinal beliefs, they will appear less exotic and enigmatic.

## Chapter 2: Background of the Study

Due to the multifarious contexts in which moral development can occur, it seems that liberal democratic citizens are created not born. Cultivating the virtues and capacities befitting members of such societies must, therefore, flow from deliberate action rather than from some form of osmotic, arbitrary acclimation. Liberal societies permit great diversity in the ideas individuals and private associations endorse. Yet the correlation between character and citizenship suggests that private associations have a responsibility to refrain from cultivating illiberal convictions and practices regardless of the beliefs they affirm. If not, their members might possibly commit oppressive acts towards other citizens. Enculturation within the home, the mosque, and the neighborhood that is capable of invoking tolerance, thoughtfulness, respect and social justice helps toward ensuring that every citizen is able to enjoy the full benefits of free and equal citizenship, particularly those outside of a given group's circle of exclusivity. "It is thus political socialization that breaches the wall of separation between the public and private" (Strike, 1998). The interest liberal democratic societies have in socializing their members to liberal democratic convictions extends to a concern for the socialization that occurs in private associations.

Americans have generally sensed an important relationship between private associations, especially religious associations, and civic virtue. Religion has largely been viewed as making a positive contribution. On the whole, the founders of America valued religion's influence on good conduct. Many considered it a useful midwife for securing civic virtue on account of their assumption that religion anchors

morality in such a manner that it becomes enmeshed in the hearts and minds of individuals.

Although he advocated a high wall between church and state and endorsed a rationalized form of Christianity, even Thomas Jefferson believed religion was useful toward achieving civic virtue if citizens were to act in a moral and responsible fashion (Corbett & Hemeyer, 1999). Benjamin Franklin was a tolerant deist who believed that ordinary people were weak and that they required religion to restrain their vice and to support virtue. He asserted, “I believe in one God, Creator of the Universe....That he ought to be worshiped. That the most acceptable service we render to him is doing good to his other children” (Corbett & Hemeyer, 1999, 67). Similarly, George Washington declared “[o]f all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports” (Rosenblum, 2000, 97). Such attitudes influenced the course of political education in public schools.

Many early educational reformers, like Horace Mann, tended to view political education more from a civic republican or democratic perspective. As secretary of the Massachusetts board of education, Mann was among the first group of individuals with the time and authority to consider the social functions of schooling and to dictate education policy. Mann felt civic education was the key to creating the good society. Motivated by his interest in forming emotional bonds between citizens and the state, he strongly emphasized political instruction that promoted patriotism and instilled the basic principles of republican government.

Mann also believed that political education in common schools should include religious instruction based on a nonsectarian use of the Bible, “with the teaching of broad religious principles common to all Christian denominations” (Spring, 2001). To his credit Mann proposed that instruction avoid controversial political or religious ideas. Instead, he suggested that teachers read texts (including the Bible) without commentary and evade contentious discussions in the classroom. However, most common school reformers of his time viewed moral education as synonymous with training in Christian doctrine. Consequently, this attitude grounded public virtue in sectarian belief and a political creed that unfairly privileged Protestant Anglo-American cultural groups.

In their efforts to create a distinct American identity 19<sup>th</sup> century educators found it difficult to keep education for citizenship free of religious bias and authoritarianism. Some past approaches to political education, although presumably well intentioned, often resulted in policies and practices that were intolerant and parochial.<sup>11</sup>

“Historically schools were justified as critical in bringing different peoples together to participate in a common and shared identity, one in which every person was recognizable to every other person as a citizen of the same nation. Today the emphasis appears to have shifted, and what was once taken as an important role of the schools – advancing a single common identity – is sometimes viewed as advancing the interests of the dominant group over those who are different and powerless”(Feinberg, 1998, 3).

Thus, despite the positive educational role religion had come to play in public schools in regard to fostering civic virtue, political socialization quickly became corrupted

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<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, some of those policies were legally sanctioned.

when schools established a Protestant hegemony which was oppressive to non-Protestants.

An example is the religious prejudice that led Catholics to opt for private schools. Nineteenth century public schools in the United States were effectively aligned with Protestant religious values. Some textbooks contained anti-Catholic sentiments, and a Protestant version of the bible was used for religious instruction. This reinforced a prejudice the Protestant majority already held towards Catholics and consequently forced Catholics to open their own schools as an alternative. Catholic parents felt that the anti-Catholic curriculum and ethos within common schools stigmatized their children and threatened to foster a sense of contempt for their own culture (Spring, 2001). Although public school administrators were principally concerned with creating a common American culture, morality, and political ideology in the face of an influx of immigrants, the practices they endorsed unreasonably intruded upon the rights of not only Catholics, but also other citizens considered socially unacceptable.

This Protestant hegemony has been largely dismantled by the Supreme Court since World War II. Decisions in three specific Supreme Court cases successfully unraveled the stitching binding religion and citizenship in public schools. In *Engel v Vitale* (1962), the court declared government sponsored school prayer unconstitutional because it was inconsistent with the Establishment Clause. As part of a program of “moral and spiritual training,” the State Board of Regents for New York public schools composed a nondenominational prayer that students were to recite every morning in an effort to combat what they perceived to be a decline in



student's morality. The court ruled against the state endorsed prayer recitation – despite it being voluntary – because it drew upon the theological influence of a particular religion. In two other cases, *Abington School District v Schempp* (1963) & *Murray v Curlett* (1963), the Supreme Court forbade state approved reading of Bible passages and the recitation of the Lord's Prayer. As a result, a test was created to evaluate Establishment issues placed before the courts.<sup>12</sup>

The central thrust of the establishment test suggests that the policy in question must have a secular purpose, and its primary effect must neither advance nor inhibit religion if it is to satisfy the scope of legislative power circumscribed by the Constitution. The Supreme Court did not completely remove religion from the public schools. Rather it determined how it should *not* be used.

In recent scholarship writers such as Robert Putnam (1993; 2000) have emphasized the importance of private associations for citizenship. But while these associations include religious groups, the emphasis has tended to focus on how the process of association itself shapes character rather than on whatever substantive beliefs or ideas the private association promotes. In *Bowling Alone* (2000) Putnam examines the correlation between civic engagement and social capital. Putnam argues that the institutions that form civil society are crucial to sustaining democracy and ultimately the economic well-being of a society. He feels voluntary associations contribute social capital (the collective value of all social networks and the inclinations that arise from these networks) to liberal democracy through their “external” effects on the public culture and their “internal” effects on the individuals participating in them. The premise behind the concept of social capital is that social

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<sup>12</sup> See *Lemon v Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602 (1971).

networks have value because they instrumentally give rise to “social trust” and “civic virtue.” These are thought to produce their most powerful effects when embedded in dense networks of reciprocal social relations.

Other work on private associations has produced a more negative picture of the role of religion in shaping citizens. Scholars have discussed how religious groups may undercut citizenship by noting negative aspects of religious groups, like their role in promoting patriarchy. Some feminists evaluate this issue from a vantage point that goes beyond those that merely critique beliefs and practices that intentionally perpetuate gender inequality. Their concern is the ubiquity of androcentrism. They argue that it is inconspicuously expressed through patriarchy tacitly nourished within the institution of the family, which they contend socializes males into positions of privilege and relegates women into positions of subjugation (Okin, 1989). As a broadly functioning cultural norm, patriarchy has, among other things, restricted women’s independence from the family on a global level. Following the logic of this argument, children acquire their values and ideas in the family's sexist setting, then grow up to enact these ideas as adults.

Some feminists believe that religious associations are particularly adroit at this form of enculturation and that they represent the most formidable stronghold with regard to the seedbeds of patriarchy in civil society. “For the world’s major religions, in their actual human form, have not always been outstanding respecters of basic human rights or of the equal dignity and inviolability of persons. Some, indeed, have gone so far as to create systems of law that deny the equal rights of persons and justify violations of their dignity and their person....Although it is difficult to

distinguish between a religion and the cultural traditions that surround it, the Hindu, Islamic, and Confucian traditions have all with some plausibility been accused of denigrating the value of female life in ways that have undermined women's claim to basic goods of subsistence" (Nussbaum, 1997, 94;105).

Key to their argument is what I will call the "correspondence principle." Consistent with the logic of the correspondence principle these authors suggest that private associations may be regulated for the public good – i.e. for the sake of citizenship. Private associations breach the distinction between the public and private sphere.

#### *The Correspondence Argument*

Parents have many practical alternatives to public education, with private, parochial (religious), and home schooling being the most common. Because these options extend from private associations many presume that the enculturation children experience within them is influenced by illiberal values. This is because private associations are free to organize their internal affairs according to whatever beliefs they so choose (within the limitations of law).

The group's beliefs have a public consequence to the extent that they influence the behavior of members in their role as citizens. The public effects of associational life stem from the tendency that values and attitudes acquired in private associations spillover into the public sphere. Private associations breach the public-private distinction. Accordingly, the interest the liberal state has in citizenship

necessarily requires legitimate efforts to ensure that the internal organization and practices of private associations conform to public principles of justice.

Arguments that more or less endorse state regulation of the affairs of private associations are an expression of the *correspondence argument*. According to Nancy Rosenblum (1998) such arguments assert the idea that “the relation between our associational life and liberal democracy is, or must be, reciprocally supportive; that liberal democratic character and commitment must find their origin and vital compliment in an array of independent groups” (Rosenblum, 1998, 10). Examples of the kinds of proposals put forth in the name of the correspondence argument include: 1) policies some feminists advance to support the financial independence of women from the family; 2) tighter controls on the activities of hate groups; and 3) restrictions on private schools, home schooling, or exemptions from public schooling. Essentially, correspondence arguments accentuate political virtue and the stability of the democratic social structure.

Kenneth Strike (1998) offers an interpretation of the correspondence argument that asserts both a normative premise and an empirical premise. The normative premise he develops suggests that liberal societies have a legitimate interest in regulating both public and private associations in order to produce liberal citizens. His empirical premise suggests that liberal citizens are more likely to be produced by associations that hold liberal beliefs and that conduct their affairs and advance their views according to liberal principles (Strike, 1998, 346). Yet despite the plausibility of its premises, the correspondence argument permits the enforcement of congruence

between the public and private sphere at the risk of compromising other liberal values.

Unqualified, the correspondence argument places the state in tension with liberal values such as free speech, free press, free association, and religious liberty, as well as the principles of tolerance and liberal neutrality that characterize liberal democracies (Strike, 1998). Additionally, it would permit the state to regulate the affairs of religious associations in a manner that would violate freedom of conscience and that would severely reduce the range of virtues fostered within civil society. This is so because, unqualified, the correspondence argument seemingly presupposes that citizenship trumps conscience. It could be argued, however, that even if political socialization trumps conscience in principle, it may not do so in cases that lack empirical proof that citizenship is at risk. Presently, the judicial branch of the government attempts to honor competing liberal values by doing its best to balance them in situations where matters of conscience collide with the state's interest in political socialization.

In addition to these two points, there are more subtle problems with the correspondence argument. I will discuss three: One, its view of how private associations function is suspect. It presupposes an erroneous view regarding the spillover of beliefs and attitudes between the private and public sphere. Two, even if its view of how associations work were correct, it presupposes a mistaken view of the substance of religion. Three, it ignores cases of "positive spillover" with regard to religious associations and their contribution to the public sphere.

Nancy Rosenblum challenges the logic of arguments that promote state regulation over the affairs of private associations as a means of satisfying an interest in producing liberal citizens. She is particularly skeptical of the presupposition underpinning them.

“Every variation on the congruence theme rests on the assumption that dispositions and practices shaped in one association spill over to other contexts. This is a vulnerable point....For the logic of congruence does not come automatically equipped with a social or psychological dynamic to explain why dispositions cultivated in one association can be expected to be stable and transmitted to other spheres” (Rosenblum, 1998, 38).

My sense is that Rosenblum’s skepticism has not so much to do with whether we can safely assume spill over is possible. Rather it appears to concern an observable feature of our psychological constitution: environmental and cultural influences affect the behaviors humans are motivated to exhibit. What she is questioning, essentially, is the premise upon which correspondence arguments justify state regulation of private associations (i.e. Kenneth Strike’s formulation of the empirical premise). In other words, Rosenblum believes it is suspect.

Again, one reason might be because people tend to discriminate between the conduct they feel is appropriate in one social context as opposed to another and adjust their behavioral expectations. Even in the public square one notices that the observance of liberal principles seems relaxed in certain settings and more intensified in others. For instance, citizens understand that it is acceptable to be intolerant, irrational and belligerent at political party conventions during the Presidential election season, and unforgivable to be so while standing at Ground Zero or the Vietnam War Memorial. Likewise, although the Roman Catholic Church upholds patriarchy with

respect to the priesthood, it does not endorse gender discrimination regarding public or civic matters.

Rosenblum suggests that any given environment might supply an outlet for the expression of dispositions frowned upon in a separate context; that the character shaped in one experience of associational life may provide oppositional force to the formative effects of experiences in a second. She adds that individuals possess an acute ability to bracket the behavioral expectations demanded of them in different spheres of social life. “We have overwhelming evidence that individuals exercise capacities for discrimination and moral adaptation all the time, even among seemingly close situations. This includes a refined capacity to resist spill over. Indeed, part of the “discipline of culture” is to discriminate among associations” (Rosenblum, 1998, 49). Her comments hint that the view the correspondence argument presupposes of how private associations function is doubtful. The implication of such doubt is that the state will not likely be any more successful creating liberal citizens by regulating the affairs of illiberal private associations than it has been by regulating the affairs of its own institutions.

Rosenblum believes that excessive attention is directed toward the categories and formal character of groups in civil society, but not enough toward the social and psychological dynamics of membership – wherein she believes the insights of moral psychology rest. “Social structure and phenomenology do not work independently, and neither should be considered alone” (Rosenblum, 1998, 47). She provides some insight into the civic contribution of associational life through the philosophical insight of John Rawls and what he calls the “morality of association.” In doing so she

offers a phenomenological explanation of why transfer might occur in cases where it appears to, and also indirectly challenges the empirical presupposition underpinning the correspondence argument (specifically, that dispositions and practices shaped in one association automatically spill over to other contexts). Rather than place undue focus on liberal democratic beliefs and principles, Rawls concerns himself with the transformative effects of the experience of association on personal character, particularly within contexts where individuals feel affirmed and incorporated (Rawls, 1972).

The civic benefits that flow from the morality of association are predicated upon individuals willingly regulating their personal conduct in reference to the behavior and points of view of others. Rosenblum explains that reciprocity operating through affective ties is what animates the morality of association.<sup>13</sup> Within any given association, relational ties conform to a system of roles and rules that individuals come to understand through the inherent authority that rests within the approval and disapproval of other members. Members learn the virtues appropriate to a particular role and its ideal expression. “Now each particular ideal is presumably explained in the context of the aims and purposes of the association to which the role or position in question belongs. In due course a person works out a conception of the whole system of cooperation that defines the association and the ends which it serves” (Rawls, 1972, 410).

Of central importance is that members detect evidence that the rules and arrangements of the association are just, thus causing them to feel assured that its

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<sup>13</sup> John Rawls does not explicitly suggest that this reciprocity is dependent upon the association affirming liberal values, although I assume he would prefer it.



activities are beneficial to all involved. “[M]embers come to appreciate that the group’s system of cooperation requires a variety of actions and points of view, and they learn to take on the perspectives of others” (Rosenblum, 1998, 50). As a result of developing the capacity to take on the perspectives of others, members gain greater recognition of the willingness of others to do their fair share and the social trust this dynamic generates. Rawls believes that the development of affective ties between members, and of a psychological attachment to this system of interaction, motivates individuals to comply with the obligations of membership. Hence they willingly cooperate toward fulfilling the group’s purposes by satisfying the expectations of their position.

Rather than spill-over or transfer, Rawls expects that in their public roles as citizens individuals will eventually endorse liberal principles of justice because of psychological continuity. By this he means they will detect similarity between the principles of justice regulating the basic structure of society and the schemes of cooperation regulating the various associations of which they are members. Rawls suspects that moral and intellectual development becomes enhanced as individuals engage in increasingly expanding roles within more complex schemes of rights and duties, primarily because they are required to view reality from a greater multiplicity of perspectives.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, his hope – what Rosenblum calls “liberal expectancy” – is that citizens will come to appreciate principles of justice because they come to care about the common good as a natural extension of the reciprocity, trust, and cooperation experienced through the affective ties of group life. Rawls’s view has a

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<sup>14</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 411.

lot in common with Robert Putnam's (1993; 2000) discussion of the importance of private associations for citizenship.

A second subtle problem with the correspondence argument is that even if its view of how associations function was more accurate on an empirical level, it presupposes a mistaken view of the substance of religion. This point is also a critique of its empirical premise. The nature of the critique it levies against private religious associations supports an image of religion that emphasizes the negative characteristics of certain religious groups while ignoring the positive characteristics of others.

Despite the presence of what some might consider illiberal beliefs and attitudes, many mainline and even conservative religious groups cultivate values and skills that abet citizenship and sustain liberal democracy. For example, they advance notions of equality, social justice and free faith. They also promote values like benevolence, grace, forgiveness, reconciliation and redemption. Each of these is instrumental toward reinforcing socially beneficial behavior. Religion often fulfills a prophetic role in society insofar that it motivates adherents to stand in judgment of the state (through dissent if necessary) in efforts to ensure that it sufficiently honors its commitment to justice for all people. In other words, instead of merely being concerned about whether religions promote patriarchy, it is equally important to take note of the fact that they promote a sense of justice or charity. Incidentally, many of these values extend beyond a concern for justice. Likewise most are difficult to transmit to students in any meaningful way in state supported public schools. A third problem with the correspondence argument is that it ignores "positive spillover."

I draw two conclusions from the correspondence argument. First, any reasonable view regarding the role of religion in preparing liberal democratic citizens must not amount to an argument that religion should reoccupy the center of political socialization in state supported public schools. Rather it should be considered a view about the nature of private associations. Second, the correspondence argument is not convincing because its presuppositions regarding how associations function are suspect and because it presupposes an erroneous image of the substance of religion. It presumes an image of religion that emphasizes the overly negative characteristics of certain religious groups while ignoring others and the positive kinds of socialization of a Rawlsian sort.

In the next chapter I substantiate this latter point by exploring arguments from within the philosophy of education literature that express a negative view of the role religion might play in shaping character and socializing good liberal democratic citizens.

## Chapter 3: Arguments Opposing Religious Education

The view of religion that dominates the discussion of the correspondence argument is more negative. It interprets religion as a sponsor of patriarchy and authoritarianism. In this chapter I will examine the views of three prominent theorists – Harry Brighouse, Amy Gutmann, and Eamonn Callan – who underscore some of the negative aspects of religion. The selection of these particular authors is meant to be more illustrative rather than exhaustive of a range of similar perspectives available in the philosophy of education literature. Thus, their views serve as exemplars of those that are critical of religious education. However, these views do not explicitly address the prophetic tradition. That tradition encourages active engagement in civic affairs and has roots in biblical portrayals of Old Testament prophets whose primary aim was to critique normalized instances of oppression and arouse the remembrance of broadly understood moral standards. Rather, these thinkers appear to direct their opprobrium towards controversial religious groups of the fundamentalist and isolationist persuasion. But this is not explicitly clear because they allude to believers of this sort as if their characteristics encapsulate religion as the whole.

These authors (with significant variations among them) tend to make two kinds of arguments. The first argument regards religion as the enemy of democratic citizenship. It views religious believers as antagonistic and isolationist – as wanting to live apart and wanting to isolate children from all perspectives other than those in accord with their own. The second kind of argument regards religion as the enemy of autonomy. This view interprets religion as being harmful to children by denying them the opportunity to freely examine inherited views and to select a way of life that

they believe best suits them. These arguments are considered together because they are linked in that both require an education that exposes children to a wide range of views about the good life: democratic citizenship because it seeks to establish a deliberative democracy, and autonomy because it seeks to enable a kind of inward deliberation leading to autonomous choice.

By examining the views of these three theorists I hope to accomplish the following. First, I will develop some criteria that I believe religious associations in liberal democratic societies should satisfy. These criteria concern autonomy and democratic citizenship. They will be addressed in more detail in a later chapter when I apply them to the prophetic tradition and explain how it satisfies them. Second, I will make some criticisms of the views of these theorists when the criteria that they use to judge religious associations are overly restrictive of religious liberty and freedom of conscience. Third, I will note that when these theorists discuss religion they focus on the views of groups that are fundamentalist and isolationist and fail to address the views of other religious groups. In doing so they allow groups of these orientations to become the default definition of religion and, furthermore, neglect the potential religion has to positively impact the development of liberal citizens.

Before examining the views of these thinkers I would first like to illumine the soil in which arguments of this sort have roots.

### *Isolationists and Fundamentalists*

*Yoder v Wisconsin* (1972) and *Mozert v Hawkins County Board of Education* (1987) are court cases involving religious believers whose traits, perhaps more

symbolically than not, embody longstanding liberal fears about the caustic influence of religion on adherents; and, accordingly, about the stability of liberal democracy.

*Yoder* involves members of the Old Order Amish who were convicted of violating Wisconsin's compulsory school attendance law requiring school attendance until the year a child turned age sixteen. The parents refused to send their children to any public or private high school after eighth grade graduation because they viewed such attendance as contrary to their religious beliefs. Evidence revealed that the Old Order Amish provided informal vocational education consistent with their separate agrarian way of life in the rural settings of their communities. These particular Amish hold strong religious beliefs regarding schooling, specifically that sending adolescents to high school endangers both their and their parent's salvation. The Supreme Court decided in favor of the parents and held that the interests of the individuals relative to the free exercise of religion clause of the First Amendment outweighed the interests of the state in requiring mandatory school attendance until the age of sixteen.

*Mozert* involves the selection of a textbook series by the Tennessee school board for a character education curriculum aimed at developing higher order cognitive skills through "critical reading" in grades 1-8. Fourteen devoutly religious parents found the reading series offensive because some passages included references to magic, evolution, secular humanism, and other material that did not affirm the truth of their religious beliefs. The particular school their children attended agreed to honor the parent's request for an alternate reading program. However the school board subsequently voted unanimously to eliminate all alternative reading programs

and require every student to participate in the established reading program using the adopted textbook series. The children of the families who objected to the series were either suspended, home-schooled, pulled out to attend religious schools, or transferred to other public schools.

The *Mozert* parents responded by filing a law suit claiming that their right to the free exercise of religion had been violated. A district court ruled in favor of the parents, but this decision was later reversed by the 6<sup>th</sup> circuit court which ruled against the parents' appeal to protection under the Free Exercise Clause. The court essentially claimed that the Holt reading series did not violate the Establishment Clause and was not a constitutional 'burden' on the parent's religious exercise. "[S]chool boards may set curricula bounded only by the Establishment Clause, as the state contends. Thus, contrary to the analogy plaintiffs suggest, pupils may indeed be expelled if they will not read from the King James Bible, *so long as it is only used as literature, and not taught as religious truth.*"<sup>15</sup> The court found no evidence that the defendant school board sought to require students to accept any religious or anti-religious beliefs.

I would like to make two points regarding the religious believers highlighted in these two court cases. First, these groups dominate much of the literature regarding religion and citizenship, literature that largely emphasizes the negative aspects of religious devotion. Paul Weithman observes:

"A formidable obstacle faces attempts to reconceive the standard view that philosophical liberals think religion a threat to political stability. That view has become the standard one in part because so many philosophical liberals seem to endorse it. A cursory reading of contemporary liberal philosophers

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<sup>15</sup> *Mozert v Hawkins County Board of Education* 827 F.2d 1058 (6<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1987)

suggests that many of them are impressed by the disruptive character of religion and the real possibility of religiously inspired political violence. It further suggests that they define themselves and their tradition by a distinctively liberal strategy for averting that threat”(Weithman, 1997, 3).

Second, these groups are atypical of most existing religious believers. The Old Order Amish seek an existence distinct and separate from the modern secular world<sup>16</sup> in order to promote a way of life devoid of idolatry to things that would place God in a subordinate position. They are what Jeff Spinner-Halev calls “nominal citizens” – effectively disengaged from the dominant society. While they have no interest in exercising their right to vote or engaging in civic deliberation, neither do they seek to use coercive state power to impose their religious convictions on others. The Amish represent a small agrarian, pacifist, law-abiding, religious minority that purposely shield themselves from the corrupt values and technology of the modern world. They are exceptionally distinct from an overwhelming majority of religious groups in the United States.

Conversely, the *Mozert* parents are radical fundamentalists. They are radical insofar as they interpret the doctrine of their faith in a manner that exceeds the usual range of proscriptions and reservations that most so-called fundamentalists find objectionable: “Members of their church didn’t even agree with their stance.”<sup>17</sup> The aspects of the school curriculum these parents objected to were grouped into 17 categories which included mental telepathy, pacifism, and magic; but also “the feelings, attitudes and values of other students” that contradicted their religious

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<sup>16</sup> Their separation from the modern world is not completely void of interaction with it or general knowledge of it. Because a small percentage of Amish children elect to defect to mainstream society, some Amish communities continually renegotiate their posture toward modern society’s most alluring aspects, namely technology. Different Amish communities therefore demonstrate varying degrees of separation from the “English” world.

<sup>17</sup> *Mozert v Hawkins County Board of Education* 827 F.2d 1058 (6<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1987)



views. Just the mere fact that their children's classmates – religious, atheist, agnostic or otherwise – expressed feelings and views that were contrary to these believers' beliefs was thought to be problematic. The parents in *Mozert* considered any aspect of the curriculum (including other students' views on curriculum related topics) that did not affirm the absolute truth of their beliefs as offensive to their religious convictions.<sup>18</sup> Their attitude is atypical of many religious believers, including the large number of so-called fundamentalists who generally concern themselves with such issues as prayer in school, the inclusion of creationism in the sciences, and maintaining the reference to God in the pledge of allegiance, but who otherwise remain relatively tolerant of the general curriculum.

To erect an argument that religion is bad for citizenship by using the believers represented in these two court cases is to maximize the minimum and minimize the maximum. Yet, despite this clear error, the *Yoder* and *Mozert* cases have nonetheless heavily influenced how people of faith are represented in the literature regarding religion and citizenship. Among the reasons, perhaps, is because these groups embody the most virulent incongruence with liberal democratic values. These religious groups not only endorse illiberal convictions (for example religious intolerance, and subordinate roles for women), they also severely restrict or outright deny any legitimate opportunity for members to revise their conception of the good or to sever ties with the group. Another possible reason is because these cases expose a strand of faith very distinct from "safe" religious groups whose convictions so comfortably cohere with the modern secular world that they scarcely appear to be

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<sup>18</sup> I find it surprising that they had not previously elected to send their children to private religious schools.

religious. More importantly (and unfortunately), though, it is a strand of faith that our thoroughly secularized popular culture views as outrageous *yet emblematic of religion*.

While the prevailing examples of religion and religious education in the literature on religion and citizenship resemble the characteristic features of fundamentalism and isolationism, these orientations in no way define the whole of religion. Not only are there other kinds of religious believers, those others have differing implications for citizenship. Variations on the correspondence argument presuppose an overly hostile view of religion and fail to acknowledge the positive impact religion has on citizenship. Consequently, the expectations some authors would have religious associations meet in order to satisfy congruence with public principles of justice often unnecessarily restrict religious liberty and freedom of conscience.

Now I will examine the arguments of three prominent thinkers that serve as exemplars of those who are critical of religious education and who permit, by default, radical religious groups to stand for religion by default.

### Harry Brighouse

In *School Choice and Social Justice* (2000) Harry Brighouse makes an instrumental argument for what he calls an autonomy facilitating education. Absent any appeal to the intrinsic value of autonomy, the instrumental argument asserts that justice requires that each child has a significant and equal opportunity to live a life that is good for them: “[I]f someone has all the resources and liberties that justice requires, but has, as an avoidable result of the design of social institutions, hardly any

opportunity to live well, she has not been treated justly” (Brighouse, 2000, 69). The instrumental argument is not motivated by an interest in the public good or in cultivating capacities for citizenship because Brighouse believes that the state’s interest in creating citizens makes for an inferior educational aim in comparison to the developmental interests of children.<sup>19</sup> Rather, he feels that providing children with a realistic opportunity to become autonomous adults is the fundamental value that should guide the design of educational policy.

“The instrumentalist argument for teaching autonomy...starts with the obligation which adults have towards prospective adults, to provide them with certain kinds of opportunity to live well...The fundamental interest each person has in living well yields an obligation on all to provide prospective adults with an instrument for selecting well among ways of life. Confidence that others have a real opportunity to live lives that are good for them is only possible if we provide the means to select one” (Brighouse, 2000, 71-72).

Brighouse believes that an important function of providing the liberties that justice requires in a liberal democracy is enabling people to not only live well, but to live well by their own judgment. By “living well” Brighouse means two things: the way of life must be good and the person living it must endorse it “from the inside.”<sup>20</sup> He does not articulate the criteria against which ways of life are to be weighed as good or bad. Nonetheless he claims one’s vital commitments, and the obligations that flow from them, are undertaken “from the inside” if the agent identifies with them.

Brighouse contends that an autonomy facilitating education is character neutral (but not value-free because it values the opportunity to choose a good life). By character neutral he means that it does not aim to ensure that children employ autonomy in their lives, but merely aims to enable them to live autonomously should

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<sup>19</sup> Brighouse, *School Choice and Social Justice*, 65.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

they wish to. The distinction between autonomy facilitating and autonomy per se as an educational goal is to permit individuals to choose a way of life that does not involve autonomy.

Brighouse asserts that the family falls into an area of life in which a wide range of choice and individual preference must be protected. Because children are vulnerable persons in the making who cannot be thought capable of making the best choices for their own interests he acknowledges that parents possess a fundamental right to protect and raise them as they see fit. But that right does not translate into unrestricted authority over children. To tolerate all practices of parents – particularly practices of families that do not value, or outright reject autonomy – would be to absolutely ignore the interests of children’s prospective autonomy.

Ideally Brighouse would limit the parental right to control their children’s education to a degree that parents would be prevented from denying children an education that facilitates autonomy. Toward the end of developing children’s capacity for rational choice, Brighouse would, minimally, have them experience an education that teaches “how to distinguish between appeals to authority and appeals to evidence;...about a range of religious, non-religious, and anti-religious ethical views in some detail; about the kinds of reasoning deployed within those views; and the attitudes of proponents toward non-believers, heretics, and the secular world” (Brighouse, 2000, 75).

Brighouse observes that it is the parents of children who live in tight-knit communities who typically limit exposure to alternative ways of life, and he emphasizes conservative religious communities as a paradigmatic example. Though

he admits deeply religious ways of life can be lived well without being autonomously chosen, he feels that *restrictive* religious commitments tend to limit children's opportunity to live well. More often than not this stems from an incompatibility between a child's internal constitution and the religious way of life passed down to her. "If what we might call constitution pluralism is true, and religious parents are permitted to exempt their children from autonomy-facilitating education, then some children will have few or no opportunities for living well" (Brighouse, 2000, 73).

While Brighouse does not wish to breach parents' freedom of conscience, he seems most deeply concerned for those children whose parents feel that their obligation to raise their children in their faith has sufficient force that it is violated if their children experience any skepticism about their faith or gain exposure to alternative views. He feels that these attitudes, rather than a child's conscious choice, create unequal life prospects. Thus, an education is unjust, in his eyes, to the degree that it precludes wide exposure to alternative views – because such conservatism creates unequal opportunities for children to choose prospective ways of life.<sup>21</sup> Brighouse, then, would most likely argue that religious ways of life must survive without the benefit of educational practices that deny an autonomy-facilitating education to children.

One issue I would like to address is the language that Brighouse uses to describe religion. He characterizes the devout as sharing a way of life. Generally, religions are not usefully described as ways of life, although particular individuals or communities (for instance Tibetan Buddhist monks) may exhibit a distinctive way of life because of how they choose to honor commitments that flow from religious

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<sup>21</sup> Brighouse, *School Choice and Social Justice*, 91.

convictions.<sup>22</sup> My sense is that what Brighthouse characterizes as a religious “way of life” would be more accurately described as a worldview. “Ways of life” would seem to include a lot more than he describes.

Kenneth Strike (Strike, 2003) draws a helpful distinction between the two when he characterizes tribes and congregations.

“A *Gemeinschaft* community is one where there are deeply shared understandings rooted in a common life together. Paradigm cases are medieval villages, clans, and tribes....Another image of a community is the congregation. Religious groups are, for the most part, partial communities in that while their members may share a common creed, they do not share a common life....Here I use the notion of a congregation to refer to groups that are held together because they share what Rawls (1993) calls a comprehensive or partially comprehensive doctrine”(Strike, 2003)

When I played recreational soccer as boy in a league largely populated by families from upper middle class neighborhoods across town, I assumed that upon visiting the homes of my teammates for gatherings I would discover that their way of life was completely different than my own because of ethnic, racial and stark class differences. I was wrong. What did become clear was that I held a worldview different from many of them (I did not feel entitled to receive a new car on my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday), but we essentially shared the same way of life (like my own family they did not hunt on a daily basis to sustain their diet and after meals they gathered to watch television together). Worldviews provide criteria people can apply to life style choices.

Religions are a lot more like worldviews and tend to constrain very few choices regarding lifestyle, or what one might envision as the good life. “Religions

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<sup>22</sup> Even those who share the same way of life could well exhibit diversity because of what Brighthouse calls “constitution pluralism”: some activities are simply more compatible with their personalities than others. I do not assume that a way of life equates to a monolithic existence.

have varying relationships to their cultures, but in ours, with a few notable exceptions, a religion is better viewed as a framework for appraising life's choices than as a way of life" (Strike, 2003). The adherents of most mainstream religions tend to have varying occupations, are members of different political parties, and participate in diverse recreational activities. And because the majority of these folks are not isolationists, their children will live within and be exposed to pluralistic social contexts and be granted the liberty to continually expand from them as they mature into adulthood. Therefore, in most cases mandating a faith tradition does not inhibit one's autonomy to choose a way of life. Rather choice is most likely to be constrained by normative considerations of goodness and evil, often expressed through the obligations religions place on people by virtue of their claim to be true.<sup>23</sup> The claim that religion amounts to a worldview more so than to a way of life is made to seem especially true by Christianity because it was intended to be able to travel across a culturally diverse empire.

This distinction between worldview and way of life is important for more than qualitative reasons. It has implications on what Brighthouse expects parents to expose their children to and why. Brighthouse desires that all children be provided a realistic opportunity to become autonomous adults. What he has in mind is an individual who endorses his or her vital commitments and way of life from the inside; that is, chooses according to their own judgment. With this in mind, it seems worthwhile to distinguish two forms of autonomy I believe are implied in Brighthouse's discussion.

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<sup>23</sup> In principle Brighthouse would agree that choices of the good life should be so constrained.

The first regards the capacity to make a rational choice among options because they somehow fit. Brighouse would have parents expose their children to a wide range of views, in part, for the sake of developing the capacity to select well among “ways of life.” He believes doing so allows children to choose in accord with their internal constitution, rather than resigning themselves to reproducing the way of life they inherit. However, exhibiting a capacity for choice according to internal fit can play itself out in several ways. One might, for example, select among articles of clothing that best fit one’s personal sense of fashion. Alternatively, one might select among cars to steal according to which models best match one’s tastes.<sup>24</sup>

Developing this form of autonomy certainly seems dependent upon exposure, but potentially to vice (immoral standards and criteria for choosing). Harry Brighouse does not explicitly address this, though I presume he would not endorse it. Perhaps the moral difference between these two choices speaks to what Brighouse means when he asserts that one criteria of “living well” is that the way of life must be good. The idea of choosing according to fittingness is only meaningful against a backdrop of some set of standards for judging. Theoretically, an illiberal moral framework leads to illiberal choices, and vice versa. So, this form of autonomy seems influenced by capacities related to a second.

A second form of autonomy regards the capacity to examine or appraise ideas, constructs, and moral or truth claims. I have stated that religions are more akin to worldviews than to ways of life. As such, they propose normative considerations that are used when making choices. These norms are based upon doctrinal claims to truth

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<sup>24</sup> I in no way want to suggest that Harry Brighouse would find the latter a type of choice he feels is an acceptable expression of the kind of autonomy he promotes. Rather I employ it merely for illustrative purposes.



that often deny the validity of competing truth claims. However, this is not always the case. Regardless, developing this second form of autonomy seems dependent upon having an opportunity to examine the truth claims of one's inherited tradition. This is an issue concerning the characteristics of the traditions into which children are initiated and the manner of their initiation (Strike, 2003). To be denied this opportunity is to risk becoming enslaved to mistruths and negative values and standards; and, hence, bad reasoning and irrational choices. Therefore, this is a form of autonomy that must be defended. It is relevant to citizenship (although this is not Brighouse's focus) in the sense that in their role as citizens individuals consider arguments for claims regarding the requirements of justice.

Judging from Brighouse's curricular expectations – exposure to “a range of religious, non-religious, and anti-religious ethical views and the reasoning deployed in those views” – and what I take him to actually mean by the term ‘ways of life,’ most religious communities will satisfy this educational expectation rather than undermine it. Many religious groups encourage discourse about the theological content of their faith. Much of the time this is so that members do not hold beliefs in the manner of a prejudice. Christian congregations often withhold baptism and full-membership until young adulthood when it is believed candidates are able to reason about the meaning of the rite.

Some religious groups of course do not encourage reflection on moral and truth claims or provide exposure to competing views. But Brighouse's comments are mostly directed towards religious believers that are isolationists and/or fundamentalists and it does not appear that he assumes all believers are like these

groups. However, he adds no discussion of groups with other characteristics that may positively affect the development of autonomy.

A second issue I would like to address regards what seems like an excessive expectation for how exposure should occur. Although Brighthouse hopes to refrain from violating freedom of conscience, it seems his attempt fails. When and how are parents able to exercise their obligation to conscientiously and responsibly raise their children in accordance with their conception of the good if at every turn they must qualify their perspectives/claims by alluding to the reasoning of other views on some matter? How are children supposed to develop any serious views about anything? Parents have an interest in instantiating the structures of faith that have proven indispensable with regard to spiritual well being in their own lives. However, Brighthouse's autonomy facilitating education would permit children to hear serious criticism of their religious views. This is, in any case, what I assume to be an outcome of exposing children to a range of religious, non-religious, and anti-religious ethical views in some detail. But children rarely possess an even adequate understanding of "the dialogical resources of traditions into which they have, as yet, only been partially inducted" (Callan, 2000, 61).

The obvious worry here is that religious identity will be lost even before it is achieved. Excessive openness may be debilitating to the capacity to adhere to a conception of the good. William Galston suggests that "the greatest threat to children in modern liberal societies is...that they will believe in nothing very deeply at all. Even to achieve the kind of free self-reflection that many liberals prize, it is better to begin by believing something" (W. A. Galston, 1991, 255). While this author

considers such exposure beneficial, the state should not make it mandatory. Most religious groups might compensate for it by not constraining lifestyle choices or demanding isolation from the pluralistic secular modern world. Perhaps Brighthouse would allow for a period of religious education in which parents can single-mindedly secure an understanding of the foundations of their faith in their children.

In summary, Brighthouse rightly believes that tight-knit, deeply religious groups undermine an opportunity for children to live autonomously. However, he only discusses the characteristics of groups similar to the families in *Yoder* and *Mozert*. Failure to acknowledge moderate or progressive religious groups undermines his arguments and perhaps constrains his ability to view autonomy facilitation as a reliable derivative of religious education. It may well be that many religious traditions develop adherent's capacity for rational choice by initiating them into dialogical practices that involve evaluating their own and other traditions according to criteria equivalent to liberal principles of justice.

### Amy Gutmann

In *Democratic Education* (1987), Amy Gutmann discusses the interest that democratic states have in cultivating the skills and virtues that enable the conscious social reproduction of the society's political norms. She contends that the conscious social reproduction of a democracy requires the capacity to deliberate among alternative forms of personal and political life. This capacity allows for an ongoing conversation between citizens about the type of education that will enable the society to perpetuate its ideals. Therefore, a legitimate and inevitable function of education

in liberal democratic societies must be the development of what she calls democratic character.

Gutmann speculates about exactly who should determine the ends of education<sup>25</sup> in a liberal democracy. She rejects the idea that exclusive educational authority should rest in the hands of parents, which would permit them to predispose their children to choosing a way of life consistent with their own cultural heritage.<sup>26</sup> Gutmann does not believe that parents have a natural right to exclusive educational authority or that they can be relied upon to pursue interests that maximize the welfare of their children. In spite of this, she nevertheless acknowledges the intrinsic significance of parental freedom to form children's values, noting its importance in relationship to securing a moral and cultural foundation that enables children to deliberate among alternative ways of life. This idea is mirrored in Bruce Ackerman's (1980) notion of *cultural coherence*. It posits that in order to have a sense of who we want to become we need to possess a sense of who we already are.<sup>27</sup>

Gutmann recognizes, though, that the non-neutral education provided by the family places limits on the range of children's future choices at the same time that it aids the capacity for rational choice. The preferences, values, and traditions central to our cultural orientations essentially serve as an arbiter of what for us is to likely count as a choice-worthy lifestyle. Indeed, Gutmann supports a significant degree of cultural coherence within families, but adds that cultural coherence generally fails to

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<sup>25</sup> Gutmann uses a comprehensive definition of education: "Education may be more broadly defined to include every social influence that makes us who we are" (Gutmann, 1987, 14).

<sup>26</sup> Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 28.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p35-36.

capture the depth of the state's interest in developing democratic citizens;<sup>28</sup> particularly citizens' capacity to deliberate among competing conceptions of the good life and the good society. Accordingly, Gutmann rejects any argument that would rest *exclusive or even primary* educational authority in the hands of parents.

She provides an answer to her initial question regarding who should determine the ends of education by arguing that educational authority must be *partially* shared by the state, educational professionals, and the family.<sup>29</sup> Her assumption is that absent state intercession and regulation of education parents cannot be counted upon to teach the value of mutual respect or to equip their children with the intellectual skills necessary to deliberate rationally among ways of life that differ from their own.

“History suggests that without state provision or regulation of education, children will be taught neither mutual respect among persons nor rational deliberation among ways of life. To save their children from future pain, especially the pain of eternal damnation, parents have historically shielded their children from diverse associations, convinced them that all other ways of life are sinful, and implicitly fostered (if not explicitly taught them) disrespect for people who are different” (Gutmann, 1987, 31).

Gutmann argues that the educational authority that parents are owed does not extend to a right to insulate their children from exposure to ways of life or reasoning that conflict with their own. She appears to have especially low expectations regarding the ability of religious parents to overcome obstinacy with respect to their doctrine's view of the truth. Far from the mutual respect and deliberative capacities that characterize her view of democratic education, she conceives of sectarian religious training as tarnished by patriarchy, repression, and religious/racial

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p43

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p42

intolerance. Gutmann uses the following depiction of religious groups to illustrate this point.

“Some parents, such as the Old Order Amish in America, are morally committed to shielding their children from all knowledge that might lead them to doubt and all worldly influences that might weaken their religious beliefs. Many other parents, less radical in their rejection of modern society, are committed to teaching their children religious and racial intolerance” (Gutmann, 1987, 29).

Because of the hazards religious training purportedly poses to the development of civic virtue, Gutmann would have the state regulate the education of children.

Considering her broad view of education, this would apparently include activities related to child rearing and religious training that occur within the sphere of the home and community.

To support her interest in developing democratic character, Gutmann erects three principled limits that constrain the exercise of political and parental authority over education: non-repression, non-discrimination, and democratic deliberation. The principle of non-repression prohibits the state, *and any group within it*, from proffering an education that does not engage in consideration of or deliberation about competing conceptions of the good life and the good society.<sup>30</sup> Because conscious social reproduction is the primary aim of democratic education, adults must therefore be prevented from using their present deliberative freedom to undermine the future deliberative freedom of children. The principle of non-discrimination prohibits the state, *and all groups within it*, from denying anyone an educational good on grounds irrelevant to the legitimate social purpose of that good.<sup>31</sup> “Democratic education is bound to restrict pursuit, although not conscious consideration, of ways of life

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p44.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p45.

dependent on the suppression of politically relevant knowledge. Democratic education supports choice among those ways of life that are compatible with conscious social reproduction”(Gutmann, 1987, 46).

Requiring families and private associations to provide an education that enables children to deliberate among alternative forms of reasoning and ways of life is, to Gutmann, instrumental for the conscious social reproduction of a democracy. Gutmann, however, faces a problem identical to the one faced by Brighouse with her use of the term “ways of life.” It lacks specificity. She uses the term in such a way that it conflates things that are qualitatively different. Similarly, her usage of it would be better interpreted as worldviews or doctrines.

Another apparent problem with Gutmann’s views is that she has created a conundrum. On the one hand she concedes the need for parents to bestow a moral and cultural foundation to their children in order to provide them with a framework from which to make rational choices. Yet on the other hand she denies parents primary authority over the education of their children believing that the state’s interest in citizenship (e.g., democratic character) affords it the right to regulate children’s education in the private sphere as well. What she does not express is whether (or how) state regulation would be balanced against the private interests families have in cultural reproduction, solidarity, and the conversational or dialogical development of their comprehensive doctrine in closed forums. In fact, it is not apparent that Gutmann has any sense of citizens’ political rights that might either ground her educational proposal or constitute limitations against which it should be balanced.

She endorses a vision of political socialization that plausibly permits considerable interference with the affairs of private religious associations.

Correspondingly, Gutmann advances a view of democratic education that basically amounts to instantiating a comprehensive doctrine in its own right. Harry Brighouse concurs with this claim.

“[S]he deploys a conception of justice that places too much weight on the value of democratic participation. It privileges democratic participation as something which should be regarded not only as a fundamental right of all citizens but as a political duty. This is controversial, and in my view false”(Brighouse, 2000, 68).

I believe schools should undertake the task of shaping certain values and providing opportunities that equip students with the knowledge and capacities that enable active participation in the political affairs of their society. On the other hand, indoctrinating children with a kind of civic republicanism, through formal schooling or through the regulation of private associations, is not an appropriate function for the liberal state. Similar to John Dewey’s conception of democracy in *Democracy and Education* (1916), Gutmann’s orientation toward shaping democratic character is seemingly intent upon imposing democracy as a “way of life” (i.e. a conception of the good).

This is significant because Gutmann’s requirements for citizenship indirectly undermine the opportunity she wants for children to be liberated from proscriptive cultural forces. She acknowledges the importance of children becoming autonomous choosers of their future lives and asserts that it is their interests that guide her institutional model for education. But her focus on “the good of children” differs from that of Harry Brighouse who similarly claims that children’s interests drive his arguments.



While he believes that the developmental interests of children, as opposed to the public good, should guide educational aims, Gutmann's emphasis on the good of children is locked into instilling in them the obligation to actively participate in democratic deliberation rather than promote it as one view of a good life that offers communal and civic benefits. The autonomy facilitating education of Harry Brighouse at least recognizes the possibility that a child's autonomous reasoning might guide him or her to a view of the good life that excludes active democratic participation; and he values the right of individuals to act on the choice. "A view of liberalism in which the socialization requirements of citizenship were so substantial as to preclude an adequate range of views of the good life would fail to do what liberalism chiefly intends to do: that is, to make it possible for people to live according to their own views of the good" (Strike, 1999a, 50).

Lastly, Gutmann's conception of religious training does not admit the empirical differences across religious groups with regard to their commitments and practices. She discusses religious believers without any acknowledgment of religious diversity. According to the characterization she presents of religious groups, the vast majority of them would be considered illiberal, specifically as a result of being unable or unwilling to foster democratic character (e.g., the promotion of mutual respect for the liberty and rights of other citizens; religious and racial tolerance; and deliberative capacities). That this is so speaks to the inadequacy of the characterization.

Many religious groups in fact do an adequate job of satisfying her requirements for democratic character.<sup>32</sup> With respect to her interest in developing deliberative capacities, Kenneth Strike (1999) suggests that comprehensive doctrines contribute argumentative resources to which adherents appeal when attempting to establish an overlapping consensus. In *Political Liberalism* (1993) John Rawls suggests that an overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines produces a political conception of justice that can win support from individuals on account of reasons internal to their comprehensive doctrine. Rawls, though, advocates some degree of “looseness” regarding individuals’ attachment to them. However, Strike argues that real people look to their comprehensive doctrines for moral motivation when conceiving notions of justice because doctrines attach moral significance to values and how to prioritize them. Hence, argues Strike, an overlapping consensus requires citizens to be adequately “fluent” in the theoretical and practical reasoning of their comprehensive doctrine (Strike, 1999b).

Ultimately, what might safely be assumed is that a negative view of religion grounds Gutmann’s argument for state regulation of private associations. Gutmann’s educational proposals result in too much influence shifting from private associational life. Moreover, they also appear to subordinate the interests of the private sphere to those of the state. Thus, freedom of conscience and the free exercise of religion are trumped by the requirements of democratic social reproduction. While liberal societies have a vital interest in diminishing the negative effects of illiberal religious education, it is equally important that they draw a line in the sand that responsibly

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<sup>32</sup> This is something she later alludes to: “Deliberative citizens may be the unintended by-product of educational efforts that aim at something else.” This quote appears in the preface (written August 1998) to the revised edition of *Democratic Education* (1987), page xiii.

forecloses a space wherein religious education is allowed to anchor morality and shape views of the good life.

The arguments Gutmann offers in objection to *Yoder* are a version of the correspondence argument, and unqualified they entitle the state to regulate the educational practices of private (religious) associations to a considerable degree. In her effort to produce tolerant citizens capable of deliberating among alternative forms of personal and political life, Gutmann's educational goals for public schooling cause the state to be partially "established" in its own right. She does not take into consideration that religions might endorse their own visions of citizenship, that such visions might be compatible with liberal democratic virtue, and that when they are not (comprehensively) the group's interests still should not be peremptorily trumped by the state's interest in citizenship.

### Eamonn Callan

In *Political Liberalism and Political Education* (1996) Eamonn Callan challenges the distinction John Rawls makes between political liberalism and ethical liberalism. Callan does so by illuminating their convergent educational implications. He argues that the publicity and reasonableness that political liberalism depends upon is funded by reciprocity. Reciprocity requires acceptance of the burdens of judgment,<sup>33</sup> because apart from the burdens of judgment individuals are prone to view those who affirm competing beliefs as either malevolent or foolish. Therefore securing acceptance of the burdens of judgment must be a universal end of political education under political liberalism. Callan warns, though, that securing acceptance

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<sup>33</sup> The burdens represent the sources of disagreement that persist among individuals when factors that signify a failure to be reasonable are filtered out (p10).

of the burdens develops habits of mind tantamount to autonomy, a comprehensive ethical doctrine. This, he suggests, represents the point of convergence between the educational aims of political liberalism and that of ethical liberalism.

In *Political Liberalism* (1993) John Rawls asserts that ethical liberalism must fail when the doctrine it privileges is advanced as the source of political legitimacy. Ethical liberalism grounds the political conception of justice in a comprehensive doctrine. Under conditions of ethical pluralism this means that persons who reject that doctrine nevertheless have to abide by rules whose justification would appear illegitimate.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, they would have to learn to adjust their public speech and behavior such that these were consistent with the reasoning of this doctrine.<sup>35</sup> Ethical liberalism would eliminate many citizens' ability to ascribe legitimacy to the basic structure of society (particularly its institutions) because the right answer to questions of justice and constitutional essentials would hinge upon the supposed truth of a doctrine many would reject. These citizens would be no less than psychologically oppressed by the prevailing conception of justice.

Rawls's political liberalism, on the other hand, attempts to establish political legitimacy through reasoned moral consensus. Theoretically, the conception of justice supporting the general structure of society would be compatible with the full range of reasonable values and doctrines citizens endorse. It would also represent an *overlapping consensus* of values freestanding from the various doctrines citizens endorse privately.<sup>36</sup> Citizens' strongly held ethical beliefs would enter into an overlapping consensus justified by the use of public reasons – that is reasons

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<sup>34</sup> Callan, *Political Liberalism and Political Education*, 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

acceptable to all who participate.<sup>37</sup> Under such conditions, no one is required to assent to an ideology they responsibly reject.

Political liberalism promotes reasonableness in citizens through a political education that seeks to secure acceptance of the burdens of judgment. The burdens represent the sources of disagreement that persist among individuals when factors that signify a failure to be reasonable are filtered out.<sup>38</sup> According to Rawls, reasonableness requires two conditions: (1) a commitment to moral reciprocity: being willing to propose principles, listen to others' proposals, and comply with others' proposals that are intended to fix the terms of fair cooperation<sup>39</sup>; and (2) a willingness to recognize the burdens of judgment and accept their consequence of using public reason in regard to establishing the legitimate uses of political power.<sup>40</sup> Acceptance of the burdens of judgment supports the reciprocity and mutual toleration that public reason must promote when citizens select the principles of justice that best satisfy the ambitions of political liberalism. Unlike the educational implications of ethical liberalism – which would involve privileging a particular doctrine – political liberalism yields an education ostensibly hospitable to society's ethical pluralism.

Callan identifies a significant consequence of a political education that aims to secure acceptance of the burdens of judgment. The relevance of the burdens of judgment are not limited to public reason during political deliberation, but must also be understood as having an impact on the values and convictions that shape the background culture. Acceptance of the burdens of judgment invites citizens to

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>40</sup> By public reason Rawls means reasons that one could expect that reasonable and rational citizens could endorse consistent with their freedom and equality.

question the absolute truth of their comprehensive doctrines.<sup>41</sup> An individual would have to acknowledge the irreconcilable disagreements that exist among existing doctrines, and come to terms with how reason could lead others to endorse views that compete and/or conflict with their own. To the extent that citizens fail in this regard the society will not achieve the crucial condition of publicity in whatever principles of justice regulate its basic structure. To argue for the use of political power on the basis that one's doctrine is absolutely true would violate the conditions of reasonableness.

Callan argues, then, that political liberalism yields an education that inadvertently promotes autonomy through the "back door," thereby transforming it into a form of ethical liberalism. Despite how this might unintentionally and unnecessarily sway individuals out of their religious convictions, Callan appears willing to assign personal conscience a subordinate status to the state's interest in creating citizens capable of legitimizing the justificatory ideal of the liberal democratic tradition. Consequently, public reasons become the currency of political deliberation because they are reasons refined by the reasonableness that results from acceptance of the burdens of judgment.

Religious associations would find this form of political socialization uniquely troubling. It would impair the ability of adherents to invest faith in the absolute truth of their doctrine. Political liberalism requires that parents be willing to permit their children to entertain alternative views and to acknowledge that those who are not of their own faith are worthy of reciprocity. Callan might argue that this form of

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<sup>41</sup> This would be an expression of the second form of autonomy discussed in the Brighthouse section above: a capacity to examine or appraise moral and truth claims.

political socialization is permissible because it threatens the conscience only of those who are unreasonable in Rawls's sense. The need for religious tolerance would prevent believers from justifying the use of state power using controversial premises from their comprehensive doctrine due to the recognition that reason cannot produce a universally shared religion.

Callan assumes that instead of appealing to public reasons, many religious and secular citizens will instead seek to justify the use of state power by appealing to ignorance, tribal animus, and the many other resources of manipulative politics.<sup>42</sup> Why? Apparently he believes that extant religious traditions contain values that diverge from the aims of liberal democratic politics and political education. Among the most worrisome is authoritarianism: that they value a sense of certainty or absolutism in light of competing traditions.

“The culture of every extant liberal democracy contains powerful currents, religious as well as secular, that pull hard against the constitutive ideals of liberal democracy. To ignore this is to eschew liberal aggressiveness by embracing liberal complacency. ‘Think for yourself, though it need only be to a modest extent’ might be an acceptable educational injunction in some better world than ours. It does not make good sense in ours” (Callan, 1996, 51).

Presumably, Callan's critique of religious education is that if securing acceptance of the burdens of judgment is not among its educational aims, then it fosters intolerance and undermines the autonomy and reciprocity required of citizenship generally, but especially during the dialogue leading to an overlapping consensus.

Eamonn Callan only notes the negative characteristics of religious believers. This raises two issues. First, he implicitly suggests that these negative features are universal features of religion; that unreasonable views are paradigmatic of religious

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<sup>42</sup> Callan, *Politica Liberalism and Political Education*, 50.

views. Second, his argument not only assumes that the burdens of judgment are a reason for tolerance but that they are necessary to tolerance.

With regard to the first issue, there is indeed a plethora of empirical evidence to support Callan's characterization of illiberal ideological currents in pluralistic liberal societies with respect to religion. However, comprehensive religious and philosophical doctrines are imbued with just as many (if not more) moral resources – values, principles, notions of community, fraternity, and justice – that mirror the aims and contribute to the interests of liberal democracy than elements that do not.

Consider *The Book of Confessions* of the The Presbyterian Church (USA), which contains doctrinal statements pertaining to what the church believes. A sub-section entitled Reconciliation in Society communicates the following elements of what I consider the denomination's views on matters pertaining to justice.

“In each time and place there are particular problems and crises through which God calls the church to act. The church...seeks to discern the will of God and learn how to obey in these *concrete situations*. The following are particularly urgent at the present time.

- a. The church is called to bring all men to receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing, education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and *the exercise of political rights*....
- b. God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ is the ground of the peace, justice, and freedom among nations which all powers of government are called to serve and defend. The church, in its own life, is called to practice the forgiveness of enemies and to commend to the nations as practical politics the search for cooperation and peace....Although nations may serve God's purposes in history, *the church which identifies the sovereignty of any one nation or any one way of life with the cause of God denies the Lordship of Christ and betrays its calling*.
- c. The reconciliation of man through Jesus Christ makes it plain that *enslaving poverty in a world of abundance is an intolerable violation of God's good creation*....The church cannot condone poverty, whether it is the product of unjust social structures, exploitation of the defenseless, lack of national resources, absence of technological understanding, or rapid expansion of populations....*A church that is indifferent to poverty, or evades responsibility in economic affairs, or is open to one social class*



*only*, or expects gratitude for its beneficence makes a mockery of reconciliation and *offers no acceptable worship* to God “(italics mine) (Presbyterian Church(USA), 2002).

The PCUSA’s doctrinal beliefs exhibit congruence with “the constitutive ideals of liberal democracy.” They reflect notions of social equality, justice, freedom, and charity that the devout are expected to uphold within the political culture seemingly as a marker of acceptable worship and faithfulness to God’s purposes. Insofar as these views represent the normative considerations of a particular religion, they (a) challenge presuppositions that religion is inherently illiberal and (b) defy assumptions that religious beliefs of the illiberal sort are universal.

Callan’s pessimism regarding citizen’s ability or willingness to reconcile themselves to the fallibility of their deepest convictions, and consequently refrain from oppressing others, is what drives his efforts to narrow the scope of what is to count as a reasonable doctrine. “Since when you think for yourself you might reason your way to vice, your unconstrained right to reason should be impaired” might be an acceptable educational injunction in some more ethically unambiguous world than ours. It does not make good sense in a liberal democratic society composed of robust pluralism.

Callan’s vision of political education compliments the almost singular focus state institutions must place on justice so that citizens can live well together in spite of their differences. However, this focus should not neglect the need citizens possess for a coherent conception of the good (at the very least, in order to anchor their motivation to treat fellow citizens justly), and the state’s responsibility to protect their right to affirm one, regardless of whether some of its tenets are illiberal.

Regarding the second issue, might there be reasons to doubt Callan's assumption that acceptance of the burdens of judgment is the singular path to reciprocity; and that a religious group's failure to encourage its members to accept the burdens fosters intolerance and undermines autonomy? One reason is that his argument ignores the possibility that reciprocity, tolerance, the valuing of an autonomous existence, and the virtues required by dialogue might actually be viewed as religious commitments by many religious groups. Unfortunately, the parents in *Mozert* firmly challenge the possibility this could be accurate. However, groups that are not radical fundamentalists represent religious orientations that affirm values that contribute to the development of civic virtue.

An example of which would be moderate or liberal religious groups that demonstrate respect for free faith (i.e. the belief that faith should be freely or voluntarily chosen) or that hold tolerance as an article of faith. While there is no creed or central authority that speaks for Quakers (The Society of Friends), nor a description of beliefs that would be acceptable to all Friends, there exist some basic principles that most Quakers adhere to. One is the belief that all humans are capable of direct, unmediated communion with the Divine. A second is a commitment to living out the word of God in a manner that attests to this inward experience. Outside of these principles various branches of the faith interpret the tradition differently. Yet in their effort to "answer that of God in every one" each community, more or less, promotes non-coercion and tolerance as religious obligations.

"Divine revelation is not confined to the past....Friends believe that, by the Inner Light, God provides everyone with access to spiritual truth for today....The absence of creeds does not mean that Friends feel that it does not matter what a person believes. They recognize that personal beliefs vitally

affect behavior. Friends are people of strong religious views, but they are quite clear that these views must be tested by the way in which they are expressed in action. Many Friends have hesitations about the value of theology, fearing that it too easily leads to speculation and argument. But all would agree that humans, as rational beings, must think about the nature of their religious experiences. Friends are encouraged to seek for truth in all the opportunities that life presents to them. They are further encouraged to seek new light from whatever source it may arise. Their questing and open attitude to life has certainly contributed to the tolerance with which Friends try to approach people and problems of faith and conduct. This may make it easier to understand how the Religious Society of Friends can accommodate such a range of religious outlooks among its members”(Weening, 1997).

My sense is that Callan associates the certainty an individual attaches to their religious beliefs with intolerance and authoritarianism, perhaps assuming that all religious beliefs are metaphysical or, if not, at least legitimated in the minds of believers singularly upon the authority of God. He assumes that one’s commitment to religious beliefs must be proportionate to the degree of certainty (i.e. the truth value) regarding their premises. But there is no necessary correlation between an individual’s commitment to the truth of a belief and authoritarianism. For some, among the religious beliefs held to be certain is the conviction that everyone shares an inherent dignity and is deserving of respect.

The burdens of judgment only tell us what *not* to do when a person’s ideas or beliefs appear wrong: do not presume that they are stupid or malevolent, even when they express those ideas poorly or use abrasive language.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, acceptance of the burdens provides no instructions regarding what *to do* when one feels certain that a person is ignorant, malevolent, or obdurate. The burdens do not advise on whether one should, perhaps, look beyond abrasive language or insolent attitudes and attempt to discern the possible presence of pain, fear, or some

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<sup>43</sup> One can assume that we should attempt to place before them our own ideas and beliefs in a manner that is respectful.

unarticulated virtue another person might feel one's view on a shared problem puts at stake. To not secure acceptance of the burdens does not automatically result in intolerance. On the other hand, to display tolerance does not mean that acceptance of the burdens has been secured.

Furthermore, mercy, grace, compassion, forgiveness, and striving for reconciliation are rarely mistaken as the aims of political education in public schools. They tend to be the harvest of religious training, specifically by groups that affirm the preeminence of religious moral values to secular cultural ones. Does anyone honestly believe that religious groups that cultivate these virtues fall beyond the boundaries Callan establishes for reasonable pluralism? I would want a view of reasonableness that was able to legitimate the virtue of these religious citizens despite the fact that certain of their beliefs could not acquiesce to the burdens of judgment – that is to say, to the possibility that reason might lead to an alternative conclusion that is equally as credible as their own on some matter.

I would like to make one final point and it regards the use of public speech. The legitimate use of coercive political power can be achieved when religious convictions such as those above have refined the attitudes of believers and inform their judgment regarding the proposals they contribute to the construction of an overlapping consensus (Rawls & Rawls, 1999; Wolterstorff, 1997). John Rawls (1999) offers what he calls a wide view of public reason. It focuses less on what premises are forbidden during public political discussion and more on honoring the duty of civility while communicating moral conceptions that are rooted in one's religious doctrine. Rawls proposes that there may be positive reasons for introducing

the beliefs of reasonable doctrines into political discourse. Among them are because (1) the roots of citizens' allegiance to political values lie in their comprehensive doctrines; (2) citizens of faith often desire that their beliefs gain acceptance from a broader audience; (3) doing so strengthens ties of civic friendship by fostering a mutual granting of the benefit of the doubt, rather than a prejudicial suspicion, about one another's allegiance to the democratic ideals of public reason.<sup>44</sup>

Rawls therefore introduces an injunction for public political discussion<sup>45</sup> that he calls *the proviso*, which requires that citizens offer one another doctrinal *and* political reasons for supporting whatever basic political values one's doctrine is said to support.

“Thus, the content of public reason is given by the principles and values of the family of liberal conceptions of justice meeting these conditions. To engage in public reason is to appeal to one of these political conceptions – to their ideals and principles, standards and values – when debating fundamental political questions. This requirement still allows us to introduce into political discussions at any time our comprehensive doctrine, religious or non-religious provided that in due course we give properly public reasons to support the principles and policies our comprehensive doctrine is said to support. I refer to this requirement as the proviso...”(Rawls & Rawls, 1999, 143).

The proviso is to be satisfied during public dialogue about political matters and in good faith (with civility). By this I take Rawls to mean that the speaker must communicate to the listener that she is doing her best to avoid coercion – in essence to display her allegiance to constitutional norms, despite the presentation of premises that cannot be widely accepted at face value. He believes that doing so cultivates “a positive ground”<sup>46</sup> for the ideal of public speech to take root. Provided it is satisfied,

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<sup>44</sup> Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, 153, 155.

<sup>45</sup> Rawls is careful to distinguish communication in the public political culture from that within the background culture, with its many forms of non-public reason.

<sup>46</sup> Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, 154.

Rawls claims that the proviso does not compromise any previously established standards regarding justification for the use public reason.

*Criteria for Judging Religious Associations with respect to Citizenship*

The discussions of Harry Brighouse, Amy Gutmann and Eamonn Callan allow religious groups that are characteristically isolationist and fundamentalist to represent the scope of religious devotion. They do so by default and less so through assertion. This is primarily because each commenter neglects to discuss cases of religious groups holding any other assumptions.

Nevertheless, there are several criteria implicit in the above discussions that I feel are acceptable, and that can be used to judge proposals for religious education with respect to its role in shaping citizens. My arguments above that respond to these discussions are meant to suggest the importance of not formulating such criteria in ways that unreasonably suppress religious liberty and freedom of conscience. But my intent has not been to deny that there is an underlying point in each case that must be respected. Moreover, it is not my intent to develop in detail the criteria I will suggest below. I will do this in chapter 5 when I apply them to the prophetic tradition and explain how its expression of religious training satisfies them.

One criterion that is implicit in these authors' discussions is that religious groups must not attempt to completely shield their members from views that do not affirm the truth of their beliefs.<sup>47</sup> While it may be reasonable to view parents and associations as having the right to be the first voice and the most impressionable

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<sup>47</sup> The term "completely" is significant here because groups have no special obligation to expose their members to discriminatory or malevolent views.

voice in relation to a child's education, the fact that children are independent beings ultimately means that they have a right to make meaningful choices concerning the beliefs they could hold and the ways of life they could adopt. Therefore, views that effectively reduce children to being the moral captives of their parents or communities, and that reduce them to moral servitude, should be considered inadequate.

Of utmost concern to all three thinkers is the high probability that the children of conservative religious believers are denied fair and meaningful exposure to alternative perspectives and ways of life that differ from those of their parents. Harry Brighouse considers this a matter of a priori injustice because it precludes the opportunity for children to choose ways of life that might best cohere with their internal constitutions. Amy Gutmann argues that the absence of exposure to alternative views undermines the development of the critical reasoning necessary to appraise different ways of life and the mutual respect indispensable to democratic deliberation. Children have the right to an education that includes plausible and respectful representations of views other than those of the adults who raise them and plausible and respectful representations of the reasons these views are held.

A second criterion implied in the above discussions is that religious groups must respect the freedom of conscience of those who hold other religious views or who hold none; and therefore must not employ the apparatus of the state either to compel others to hold or practice their religion or to compel the state to enforce moral conceptions that cannot be justified apart from their religious convictions. What is uniquely important when discussing religious groups in relation to the obligations of

citizenship are the attitudes they hold with respect to persons who are non-believers. What status does their doctrine assign to those who are adherents of other faiths or no faith? This question has much bearing on the degree to which religious believers will be willing to respect the political rights of fellow citizens. This question also reflects Eamonn Callan's focus on reciprocity as funded through acceptance of the burdens of judgment. Religious associations must not shape or encourage an urge to use civil law as a means through which one might attempt to have their religious beliefs and values permeate every sphere of public and private life.

A third criterion that I accept implicit in the discussions regards recognizing the freedom and equality all human beings share with respect to their status as citizens. While citizenship is not the chief end of life and religious people may not be compelled to honor all values of citizenship before their religious convictions, the core values of citizenship (reciprocity, tolerance and mutual respect) must be honored. Religious people should not hold or act on the view that those who hold other convictions are unworthy of fair treatment or equal rights as citizens.

Coincidentally, these are criteria I would use to judge any private association rooted in a comprehensive doctrine, religious or otherwise. I make no special distinction – at least with respect to citizenship – between religious convictions and those of any other sort (philosophical, scientific, etc.) regarding how they influence behavior in the political dimension of life; more specifically, that dimension which encompasses social and economic, as well as narrowly “political” relations.



### Summary

The argumentative thrust of this chapter does not seek to reject the values of democratic character or autonomy in any formulation. Rather this chapter seeks to emphasize the importance of the following points. First, the view of religion represented in each author's discussion is based on examples that are atypical and radical. While there are occasional caveats from these authors that suggest they recognize this, there is no discussion of alternative religious orientations holding other assumptions. Consequently, isolationist and fundamentalist religious orientations, as embodied by the Old Order Amish and the fundamentalist parents represented in *Mozert*, are permitted to stand for religion by default. Second, the educational proposals of these authors give insufficient weight to the importance of freedom of conscience. Third, arguments that are able to show that religious education is inherently inconsistent with the development of democratic character and autonomy tend to assert "hard" interpretations of these values, which are themselves suspicious. An example of this is Amy Gutmann's view of democratic education, which seems to view democracy as a kind of comprehensive doctrine in its own right; one which has the potential to lead to the oppression and exclusion of religious groups. A "hard" view of autonomy would be one that precluded any authorization on the part of parents favoring their own views in the socialization of their children. However, if we appeal to "softer" views of democracy and autonomy it becomes far less clear that democratic character and autonomy are inconsistent with any but the most radical religious convictions.

Few religious groups are isolationist as are the Amish. Many practice congregational democracy in their churches. Most have found reasons to support freedom of conscience and many associate this with intellectual openness, believing that God does not value faith that is coerced. Many have theological traditions that are associated with the life of the mind (e.g. Thomistic, Aristotelianism). Most importantly, many religious traditions speak eloquently in favor of justice and argue that God favors the poor and oppressed.

There are arguments, based on a reinterpretation of John Rawls, which suggest that for very many people religion will be an essential component of their support for an overlapping consensus. The function of these arguments is to encourage consideration of religious traditions or orientations that advance an alternative vision of citizenship. My aim is not to restore an aggressive religiosity in public schools. It is to restore respect for the positive contribution of religion in the minds of those whose views are biased by *Yoder* and *Mozert*; and to illuminate the importance of religious private associations in civic and moral education.

The next few chapters engage in a critical exploration of the religious diversity that actually exists across American society and place special focus on one expression of it as represented in the prophetic Christian tradition. The prophetic tradition advances a vision of citizenship distinct from that of isolationists and fundamentalists. Hence, it has differing implications for liberal citizenship.

## Chapter 4: Typology of Religious Belief

The answer to the question “What implications does religious education have for political socialization?” is predicated on a kind of typology of religious belief. There is a great deal of diversity within traditions regarding adherents’ orientations toward citizenship, not to mention across them. For example, Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist Christian denominations comprise a broad array of groups; some theologically conservative and bordering on fundamentalism, and others whose beliefs and practices are so indistinguishably fused with secular culture they fail to appear even remotely “religious.” Each denomination is comprised of groups that might represent distinctly different religious beliefs and, more specifically, approaches to religious training. The bearing these varying religious beliefs and practices have on citizenship can in no way be generalized. Nevertheless, I will attempt to shed some clarity on the question above by analyzing the attitudes of three broad categories of religious believers as they relate to the state. I place exclusive focus on Christian groups as exemplars of these categories.

Michael McConnell (2000) discusses a condition religious believers confront as they attempt to reconcile two identities: one being faithful devotee and the other being citizen. The condition he calls *citizenship ambiguity* stems from the attempt to fulfill dual commitments to both a transcendent and a secular authority.<sup>48</sup> McConnell believes, then, that religious belief can impact the development of a citizen identity

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<sup>48</sup> By secular authority I refer not so much to a particular individual per se, but rather to the office that vests authority to the individual. In constitutional regimes the use of that authority is to be in alignment with civil law.

due to the presence of conflict between the competing obligations and loyalties derived from each source of authority.

In their role as citizen, religious believers are sometimes required to suppress their beliefs when these conflict with civil law or custom. For example, the liberal democratic norm of using secular language when justifying the use of state power would view "...because the Bible says so!" as inappropriate justification for enacting the laws of the state. Alternatively, in their role as faithful devotee, believers are often compelled to champion the truths of their faith such that those truths might win greater social influence in what they may view as a morally decadent and spiritually impoverished world. Yet, it is not always clear how one is to interpret religious commands. Under any unique social circumstances a believer may be left in a quandary about how to, for example, reconcile the religious commands to submit himself to the governing authorities – because "there is not authority except that which God has established" (Romans 13:1), and to obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29). Believers experience citizenship ambiguity precisely because they feel an obligation to be good citizens, albeit while being faithful to the theological tenets of their faith.

McConnell implies that the tension that results from an attempt to balance religious and civic allegiances is by no means present in the psychological life of all believers. He argues that this is because civil law and vast majority of religious commands do not necessarily conflict, but rather are often mutually reinforcing.

"Much depends on the nature of the religion and of the state. Religions that place few nonspiritual demands on their adherents, or whose cultural and moral commitments are more or less congruent with the wider community,

will create relatively few conflicts. Governments that confine themselves to the few essential functions necessary to peace and good order will generate fewer conflicts than governments active in the educational, cultural, and moral lives of their citizens” (McConnell, 2000, 91-92).

Basically, McConnell seems to be implying two things: one having to do with a doctrine’s compatibility with a society’s prevailing (and potentially morally corrupt) cultural values, and the other having to do with a doctrine’s congruency with the political principles (principles of justice) underpinning civic law. He seems to be suggesting that citizenship ambiguity is avoided when a group’s religious commitments are aligned with the morality expressed through the prevailing values animating secular culture (e.g., materialism, individualism, competition, paternalism, consumption); or when liberal democratic governments resist any expression of *de facto* establishment.

But if this is McConnell’s view it cannot be completely accurate. Citizenship ambiguity can be faced by all but one type of believer: one who cannot reconcile his or her religious moral commitments with the political values and principles underpinning civil law. This sort of believer would, in effect, lack the motivation to be a good citizen because he or she disavows the criteria by which good citizens are measured. In America this amounts to liberal democratic virtue.

Believers who are capable of reconciling their religious moral commitments with liberal democratic political principles might nevertheless face citizenship ambiguity in cases where their convictions conflict with dominant cultural values (despite the fact that cultural values cannot formally be considered requirements of liberal citizenship). This is because the prevailing values of a given culture – its ethos – wield such a normative influence upon what gets trademarked as the notion of what

an American is (which, coincidentally, is the stereotype that non-Americans around the globe, particularly the Muslim world, generally accept as accurate for all US citizens). The conflating of this “American identity” (so much a reflection of dominant cultural values) with citizenship (most accurately defined by commitments that are “constitutional”) is, in essence, the source of the ambiguity for these believers.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, they find themselves surrounded by fellow citizens morally undisturbed by the degree to which many of the prevailing cultural values impair the pursuit for genuine justice. Consequently, some religious believers find themselves in a quandary wondering just how, as a religious citizen, they might responsibly address such conditions in a manner that is faithful to both liberal principles as well as to their conscience.

Consider also the emphasis many religions place on social justice. Even thoroughly secularized believers, if they honor this value, must decide *whether and to what degree* dominant cultural values might oppress and enslave, and, consequently, how to respond when they do. “[T]he problem for the religious person in liberal society is not to see if justice...is consistent with the picture of the good life taught by the faith. It is rather to see whether liberal ideals such as respect for persons, the equal protection of the laws, and the separation of church and state provide suitable interpretations of views already held. Sometimes the issue may be one of translatability” (Strike, 2001b).

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<sup>49</sup> I believe John F. Kennedy may have been addressing this very phenomenon when he once said, “War will exist until that distant day when the conscientious objector enjoys the same reputation and prestige that the warrior does today.” The true meaning of citizenship is severely threatened when dissent is associated with disloyalty and unqualified devotion as the only acceptable expression of national loyalty and patriotism.

Ronald Thiemann (2000) coined the term “pilgrim citizen” in an attempt to capture the interaction between religious convictions and civic obligations. He uses this term not so much to describe the experience of ambiguity, but rather to describe believers who have come to recognize the penultimate nature of the temporal world and their appointment as ambassadors of a ubiquitous kingdom that is both present and to come. He argues that pilgrim citizens do not, however, endorse any divinely mandated political model of government.

“Religious persons bring a set of fundamental convictions and orienting principles to public debate, but the application of the resources of faith can only be determined in each particular situation. Religious convictions and principles may provide a basic framework within which policy reflection takes place for the believer, but those resources do not determine choices in the public realm. People of faith, then, should function in a democratic society as “connected critics”” (Thiemann, 2000, 85).

Although he feels that all believers should function as connected critics in society, clearly not all will. However, connected critics are able to sustain their commitment to the state even in the midst of being critical of it. It is very likely that believers of this sort indeed interpret liberal ideals as an acceptable instantiation of their religious ideals. Therefore, in light of the orienting principles common to both the political conception of justice and their faith, the force of their critique “serves to call a community back to its better nature” while at the same time affirms what they view as God’s moral ideal (Thiemann, 2000). Thiemann seems to think religious believers are quite certain about which authority claims their ultimate allegiance, just as they can be about in which areas their political attitudes are at odds with their religious convictions.

There are two main points I would like to extract from these author's views. It would seem that citizenship ambiguity has little to do with any difficulty believers experience regarding where to place their loyalty or allegiance, but instead has to do with: (1) the perceived degree of compatibility between the dominant political and cultural values of secular society and those endorsed by the believer's comprehensive doctrine; and (2) how believers translate (behaviorally) their theologically inspired obligation to rectify any gap they perceive between the two.<sup>50</sup> Nancy Rosenblum provides a range of religious orientations that illustrate how believers negotiate these two tasks.

Nancy Rosenblum (2000) highlights three broad expressions of religious belief by discussing a political orientation she calls "integralism." Rosenblum describes integralism as a challenge to democratic government in the name of faith. She argues that it is motivated by a sense of dualism religious believers experience, resulting from their attempt to honor the mandates of religious law and authority within a public culture that does not often mirror their faith. "At its heart is a sense of alienation, or a falling off from unity, which comes from being "forced" to live what is described as the divided life of believer and citizen" (Rosenblum, 2000, 15).

As defined, integralism incorporates both believers who have reconciled their beliefs with civil law as well as those who have not because they feel the two are incommensurable – either politically and/or culturally. Each type feels a sense of alienation from the public culture insofar that the society, to varying degrees, is permissive of values that not only violate religious belief but places demands on them

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<sup>50</sup> I use the word perceive in either case because it seems that much of what differentiates the attitudes of these groups towards secular culture and political engagement has to do with their distinct interpretation of Christian doctrine.



as citizens that are theologically unsettling. For example, in light of their private religious convictions about homosexuality some believers express moral doubt about the legalization of gay marriage, even though politically they believe all citizens, being free and equal, are entitled to the right to marry who they love.

Integralism encompasses a broad range of religious attitudes that seek a religiously integrated existence. A common feature is a preoccupation with repairing fragmentation and restoring personal moral and political wholeness. Rosenblum lists a range of religious attitudes that circumscribe three principal groups.

Religious integralists of at least one principal type desire to see their faith and values reflected in every sphere of public and private life. They exhibit religious attitudes consistent with what has come to be associated with fundamentalism. “We associate these demands of faith with desecularization, antimodernism, or a pervasive rejection of the profane world, and with the characterization of secular democracy as atheistic and nihilist” (Rosenblum, 2000, 15). Rosenblum believes this attitude reflects the strongest form of integralism because it conflates discipleship and citizenship. It does not seek to disassociate religious commands and state authority. Because these believers insist that “religious commands are the supreme law, cover every aspect of life, are binding on everyone in society,” (Rosenblum, 2000, 15) they likely reject concepts like free faith.<sup>51</sup>

This *conservative integralist* attitude detects a severe degree of incommensurability between the values endorsed by their doctrine and those of secular culture (and perhaps even some of its civil laws). Consequently, believers of this sort can become isolationists in an attempt to insulate themselves and their

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<sup>51</sup> The belief that God values autonomously chosen and uncoerced faith.

children from corrupt “worldly” or secular forces. Hence they risk autonomy and largely reject any sense of political solidarity with citizens not of their faith. A plausible portrayal of these believers is expressed by Spinner-Halev when he discusses parents that object to their children’s exposure to the antagonistic elements of society:

“Parents who object to this exposure, and who believe that the sacred permeates everything, and want their children taught accordingly, will not receive satisfaction in the public schools. Their objection is not only to evolution, but to the idea of a secular education, even one that accommodates religion. These parents, and not all religious conservatives are like these parents, have to turn to parochial schools or home-schooling to have their children taught as they would like” (Spinner-Halev, 2000a, 86).

Mirroring Kymlicka’s (2000) “isolationist religious groups”, they generally avoid political participation. But not all disavow responsibility for the larger society. To the degree they are politically active they are to some extent allied with conservative political causes that reflect their theological conservatism. Conservative integralists that feel a theological obligation to rectify the gap between secular and religious commitments often translate it in a manner that displays little respect for inclusivism. “This form of integralism encourages (though it does not entail) establishment” (Rosenblum, 2000, 20).

A second principle type of religious integralist subscribes to beliefs less overtly entrenched in moral absoluteness or authoritarianism, however they do hold strong religious convictions. Rosenblum suggests that these integralists seek *moral regeneration* through faith, and contend that religious associational life strengthens moral conduct and cultivates moral dispositions that advance the public welfare. “The idea is to supplant social relations that are presumably based on rational

calculations of individual self-interest with moral relations” (Rosenblum, 2000, 16).

Believers whose principal interest is moral regeneration view religious tenets as intrinsically valuable, particularly with respect to solving social problems, because of their greater moral authority, vitality, and legitimacy. Rosenblum explains:

“Believers do not always insist that morality is impossible without religion, but they do insist that religious belief and association strengthen moral conduct and compensate for the failures of secular values, institutions, and authorities....For religion to provide meaning and moral guidance the sphere of religious authority over adherents must be broadened, and religious community and identity must be strengthened....The emphasis is on religious exceptionalism rather than functional equivalence to other social groups” (Rosenblum, 2000, 17).

The stress this integralist attitude places on strengthening moral dispositions and on moral regeneration expresses a desire to fulfill more of a subsidiary role to the state by satisfying ethical needs that would make governmental institutions seem suspiciously biased if they sought to address them in like manner. In fact, they might assume that the moral inferiority of secular values would make any attempt by the state largely futile. These believers are likely to feel that their role is most effectively fulfilled by operating their own independent institutions (including schools in some cases), and by soliciting governmental support in the form of selective legal exemptions and subsidies.

This sort of integralist levies sharp critiques against the pervasiveness of individualistic, self-interested calculations in general moral relations. Their desire to circumscribe the sphere of religious influence over their own adherents is evidence of a biblical worldview filtering their encounter with secular culture in a manner that clearly seeks to distinguish them from it. Yet, this worldview encourages their responsibility for the moral health of the polis, primarily through personal

rejuvenation on a micro level rather than state “conversion” on a macro societal level. The global evangelical ministry of Billy Graham epitomizes them quite well, given his apolitical agenda and emphasis on personal virtue.

Presumably, moral regenerators do not advance a radical offensive against the social institutions of society. Their platform is more sublime and accommodating; providing individuals with moral resources that improve their character, but that may not necessarily de-familiarize their social context to the extent that they experience any arresting incommensurability between the moral values that buttress their theology and many of the political values buttressing civic law. These believers view secular values, institutions, and authorities as failing society to a great degree because they lack the appropriate substance to effectively address the moral defects of society. Moral regenerators’ critique of secular values points more to the limitations of those values rather than to their corruptness.

Secular theorists see these believers as “safe” largely because they view them as having accommodated their religious convictions to the modern world. They have made scripture a series of metaphors for a liberal political outlook. “Advocates of a publicly endorsed moralizing role for religion assume a felicitous congruence between religious and democratic values” (Rosenblum, 2000, 17). Their primary approach to rectifying the gap between secular and religious values is through enhancing or enriching the quality of social relations “from below”, by cultivating moral dispositions that transfer to the civic arena and improve public welfare.

The third integralist attitude is strikingly similar to the second insofar that it affirms the preeminence of religious moral values to secular ones. However, the

uniqueness of this attitude is evident in its lone inclination to, at the very least, encourage active engagement in civic affairs. Rosenblum claims that these religious integralists assume a priority of responsibility over rights and entitlements, thereby envisioning a distinctly *civic role* for religion. They oppose political passivity. Their integralism is expressed through efforts to help citizens overcome the sense of intimidation that inhibits public involvement and to generate civic participation in ways that offset inequality of resources. Such efforts are sustained on the basis of an appeal to their religious convictions.

“[C]ivic integralists encourage political engagement, often via religious associations, on religious terms....They may or may not adhere to the strict norms of theorists of deliberative democracy for whom political beliefs rooted in religious doctrine should be expressed in ways that advance ‘ecumenical political dialogue’ and proceeds from common political principles....[R]eligious groups perform classic liberal democratic functions when they enter political arenas self-defensively to insure toleration, publicize and resist oppression, protect the weak against powerful elites, curb careless and arbitrary exercises of power. They have always been vital checks on government” (Rosenblum, 2000, 19).

Groups like the Society of Friends (Quakers) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference led by Martin Luther King, Jr. during the height of the Civil Rights Movement epitomize this type of *civil integralist*. Similarly, the Liberation Theology movement, expressed in both African-American and Latin American contexts, articulates a distinct view of God’s orientation toward humankind and an interpretation of Christian theology in relation to political life through the perspective of the poor and oppressed.

Their objective is political (ethical) wholeness. In this sense their biblical worldview is politically progressive because it does not conflate religious commands

and state authority (discipleship and citizenship). At the same time their world view might be thought of as an expression of orthodoxy because it is sufficiently distinguishable from penultimate modern values, and because they view it as authoritative in the sense that the implications of its truth erect moral norms (usually justice centered) that they feel should be binding on everyone in society. The worldview of civil integralists does not merely promote a communitarian vision of the moral order that is to exist within the faith community – values to be honored simply between members. It is also a moral vision of social reality that promotes a vision of justice and civic virtue expressing ethical norms that are to govern social life in public and private.

The emphasis Rosenblum claims civil integralists place on rights and entitlements, resisting oppression, asymmetrical power relationships, and the abuse of power seems to express an earnest, almost singular, commitment to a biblical view of social justice. “The appeal of these churches is precisely their ability to eliminate the disjuncture between daily immersion in racism and conspiracism on the one side and typical Sunday services preaching unity on the other” (Rosenblum, 2000, 20). Any incompatibility civil integralists perceive between their comprehensive doctrine and a society’s dominant cultural values would appear to have less to do with the content of a fair and reasonable political conception of justice (they seem capable of translating their religious moral beliefs in a ways that interpret secular moral values as roughly equivalent), but more to do with bias with regard to how the political conception of justice is interpreted and implemented in the public sphere. Civil integralists view this as the chief impediment to political ethical wholeness, and they desire to rectify

the gap between what the dominant society professes and what it practices by sustaining an active and engaged political voice that challenges conventional assumptions about social reality.

My primary concern is with this third group of religious believers and their posture toward the state. Whether one calls them the “progressively orthodox” or “civil integralists” is of less importance than what, theologically, informs their particular orientation toward citizenship reconciliation and the educational implications of their beliefs with respect to the moral obligations of citizenship.

The prophetic tradition within the Judeo-Christian faith most resembles the characteristics Rosenblum attaches to the third type of religious integralists. This tradition is not isolationist. Although it seeks engagement with the secular world, it also seeks to be prophetic in the sense that it has a message to announce that stands in judgment of the world. This message has at least three components: (1) the demand for social justice; (2) an emphasis on the decadent values of modern societies; and (3) a call to repentance.

### *The Prophetic Tradition in Christianity*

“For too long now we have been satisfied with a very unprophetic, popular interpretation of the Bible that has comforted the comfortable and left the oppressed to their oppressors....The Bible, however, is a document that stands solidly on the side of evenhanded justice and equality” (Hanson, 1996, 1).

The oppression and exploitation produced by social hierarchy, and generously supported by the rigid legalism of the Jewish aristocracy, were the primary targets of the ministry of the biblical Jesus. During his time, like our own, the lower one’s social status – principally related to assets and the “accidents of birth” – the more

likely one would be deprived of the sustenance necessary for basic physical, psychological, and spiritual survival. His concern was human wholeness, and he sought to provide an opportunity for redemption to those who the religious and political elite overlooked; an opportunity that would not depend upon an evaluation of one's social status. This has been described as his "preferential option for the poor."

To the biblical Jesus, the ethical mandates of Hebrew law provided a sufficient response to these concerns and his means of implementing that response was by reinvigorating a radical conception of equality and social justice. His orientation provided a model for the early Christian church, and one that connected to a political orientation already present within Judaism. The "prophetic" (Mosaic) and the "royal" (Davidic) traditions represent two discernable political orientations in the Hebrew bible that reflect a tension within ancient Israelite theology. The primary difference between the two orientations rests upon how each understands Yahweh's relationship to humanity as a whole.

The prophetic tradition views Yahweh as liberator of the poor and oppressed, and as expressing a paramount concern for social justice. Its origins are located in the exilic experiences of the Hebrew people as characterized in the book of Exodus. The understanding of Yahweh as liberator is derived from biblical portrayals of his liberating acts directed toward those enslaved in Egypt and the subsequent covenantal relationship Yahweh establishes with that community. "[E]arly Yahwistic tradition recalled a historical drama in which Yahweh, in defiance of earthly potentates, embraced the cause of the most lowly of the earth and of them made a nation chosen to be a blessing for, and a teacher of, all people" (Hanson, 1996, 6). Throughout the



period of exile, Yahweh's prophets not only attack physical bondage but also the existence of idolatry within any culture whose allegiance to a foreign deity and whose perception of reality undermined the freedom of Yahweh's chosen people. "This divine partiality does not mean a lack of love for other people, but a concern to overcome social injustice and thus bring about a society in which all people are equally respected as bearers of God's image" (De Gruchy, 1995, 11).

Conversely, the royal tradition developed concurrently with the Davidic monarchy in Jerusalem. According to this tradition, Yahweh upholds a privileged, quasi-deified leader from a chosen nation for the sake of maintaining earthly kingship. The social hierarchy this structure established was interpreted as a divinely justified monarchical structure appropriate for the larger society. "Basically, the system from which the Hebrews had been liberated and which their descendants saw reimplanting itself in Israel was a social pyramid with the deity at the top, followed by the divine king, and then in a progressive descent moving through the social classes to the slaves at the bottom" (Hanson, 1996, 7). What is important to note is that the centralized structures of the monarchy were strategically beneficial to the Israelites with respect to external threats from enemy nations and for responding to the sinfulness of the people (Hanson, 1996). However, a history of self-aggrandizing and arrogant kings clearly revealed that all forms of government and societal institutions, even the monarchy, are flawed, particularly when they do not grant justice and dignity equitably to all people regardless of status.

The prophetic tradition adamantly rejects any monarchical structure. Instead, it reinforces a unique conception of life and personhood that supports an egalitarian

social ideal. In contrast to the royal tradition in which access to political authority is determined by birth, the prophetic tradition insists that communities elect their ruler by way of God's guidance, which is slightly different from God delineating a specific pool of potential candidates. This orientation places more emphasis on persona over pedigree. The elected ruler would not regard himself as being intrinsically superior to his followers (Deuteronomy 17:14-20) – in essence, denying any hereditary claims to kingship – but would instead regard all humans as created in the image of God.

Foundational to Christianity is a metaphysical conception of the person which suggests that humanity is created in the likeness of God, or in God's image (Genesis 1:27). The Latin term *imago dei* defines this idea. The term signifies a fundamental commonness humanity shares at the moment of creation; suggesting that on some basic level all humans are equal. "The fact that humanity is created in the image of God is widely regarded as establishing the original uprightness and dignity of human nature" (McGrath, 2001). Despite the evident diversity across humanity with respect to ability and status, from a Christian perspective all persons are the object of God's redemptive grace because every person is considered equally worthy. Specifically from a prophetic stance, the scope of God's salvation incorporates everyone, and no one community is especially favored or excluded. This notion of human equality and human dignity has given rise to a fervent egalitarian impulse within the prophetic tradition.

This egalitarian impulse in the prophetic tradition is reflected in what is called the *Deuteronomic Code*, which was likely drafted just prior to the Babylonian exile

by priests influenced by the prophetic tradition.<sup>52</sup> The code places primary focus on the significance of the covenant established by God with the Israelite community at Sinai (as it preserves ancient customs from the days before the monarchy) as well as King Josiah's religious and political reforms.

“Central to the Deuteronomic reforms were *economic* concerns. Under the monarchy, the egalitarian social ideals of the prophets were continually threatened, not least through burdensome taxation and the confiscation of land in lieu of the repayment of debts. Thus the Deuteronomic code called on Israel to emulate Yahweh's concern for the poor, oppressed, widows, orphans, and other *victims of society*. . . . Tsedādah, social righteousness or justice, was ‘the barometer of the health of society’ . . . . Laws and their administration were subject to the higher law of social righteousness, which meant, in effect, ensuring that the structures of society were themselves just” (Italics mine) (De Gruchy, 1995, 43-44).

Deuteronomy seeks to make God's covenanting kingdom concrete.

Walter Brueggemann (1987) considers Deuteronomy not simply the legislation of Israel's economic and political concerns. He argues that it represents the social imagination of a wilderness inhabiting liberated community governed by Yahweh rather than the gods of Canaan. It is an alternative shaping of human life in new modes; faithful to the experience of Exodus and according to the will of Yahweh, Lord of the covenant.<sup>53</sup> Obedience to the requirements of the covenant assured God's benevolence and favor. Moreover, fulfilling the commitments of the code entailed the incorporation of political concerns. Of them, the just treatment of all persons, despite their lineage and economic status, was critical.

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<sup>52</sup> On this point Michael Walzer writes: “The precise relation of Deuteronomy to the prophetic movement is a subject of ongoing scholarly debate. Did the prophets influence the Deuteronomic writers, or the writers the prophets? It seems likely that influence worked in both directions and in ways that we shall never wholly understand” (Walzer, 1996, 25).

<sup>53</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Hope In History*, 23.

One of the chief effects of the Deuteronomic code was to provoke the community to initiate an ongoing appraisal of social injustice and oppression, although the Israelites did not always honor the terms of the code. The prevalence of the hierarchical and paternalistic customs endorsed by supporters of the royal orientation placed the Jewish prophetic tradition in the position of underdog with respect to exerting much social influence. The prophetic orientation represents a strand of Judaism expressly concerned about political and social issues, including those external to the faith community, because of its emphasis on oppression and social justice.

The concern for social justice and the hope for a transformed world expressed in the prophetic tradition undoubtedly affected the New Testament. The ministry of the biblical Jesus, and the subsequent religious movement that developed after him, must be located within the prophetic tradition. Within the biblical narrative one discovers Jesus fixing his focus toward the needs of the oppressed, considering wealth a danger to the soul, and opposing the Jewish priestly aristocracy who represented the dominant ecclesiastical forces of his day (De Gruchy, 1995).

Following Jesus' death early primitive Christians co-opted the term *ekklēsia* from common parlance and transformed its meaning to reflect their identity as gadfly to the larger society. The term was commonly used to describe an association of citizens formed to execute some particular civic responsibility. It therefore tended to be a political term applicable to a range of associations within civil society.

Hellenistic Christians wanted it to signify them as God's chosen people. They sought to be viewed as a peculiar assembly of citizens distinguishable from the array

of other voluntary private groups that restricted membership only to those of similar social status. The Christian *ekklēsia*, in contrast, considered itself a universal community of equals comprised of local congregations of converts drawn from *all* segments of society. The infant Christian church was likely diversified by ethnicity as well as by class. “For Hellenistic Christians it would have suggested an analogy to the secular assembly of citizens, with the implication that Christians had a responsibility to ensure not only that their own community, but also wider society was well governed (I Corinthians 6:2)” (De Gruchy, 1995, 51). A commitment to conscience and to a higher moral law demanded civic engagement and, ultimately, dissent in situations where public culture was thought to be in violation of God’s moral order. Due to its growth and public influence the *ekklēsia* “was increasingly perceived as a rival socio-political institution, another centre of power, which made absolute and universal claims in the name of God” (De Gruchy, 1995, 51).

Having located the source of the prophetic tradition, it will be easier to understand the primary function of prophecy and the social criticism expressed through prophetic Christian witness within both the biblical narrative and present modern society. In *Prophecy and Social Criticism* (1996) Michael Walzer attempts to understand the function of prophecy as a social practice. He essentially argues that prophecy is a unique form of inspired communication that arouses remembrance of some commonly understood morality. The traditional method by which the prophet fulfills this function is through some form of contextual social criticism of the particular practices of a particular group. Walzer adds that the primary aim of prophecy is not forecasting the future (although the ethical implications of current

behavior are often communicated) but rather sustaining the moral health of a covenantal community as an organic whole.

Walzer argues that the efficacy of the prophet's message depends upon the background of a common moral theology. He posits that a strong, disinterested lay religiosity within a community – synonymous with a covenantal doctrine, or political values expressed through a social contract in a secular constitutional regime – sustains a culture of faith and argument upon which the prophet's message is comprehensible. Walzer describes this doctrinal background as a “normative account of the informal and unpriestly culture of prayer and argument” (Walzer, 1996, 25). In Israel's covenant theology, the source of that doctrine is found in Deuteronomic writings. Whatever its source in a given community, the principles endorsed through this common moral theology are an engrained element of ordinary discourse; something against which the prophet takes for granted his words can be immediately understood and accepted (Lindblom, 1962).

However, it is important to remember the historical position of the prophetic tradition within ancient Israel. The prophet represented a minority voice in a social world that largely identified with an opposing set of values and institutions. Furthermore, the royal ideology of kingship often held sway. As Paul Hanson states, *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* were coextensive (Hanson, 1996). Located within a distinct sphere of power yet integrated in society, Old Testament prophets stood outside the sphere of mainstream authority and issued harsh critiques from a perspective that was independent of, and a tradition distinct from, the prevailing

worldview. Although their perspective was a cultural and political underdog, it was still widely known and understood.

For this reason, the message of the prophets is fundamentally pragmatic. In many ways, Walzer argues, the prophetic message communicates nothing radically new but instead builds upon previous messages that fund obedience to a morality contrary to the present ordering of social reality. Walzer uses the prophet Amos as a paradigmatic example of a “peripheral” prophet<sup>54</sup> who, in his critique, invokes a particular moral law against religious customs and social norms. Because the prophets were also members of the societies they addressed, they translated and revised the vision so that it was sensitive to the dynamic conditions of their particular contexts. But the authenticity of the original covenantal doctrine was never lost. Hanson suggests that prophecy is ontologically grounded, which forces it to make pronouncements within concrete and often ambiguous situations.<sup>55</sup> Walzer explains further:

“First, there is no prophetic utopia, no account...of the “best” political or religious regime, a regime free from history, located anywhere and nowhere.... They are not religious adepts or mystics; they never advocate asceticism or world-rejection.... Utopian speculation and world-rejection are two forms of escape from particularism.... The prophetic argument, by contrast, is that *this* people must live in *this* way” (Walzer, 1996, 29).

The prophets endorse no final or universal version of their vision. The prophet need only show the people their own hearts and judge their attitudes and dealings with one

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<sup>54</sup> One outside the dominant political structure and critical of its interests and institutions (Hanson, 1996).

<sup>55</sup> This is the primary reason that civil integralists (Rosenblum, 2000) are not isolationists. They desire to remain integrated and engaged in secular society in order to develop adequate responses to its changing peculiarities.

another. Their audience already knows the commandments – those principles of the background common moral theology.

Given that the prophet's audience is already aware of the moral standards being defended, what exactly is the content of the prophetic message? What is the central target of its criticism? The intersection between human and divine authority, and consequently, the shaping of social reality, is the focus of the prophetic message.

As was stated earlier, the primary aim of prophecy is sustaining the moral health of the covenantal community as an organic whole. Any deficiency in the functioning of one organ threatens the health of the entire body. Prophetic voices focus on social injustice and the welfare of the poor and oppressed – those whose marginalized status has come to be viewed as justified and is acceptable to greater society. Prophetic social criticism then, continuing the example set by Yahweh during Israel's exile, seeks to preserve the intrinsic value of every person regardless of their social status. The prophet begins by assessing the condition of those John Dominic Crossan describes as being deliberately squeezed out as human junk from the social system's own evil operations (Crossan, 1994). But the prophet also understands that a defective and unhealthy ethos indirectly oppresses the privileged as well.

Walzer explains how prophecy attempts to make a distinction between piety and doing what is "right" by suggesting that ritual observance alone falls short of what God requires.

“[T]he power of a prophet...derives from his ability to say what oppression means, how it is experienced, in *this* time and place, and to explain how it is connected with other features of a shared social life. Amos has an argument



to make about oppression and religious observance, and it is one of his chief arguments: that *it is entirely possible to trample upon the poor and to observe the Sabbath*. And from this he concludes that the laws against oppression take precedence over the Sabbath laws” (Italics mine) (Walzer, 1996, 34).

Additionally, the prophet Micah wrote:

“Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousand rivers of oil?  
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He has showed you, O man, what is good.  
And what does the LORD require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy  
and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 5:7,8)

In oblique, systemic, and structural conditions of oppression, injustice often wears a mask of acceptability, normalcy, or even necessity (Crossan, 1994). The prophet’s central critique is that the prevailing cultural values of a given society cause many to suffer unnecessarily within a system that views their fate as appropriate. This is not merely the result of illegitimate hierarchies that estrange humans from one another, but it is also due to erroneously elevating the letter of the law above the spirit of it.

A rigid legalism regarding rules and regulations abets oppression and injustice as effectively as social inequalities rooted in class, culture, race, and gender. Upon being chastised for gathering food on the Jewish day of rest, Jesus reminds the Pharisees that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). Legalism against love, or judgment against reconciliation, seems to be the obscured source of error for the prevailing culture of most societies. Shrewdly exerting the law is a legitimization strategy.

The legitimating powers controlling social reality communicate to some that they are inferior and insignificant and effectively deny their humanity. This oppression violates Yahweh's covenantal standards, which convey that all are created free, equal and in God's image. The prophetic orientation enables one to perceive subtle yet systematic assaults against human dignity that stem from hegemonic expressions of illegitimate authority a given society views as normal. "If that purpose (to remind the people of their moral commitments) is not served, then the ceremonies are of no use; less than no use. For they generate among rich and avaricious Israelites a false sense of security – as if they were safe from divine wrath" (Walzer, 1996, 32).

The prophetic Christian tradition is a tradition of attitudes and practices that evoke the remembrance of a set of (covenantal) values and standards. It also reveals how, by neglect or intent, a person or community violates that standard, often despite the appearance of faithful adherence to it. The prophetic Christian message, in fact, has two principle foci. One is the axis of temporal power that governs the shaping of social reality in human institutions (and the residual oppression which results when such structures are illegitimate). A second is the rigid enforcement of the law.

The tradition is rooted in a radical conception of life and personhood that is buttressed by an egalitarian impulse. That egalitarian impulse advances a belief in the "absolute equality of people that denies the validity of any discrimination between them and negates the necessity of any hierarchy among them" (Crossan, 1994, 71). The radical conception of life, or worldview, it endorses is critical of oppressive systems of language and conduct that threaten human dignity and human flourishing.

Ultimately the tradition seeks to reconcile the gap between a society's prevailing ethos and sacred covenantal values.

## Chapter 5: Christianity, the Political Dimension, and Citizenship

While some critiques of religion turn on the assumption that a strong commitment to one's religious beliefs equates to authoritarian behavior, what this particular view overlooks is the possibility that mainline and left-leaning believers possess a sense of responsibility for the health of the greater society and for fulfilling the obligations of citizenship *as a function of* their religious convictions. I will illuminate a few doctrinal sources of this type of conviction within Christianity and then discuss the implications the prophetic tradition has with respect to citizenship.

The Bible is the most popular source to which Christians appeal for guidance on political issues, especially regarding a suitable posture toward worldly affairs and, specifically, whether believers should forsake some or all civic obligations. However, exegetical disparity precludes any consensus among Christians on these concerns. There is no more of a consensus within Christendom concerning the interpretation of scripture with respect to the civic demands of faith than there is among political theorists concerning the interpretation of the Constitution with respect to religious accommodation. One theologian notes, "There are in fact different Christianities, and different ways in which the gospel is understood and related to the world. Confessional and denominational differences clearly affect the ways in which churches participate in the political arena" (De Gruchy, 1995, 10). According to Nancy Rosenblum, ongoing *internal* appraisal of religious traditions within faith communities is the cause of "divergent interpretations of religious law...and varying degrees of commitment to the dictates of religious authorities, from

militant to passive to rebellious....Christianity and the church are a complex phenomena. It is important, therefore, not to indulge in sweeping generalizations, nor to assume that there is Christian unanimity on the issues at hand”(Rosenblum, 2000, 8).

Much of what the bible offers relative to influencing believers’ deference to secular rulers or their participation in secular affairs amounts to isolated verses that basically acknowledge the importance of both. What I will do in the following paragraphs is discuss three random, though popular, biblical verses that I feel hang together relatively well to help illuminate these points.

To begin, an often cited verse concerning the church and the state is found in the New Testament gospels. It is Jesus’s famous admonition to “give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”<sup>56</sup> In this verse Jesus is responding to antagonists attempting to entrap him into expressing open contempt for Caesar. Of note is the fact that they are concerned with an issue that still troubles some believers in our time: whether and how one ought to balance deference to political authorities and give honor God (who most believers consider the focal point of ultimate allegiance). Jesus’s response in no way addresses all of the peculiar “muddles” confronting believers who attempt to honor the obligations of citizenship and the demands of faith. However, it does provide ample room and encouragement for believers to satisfy the duties that comprise citizenship. At the same time, by directing believers to also give to God what is God’s (which I suppose includes one’s commitment to sacred moral mandates), Jesus’s response erects boundaries regarding what believers may consider impermissible according to

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<sup>56</sup> Luke 20:25, New Revised Standard Version.

conscience. Ultimately, I assume few churches struggle with communicating to their members that God should be granted their ultimate allegiance and that government laws do not trump God's laws.

Second, the Old Testament book of Jeremiah includes a letter attributed to the prophet that is addressed to Jews exiled in Babylon – a foreign culture and community. God, through Jeremiah, tells the Jews to seek the welfare of the city into which they have been exiled and to pray in its behalf.<sup>57</sup> The explanation provided in the verse is fairly straightforward: there is a reciprocal relationship between the welfare of the city – its ethical, economic, and physical state – and the prosperity of the faithful.

Third, in the book of Romans one finds more specific statements regarding civic duty (citizenship) than those credited to Jesus above in the gospels. In fact these statements can be viewed as extending the remarks in Luke chapter 20 and also complimenting the theme of interrelated fate shared between believers and the secular society that is expressed in Jeremiah. The book of Romans is actually a letter to the community of faith in Rome. It is attributed to the Apostle Paul, and in it he comments on civil authorities: that is, how to interpret their station and authority, and also what obligations believers owe them.

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment....Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due them – taxes to whom taxes are

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<sup>57</sup> Jeremiah 29:7-11.

due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.”<sup>58</sup>

It is easy to interpret Paul’s words literally and presume that he is conflating civil and religious authority. In fact some Christians hold to this view, and it guides their desire for a self-confessing “born again” Christian as head of state. An alternative view might suggest that Paul is simply making a statement about God’s divine providence.

“The Church has never accepted the divine right of kings, the view, based on a literal interpretation of St. Paul’s letter to the Romans, that political rulers were personally chosen by God to rule over their subjects. The Church’s view might be better described this way: God created people as social beings naturally inclined to form communities. Part of community life is the establishment of authority to act in the name of the community. Thus, God wills that there be political authority” (Argan).

In this sense, the social welfare of believers and non-believers is connected because all inevitably remain members of some larger civic community. Even socially isolated believers are indirectly affected by the personal and corporate decisions of political authorities and fellow citizens.

If it is reasonable to infer from these obligations expectations of believers qua citizens, then being a believer-citizen does not necessarily involve developing a psychological bracket between a duty to obey secular authorities and a duty to obey God. Jesus’s remarks in Luke 20 would appear to support such a view. Likewise, one can interpret Paul as suggesting that out of fidelity to certain ethical standards believers are to issue the same degree of respect to non-believers and Christians alike. This point is relevant in light of how some Old Testament prophets assert various norms of religious purity and justice that appear to only hold within the Jewish

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<sup>58</sup> Romans 13:1-2; 5-7, New Revised Standard Version.

community and not between other communities, seemingly shaping a kind of communitarian (intra-community) ethic. In addition, St. Paul's comments represent two things: 1) what believers might appeal to for accepting an overlapping consensus concerning the scope of justice and 2) the presence of practical and moral reasoning within the Christian comprehensive doctrine.

At most, my random survey of scripture illuminates the ingredients of a popular or conventional Christian view of citizenship. Given the central concerns of the tradition, a specifically prophetic Christian stance concerning the expectations of citizens would likely resemble what has been highlighted above but would probably have more to say about at least two things: (a) dissent through acts of constructive civil disobedience in the face of corrupt civil authorities and unjust social policy; and (b) a prohibition against conflating civil and divine authority in any literal sense.

Like Rosenblum's *civic integralists*, the aim of prophetic voices is political ethical wholeness rather than having religious commands comprehensively enforced across the educational, cultural, and moral lives of their fellow citizens. In order to more accurately envision a prophetic Christian view of citizenship, it might be helpful to explore the possible role of the citizen in the prophetic tradition, which I will attempt to construct later in the chapter. But first I will discuss the manner in which the prophetic tradition shapes citizens. How a religious tradition shapes the disposition of an individual has some bearing on their behavior and the role(s) they might assume within society.



### *How the Prophetic Tradition Shapes Citizens*

Before analyzing how the structure of faith within the prophetic Christian tradition shapes citizens I want to first bring attention to one of its unique features: its implicit understanding of citizenship as religious vocation. I believe doing so will provide context and meaning to the subsequent discussion of the distinctive manner in which the prophetic tradition shapes citizens. That discussion will draw upon the dimensions of Israel's process of disjunctive faith transformation, hence citizen shaping, as articulated by Walter Brueggemann in *Hope Within History* (1987).

The prophetic tradition does not hold socializing individuals for participation in liberal democracy as an interest of its stance toward citizenship. Based upon the discussion in the preceding section the interests the prophetic tradition connects to citizenship evidently differ from the state's interests regarding the same. The Exodus narrative, as one instrument for shaping the prophetic identity, doesn't necessarily strive to equip individuals with the knowledge and capacities that assists their enculturation into society. In an effort, for instance, to either secure believers' obedience to secular rulers or to inspire them to seek the welfare of a given community, the prophetic Christian tradition associates such behavior to religious devotion and fidelity to a biblical worldview.

Alternatively, the state does not conflate citizenship and discipleship, nor should it. Its primary concern is political stability and social reproduction of the political and social norms that sustain it. Considering this, the values, capacities, and virtues the state seeks to cultivate will largely be political in character and free-standing from competing doctrines and views of the good. However private

associations like churches need not follow this course. “Israel’s narrative is never, and never intends to be, substantively neutral, for Israel’s faith is characteristically passionate in its partisan claims that concern both religious matters and social reality” (Brueggemann, 1987, 7). Therefore, citizen shaping, from a prophetic stance, is not so much a process of ‘political socialization’ or ‘political education,’ but is rather a process that entails the *appropriation* of a worldview.

The worldview endorsed by the prophetic tradition is critical of the political culture depending upon how congruent those values that shape social reality are with core prophetic values. A prophetic worldview is most critical of the political culture of a given society when it reflects the two following scenarios. First, when the state violates its own norms of justice and these norms are congruent with the core values of the prophetic tradition. Under this scenario, the prophetic tradition advocates speaking in opposition to the hypocrisy of the state but not in opposition to the state’s core values – since the state is in violation of its own core values. Second, when the state acts in concert with its core values and its values are corrupt (so far as the prophetic tradition is concerned). Under this scenario, the prophetic tradition advocates speaking in opposition to the state in a more fundamental way, and the prophetic Christian believers cannot at the same time fully be good citizens (according to the standards for citizenship held by the state). The role of the prophetic Christian believer under this second scenario is to call the state to a higher standard – the standards of morality congruent with the prophetic worldview – albeit in a non-authoritarian way.

Prophetic Christians must be prepared for active participation in a liberal democracy, yet possess a peculiar consciousness that energizes their criticism and delegitimization of any prevailing myths and corrupt values that might masquerade as absolutes. If prophetic believers fail to continually revitalize this peculiar consciousness they will fail to fulfill their function in society as “connected critics” (Thiemann, 2000): those remedying the gap between dominant social realities and God’s moral standards. Thus the character of the Exodus narrative is actually deconstructive rather than assimilative; aiming to disorient, assault, impinge upon, and shatter conventional descriptions of reality<sup>59</sup> so that believers may adequately discern and critique them. The prophetic tradition, then, represents an epistemological critique of social reality.

Nevertheless, doesn’t this process still constitute a form of socialization? My answer is no. The distinction I make between socialization and appropriation may seem merely semantic. However, I believe the difference is substantive. Socialization is a process of adaptation relative to a *particular* context or social environment (home, community, school or society). Socialization then involves some degree of establishing a fittingness or suitability for something or somewhere. Walter Brueggemann (1987) claims that development, growth, or socialization are *not* among those ends Israel’s normative narrative in Exodus is interested in. He instead argues that its intention is to evoke and generate *transformation* in each new moment of its hearing.

“The Exodus narrative is not interested in development, but characteristically jars, assaults, and disorients so that development and growth are not adequate ways of speaking about the changes that are wrought through discontinuity,

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<sup>59</sup> Brueggemann, p8.

displacement, and disjunction. . . . Whereas development may yield classification, transformation resists such thematization” (Brueggemann, 1987, 8).

This resistance is attributable to the fact that, on an individual level, disjuncture with prevailing beliefs will not occur in any predictable way.

Conversely, to appropriate is to lay claim to or make use of for a particular purpose. Israel’s narrative emphasizes a historical memory and alternative paradigm that represents an ideal conception of social life and personhood. The alternative paradigm evokes a vision that permits a new reality to emerge and generates hope in something that is to come. Israel’s narrative, therefore, possesses the capacity to disrupt enculturation, resulting in the opposite of socialization; ensuring that a particular vision is not lost, especially if it is under threat of being domesticated by a culture that may be hostile to it.

Brueggemann contends that “the church will not have power to act or believe until it recovers its tradition of faith and permits that tradition to be the primal way out of enculturation. . . . [T]he church has no business more pressing than the reappropriation of its memory in its full power and authenticity” (Brueggemann, 2001, 2). Rather than socializing for a particular context, the moral standards and social interests of the Exodus narrative sustain an imaginative vision and alternative consciousness, which in turn energizes prophetic thought regardless of the context or society in which adherents live.

So far I have consistently referred to the function of the Exodus narrative in Israel's transformative faith formation.<sup>60</sup> A great deal of focus is given to the Exodus narrative (particularly by Jewish communities) because it symbolizes a prototypical prophet and a basic understanding of prophecy in the character Moses. The narrative also exemplifies the impact of a community's criticism of and subsequent delegitimization of an empire. Brueggemann refers to Israel's formative process of appropriating its normative memory and governing metaphors from this narrative as "liturgical," signifying sustained performance by a community. Through this sustained process Israel is, in effect, "constructing its own life and identity and permitting each new generation to appropriate it and to participate in its peculiar angle of vision" (Brueggemann, 1987, 10).

Brueggemann argues that Israel's use of the normative narrative of Exodus is to enhance faith formation in a conflictual, disjunctive way. He claims this is because the Exodus narrative is not interested in "stages" of faith development but instead on the wrenching transitions between them.<sup>61</sup>

"The Exodus literature mounts an argument that individual personhood is always a communal enterprise. Therefore the stages are never merely about *interiority* and yet are always about *interaction* in which the person is evoked, assaulted, and impinged upon in formative and transformative ways, depending on the other parties to the interaction....The struggle to embrace covenantal modes of life is the story of faith development in Israel" (Brueggemann, 1987, 9).

Israel's liturgical process of faith formation aims to arouse a search for new and different meaning by training believers to consciously evaluate the norms and

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<sup>60</sup> Faith communities that adhere to the prophetic tradition employ varying methods and texts by which they enable new members to appropriate the distinct norms and metaphors that make up the prophetic worldview.

<sup>61</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Hope Within History*, 8.

prevailing myths that play a dominant role in shaping social reality. The community comes to understand that being able to become awake to pain is a very important dimension of what makes liberation and redemption possible – particularly seeing one’s own pain. To lack an awareness of how wrong things are means that nothing ever changes.

Prophetic communities presuppose that transformational action only results from a transformed consciousness. Therefore, Israel’s retelling of the story of the Exodus appears to have multiple purposes:

- (1) to inspire compassion – a “feeling with” the characters in the story in such a way to emphasize an experience and an idea (liberation).
- (2) to inspire questions/inquiry – because questioning is a path to freedom and inquiry is a way of “opening things up” so that individuals will ask more questions (otherwise everyone *becomes* the system, not so much by consciously accepting a role but rather by unconsciously becoming their role).
- (3) to propagate new ideas – the feeling that one is capable of giving birth to possibility. Those who have to be liberated (and who must serve as liberators) must achieve in themselves some sense of agency and control over the possibility of change.
- (4) to form and reform an alternative community.

Brueggemann contends that there are three dimensions to Israel’s transformative redescription of life and personhood. He names them the *critique of ideology*, the *public processing of pain*, and the *release of social imagination*. I will describe each in an attempt to explain how religious associations of a prophetic orientation affect the transformation of social reality through disjunctive faith formation.

#### Critique of Ideology

This dimension of faith formation focuses on the prevailing myths that shape personhood according to dominant social interests. The purpose of critiquing the

arrangements legitimated by what Brueggemann calls “imperial ideology” (i.e. the prevailing cultural consciousness: values, norms, myths) is to subvert the *absolute* shaping of reality. What the Exodus narrative conveys is the notion that every Israelite initially defines life and comprehends their self-identity within the contrived world of the dominant culture of Egypt. Thus the impact of Egypt’s hegemonic ethos must be eliminated and Israel’s despairing conformity to this ethos must be transformed.

The Exodus narrative is fundamentally critical of the social reality in which Israel is inevitably enmeshed. Pharaoh’s all-encompassing empire sustains life and controls meanings in a stable and efficient manner. Consequently, Israel knows no innocence, and has no innocence, outside of this social reality.<sup>62</sup> The community’s existence is colored by a world in which oppression and pain are pillars of public reality. “From the beginning, personal life is experienced as participation in and appropriation of the public realities of oppression and pain. Those realities are not just historically present; they are also given symbolic maximization through the liturgy which is person-shaping” (Brueggemann, 1987, 11).

Although Israel concedes the hegemonic power of the empire the community does not accept its authority as proper or normative. “[O]ne knows without being told that *we do not belong to Pharaoh’s world*. That is an alien world and one must not be seduced by it” (Brueggemann, 1987, 11). The oppressed Israelites have not been enculturated to the degree that all are unable to recognize that the legitimated social contrivance is organized against justice, freedom, and humaneness.

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<sup>62</sup> Brueggemann, *Hope Within History*, 11.

Consequently, Israel practices a liturgy that intends to enhance their capacity to discern modes of oppressive ideology, critique them, and act apart from them.

An important ingredient in Israel's method of critiquing ideology is that it provides theological motivation for transformation. According to Brueggemann, Israel's narrative recital reinforces the belief that Yahweh is ultimately responsible for dismantling the contrived reality. Every generation is taught that freedom and justice are concerns of God, and that He is a reliable ally with sufficient power to guarantee the deconstruction of any hegemonic empire. This message develops a posture of refusal within believers that is invigorated by the alternative paradigm of social reality expressed throughout the text. "Each new generation, as it participates in this narrative, learns how to make and engages in this social criticism of established power. The capacity and the freedom for such criticism are central to faith maturation in Israel's self-understanding" (Brueggemann, 1987, 14). Brueggemann believes that the Jewish community understands that a proper retelling of the Exodus narrative will dismantle the dominant ideology by evoking a memory of "who we are" and by inspiring concrete acts of refusal and freedom.

#### Public Processing of Pain

Social criticism arouses consciousness and creates a basis for concrete acts of disengagement. Brueggemann warns, however, that mere insight never liberated anyone. An *embrace* of the source of our pain is necessary in order to be liberated from a dominant consciousness. In this sense, Israel's grieving is the beginning of



criticism because it means that the community acknowledges the pain caused by a false myth – a broken promise.<sup>63</sup>

Brueggemann defines public processing as an intentional and communal act that expresses grief and generates social power. “Bringing hurt to public expression is an important first step in the dismantling criticism that permits a new reality, theological and social, to emerge” (Brueggemann, 2001, 12). When the oppressed assemble publicly to articulate their pain, their collective social anger gets concentrated. Be it through political meetings of protest, formal protests in court, or acts of stylized assault,<sup>64</sup> each constitutes an expression of civil disobedience on the part of the disinherited and indicates that they will no longer be in denial about how incompatible the imperial ideology is with their personal longings for life and personhood. A *public* outcry from the oppressed based upon their alternative perception of reality serves as an act of criticism that initiates the formation of a counter-community.<sup>65</sup>

Reciting the Exodus narrative reminds the Israelites that Yahweh hears their cries and desires to relieve their pain. The community recognizes that the empire cannot nurture their hope because it never actually hears their cries.<sup>66</sup> Consequently, they learn to not expect anything from the empire, that they owe nothing to it, and that its promises are ineffectual. Faith formation, then, ultimately rests upon “faith in this God evoked in this community which lies outside the system... Faith formation

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<sup>63</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 12.

<sup>64</sup> Brueggemann, *Hope Within History*, 17.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>66</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 13.

means to convey the uniqueness of Yahweh and hence the distinctiveness of Israel” (Brueggemann, 1987, 18).

Being an Israelite implicates being able to recognize the legitimacy of pain in human existence, and that the public processing of such pain permits and calls forth a kind of social redescription of reality that creates opportunities for newness. Israel’s narrative enactment invites each new generation of believers to view the deconstruction of oppressive empires and the redefinition of their identity as normative. This liturgical process effectively “permits no ideology to cover over the pain which is judged to be the crucial element in the reality of the community and, indeed, in the reality of the person” (Brueggemann, 1987, 20). Embracing pain is, in itself, an acknowledgement that the myths and alleged absoluteness of the dominant ideology is fraudulent.

#### Release of Social Imagination

Brueggemann explains that the social aspect of releasing imagination is the collective process of discovering new ways to shape the identity of the community.<sup>67</sup> Ritual defiance (for example celebratory singing and dancing)<sup>68</sup> usually occurs before there is any public defiance. Then public outcry that often follows unleashes Israel’s stifled imagination and quenched hope, thus renewing courage and the will to design and implement alternative visions of social reality.

Brueggemann considers three examples in which the Exodus narrative articulates the release of social imagination. The first he labels a *liturgic* enactment

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<sup>67</sup> Brueggemann, *Hope Within History*, 21.

<sup>68</sup> These acts tend to be tried in the safety of the community before one can act in a hostile public arena.

of a changed social situation and transformed sense of reality. This behavior is evidenced insofar as Israel tells an alternative story, enacts an alternative reality, and envisions a different shaping of reality.<sup>69</sup>

He labels the second example a *political* act wherein Israel changes “gods.” “Faith formation is a process of choosing gods....In choosing this new God...the peasant community always found it had also chosen a new mode of social existence along with the new God. This God may not be chosen apart from a particular social existence” (Brueggemann, 1987, 26). By affirming the kingship of Yahweh Israel is in effect forming a new political entity that provides a foundation for rejecting the former political realities of Pharaoh.<sup>70</sup> This political act represents an allegiance to a core metaphor for social imagination that is present in the Old and New Testaments: the notion of the Kingdom of God. The kingdom of God metaphorically symbolizes “a social construction of reality that judges and critiques every other social construction of power and authority” (Brueggemann, 1987, 22). *But it is not a utopian template for social life.* It is more akin to a vision of God’s reign as a spiritual reality in a contextual political dimension.<sup>71</sup> The prophet *adapts* this vision to particular contexts: “No prophet ever sees things under the aspect of eternity. It is always partisan theology, always for the moment...satisfied to see only a piece of it

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<sup>69</sup> Exodus 15:1-18, 21.

<sup>70</sup> Exodus 19:4-6.

<sup>71</sup> The characterization of the kingdom of God described here by Brueggemann and implied within the prophetic tradition reflects a vision of it that John Dominic Crossan calls a “sapiential” kingdom, as opposed to an apocalyptic or concrete future kingdom whose consummation is consigned to divine power alone. According to Crossan, “sapientia” emphasizes the necessity of wisdom in determining how one can live so that God’s redemptive rule and blessings are evidently present to all through virtue, justice, and freedom. “The Kingdom of God is people under divine rule – and that, as ideal, transcends and judges all human rule” (Crossan, 1994, 55).

all and to speak out of that risk of contradicting the rest of it” (Brueggemann, 2001, 16).

Brueggeman labels a third example of social imagination within Israel’s narrative as a *legislative* act. Acts of this sort translate Israel’s alternative conception of reality into concrete economic and political social criteria. “One example of such social imagination which seeks to make God’s covenanting kingdom concrete is the tradition of Deuteronomy....Deuteronomy, however, makes the extraordinary venturesome suggestion: the fertile land does not need to be ordered in Canaanite ways. The land can be ordered in covenantal ways according to the rule of Yahweh and Lord of the covenant” (Brueggemann, 1987, 23). The primordial hope of prophecy is that imaginative social transformation is ongoing and that the purposes of the tradition do not become domesticated and do not succumb to hopelessness.

Although specifically drawn from Israel’s liturgic use of the Exodus text, these three dimensions of faith formation – the critique of ideology, the public processing of pain, and the release of social imagination – can be viewed as three general (rather than orthodox) types of attitudes and practices prophetic religious communities rehearse in their own unique way from generation to generation for the purpose of shaping citizens. However, Brueggemann explains, “...these texts hold that every process of transformation and genuine faith, in whatever social context...moves in this fashion. This is Israel’s reading of all reality, not only its own” (Brueggemann, 1987, 26). Although the narrative and methods may vary among prophetic religious communities, the substance of this process of disjunctive faith formation is essentially the same according to Brueggemann. Furthermore, God

is the essential ingredient because of the importance of internalizing the truth that God represents an active agent in the quest for liberation.

In summary, a primary objective of prophetic faith formation, and hence citizen shaping, is to develop believer's capacity to appraise and if need be reject the prevailing reality-shaping ideology; and, subsequently, to make a bold move of disengagement – “a denial of the theodicy sponsored by the system” (Brueggemann, 1987, 17). Israel's liturgical process does this by issuing both an epistemological and sociological critique of social reality. The structures of faith underpinning the prophetic strand of Christianity implicate involvement in the political dimension of life with a concern for social justice, liberation from oppression and political ethical wholeness. By facilitating the appropriation of a normative memory and a set of governing metaphors, the prophetic tradition invites citizens to embrace a religious vocation that involves critiquing established power and imaginatively reconciling society with a radical vision of personhood and social intercourse.

### *The Role of the Citizen in the Prophetic Tradition*

Let me summarize the claims I have made concerning the prophetic tradition. I have said that it is undergirded by a conception of personhood that views every human as created in the image of God. This conception of personhood supports an egalitarian social ideal that seeks to affirm the dignity of all persons regardless of social status. The establishment of a covenantal relationship between Yahweh and humanity form the tradition's roots in the Old Testament. In that covenantal relationship Yahweh displays partiality to the poor and oppressed and serves as an active agent in their liberation from oppression. The tradition expresses a paramount

concern for equality, freedom and social justice. I have said that the axis of temporal power and the rigid enforcement of the law are the foci of the tradition. The critique of dominant cultural and political norms not only serves to eliminate the gap between social circumstances and covenantal standards of humaneness, but also to arouse the remembrance of a commonly known moral framework. I explained that prophecy ultimately does not endorse a prophetic utopia (i.e., an account of an absolute, ideal version of its vision that is free from history). Instead, the prophetic stance is more pragmatic in that the object is to proclaim that a concrete community or political regime must operate in a particular way. Finally, I have said that the prophetic tradition invigorates a liturgical process of transformative faith formation that involves: appropriating a normative memory and governing metaphors; dismantling, through critique, a taken-for-granted ethos that assists enculturation; igniting a public embrace of pain that consequently funds obedience to an alternative consciousness; and energizing hope through activating social imagination.

That being said, how might these concerns and objectives translate into a specifically *prophetic role* for religious citizens in a liberal democratic society (especially given the conscience-raising influence of a normative narrative rife with criticism of dominant cultural values and cynicism toward political authority)? Should liberal societies expect religious absolutism accompanied by abrasive crusading in the name of God from believers who adhere to the prophetic tradition? Or might the opprobrium offered by contemporary prophetic religious voices have a broader focus than merely their perception that the whole of society is in violation of religious law?

Given the traditional confrontational model of prophecy as “prophet versus established power” in the Old Testament, and the claims I make above, the role of citizen in the prophetic tradition might seem fairly obvious. One could consider the ultimate focus of prophetic criticism to merely be the repugnant and sordid abuses of power, violations of law, or transgressions of social etiquette that have historically lead to boycotts, rallies, speeches and marches decrying injustice or advancing some social cause. If so, the role of prophetic citizens would simply be to confront corrupt political norms and aggressively overhaul overtly unjust social policies and practices that provide license for socially unacceptable behavior.

However, if the focus of the prophetic tradition includes not merely overtly unjust public policies and practices but also acceptable attitudes and cultural values that are, upon close inspection, as repugnant and sordid as many of the political norms they probably give rise to, then the vocation of citizen in the prophetic tradition may be more wide-ranging than the aforementioned conclusion.

Old Testament prophets generally attribute the root cause of the many and varied concrete instances of injustice to some expression of idolatry and what I will call obdurateness.<sup>72</sup> Walter Brueggemann contends that each distinct and concrete political crisis is perhaps evidence of an enduring and resilient dominant crisis:

“[T]he dominant crisis...of having our alternative vocation co-opted and domesticated. It may be, of course, that this enduring crisis manifests itself in any given time around concrete issues, but it concerns the enduring crisis that runs from concrete issue to concrete issue” (Brueggemann, 2001, 3).

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<sup>72</sup> Idolatry being a function of enculturation, and obdurateness being an unwillingness to consider alternatives.

How, then, might the prophetic vocation itself – represented in the concerns and objectives I summarized above – become co-opted and domesticated? One common means is when the mainline church becomes enculturated.

In *The Prophetic Imagination* (2001) Brueggemann notes that mainline churches have increasingly become decentered and disenfranchised in the United States during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among other causes, he feels the long-term and penetrating force of secularization has helped marginalize these church communities away from the cultural center of contemporary liberal society. Consequently, the social clout of mainline churches has deteriorated. Therefore, instead of participating in the public life of the dominant community from a perspective of tension, mainline congregations are, for the most part, comfortably integrated within the dominant culture. Speaking about the Sanctified Holiness Church and its tradition of sustaining a socially conscious and profoundly spiritual Christian witness, Cheryl Sanders (1996) expresses concern about how this tradition is possibly being undermined by the seduction from larger cultural forces: “The future of the tradition seems imperiled by the drift toward the acceptance of elitist patriarchal values, the rejection of ancestral identity and worship practices, and the failure to sustain a creative evangelistic outreach in the face of the host of nihilistic encroachments of despair – homelessness, poverty, drug abuse, crime, family dysfunction....” (Sanders, 1996, 150-151).



In fact, Brueggemann despairingly suggests that the contemporary church is so largely enculturated to the dominant American ethos of consumerism that it has little power left to believe or to act.<sup>73</sup> Cornel West reiterates this view:

“The rewards and respectability of the American empire that tempt Christians of all colors cannot be overlooked. The free-market fundamentalism that makes an idol of money and a fetish of wealth seduces too many Christians. And when the major example of prophetic Christianity – the black church tradition – succumbs to this temptation and seduction, the very future of American democracy is in peril”(West, 2004, 158-159).

Assimilation allows churches to be co-opted by the political powers of the day and reshaped by profane elements of the dominant secular culture instead of the other way around. This “domestication” of the church’s vocation by “imperial” or popular culture inevitably corrupts the intent and diminishes the efficacy of the methods it might employ to fulfill its prophetic vocation.

Brueggemann insists that the task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and *evoke a consciousness* and *perception* alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture.<sup>74</sup> The pull toward conforming to the dominant culture and accepting its myths is central to the “dominant crisis” of domestication. Prophetic ministry targets how this process of enculturation inconspicuously and efficiently persuades individuals to not merely accept, but to *become* the system. Therefore, to answer my guiding question, I argue that the concerns and objectives of the prophetic tradition translate into a specifically civic role for its adherents in that they have a responsibility to resist enculturation and contest the effects of obdurateness.

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<sup>73</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 1.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

## Resist Enculturation

Enculturation is the process by which the supremacy of a dominant ideology grants it sufficient influence to shape social reality and assimilate individuals such that they perpetuate its values and practices. Brueggemann hints at this supremacy when he observes (in reference to the critique of ideology) that Israel knew no innocence outside of Egypt's social reality, and that every Israelite initially defined life and understood their self-identity within the contrived world of Egypt's dominant culture.<sup>75</sup>

It is worth saying that because an ideology possesses dominance over other extant doctrines does not, in itself, make it unreasonable; only more influential. My guess is that the prophetic tradition would welcome such widespread influence with respect to God's covenantal values and principles inexorably buttressing the norms of social intercourse. However, the prophetic tradition is not an ideology, nor does it advance a particular way of life into which individuals could be enculturated. At most it might be considered a vision of justice, but one compatible with ideological pluralism. What makes an ideology unreasonable is not necessarily dominance but authoritarianism: if it aims to stifle the viability and flourishing of competing ideologies.

Authoritarianism is not singularly manifested through the words and deeds of an autocratic pharaoh. The most dangerous sort tends to operate beneath the threshold of conscious perception. By using words like "contrived" and "imperial" Brueggemann intends to focus attention on a particular kind of enculturation: one that assimilates according to a provincial ideology. Such adjectives insinuate acts of

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<sup>75</sup> Brueggemann, *Hope Within History*, 11.

manipulation on the part of an authority or regime with the *intent to deceive*. Yet, the use of this subliminal coercion in service of an imperial ideology rarely betrays the inaccuracy of the governing myths and symbols the ideology promotes. Conduct of this sort on the part of a state would violate the notion of voluntarism<sup>76</sup> so integral to liberal democratic societies.

Similar to the political methods used in fascist regimes, the promotion of an overarching view of the good life can effectively fix social reality in free societies as well. Recall that the “dominant crisis”<sup>77</sup> that occurs as a result of the enculturation that results from an imperial ideology is less discernable and not manifestly illiberal. Michael Walzer interprets an argument made by the prophet Amos about oppression and religious observance in a manner that highlights the dangers of subtle forms of enculturation: “It is entirely possible to trample upon the poor and to observe the Sabbath” (Walzer, 1996, 34). In other words, although a given society might faithfully perpetuate certain socially acceptable cultural beliefs and practices believing that they cohere with their cherished ethical standards, it is very possible that at some level this assumption is in error. Moreover, some of the most oppressive forms of enculturation become normative within a society’s dominant public culture precisely because they do not violate any laws. For instance, the view that it is morally acceptable to redefine the notion of family and the institution of marriage in a manner that would effectively deny civil privileges to certain citizens.

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<sup>76</sup> Voluntarism emphasizes that (political) membership and participation should be freely chosen (voluntary) and absent of coercion. Christianity’s notion of free faith is tantamount to voluntarism. Many Christians believe that God values only voluntary faith, and that salvation in fact requires this autonomous act of free choice as a precondition. The prophetic Christian tradition clearly affirms the notion of free faith because it intentionally cuts against the grain of social forces that erode autonomy and human flourishing.

<sup>77</sup> Brueggemann equates this with the co-opting and domestication of the prophetic vocation.

Walter Brueggemann's suggestion that contemporary prophetic action become more nuanced and cunning than the old confrontational model is more than likely a response to the fact that current systems of enculturation and domestication are nuanced and cunning.<sup>78</sup> For example, "political correctness" and the "spinning" of views on social issues have effectively masked much of the vitriol that once flowed unabated in society. Consequently, some people will candidly claim that certain illiberal attitudes (like racism) no longer even exist. Such views may sound laughable to some, but under conditions of imperial enculturation they are quite believable. The masses simply learn to rationalize and tolerate injustice partially because it is concealed in socially acceptable packaging. The prophetic tradition views such conditioned indifference as a transgression, and promotes creative, contextual elimination of those forces that cultivate it. "Prophetic witness consists of human acts of justice and kindness that attend to the unjust sources of human hurt and misery...It highlights personal and institutional evil, including especially the evil of being indifferent to personal and institutional evil"(West, 2004, 17).

The institutions that most impact the shaping of America's dominant culture (like the media) promulgate consumption, materialism, individualism, sexual aggrandizement, and competition as the paths to personal well being. Two effects of this domineering posture toward the good life are that alternative conceptions of the good that seem at odds with the popular versions lose their appeal, and also the gradual reduction in reflection about alternative conceptions by the general public. Kenneth Strike echoes this point.

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<sup>78</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, xii.

“Our society has a default ethic. It’s the one taught on television and via the popular culture. It has a firm grip on educational policy. Its basic tenant is that the good life consists in things such as material possessions, status, and the admiration from others for the possession of such characteristics as wealth, beauty, and power. It leads to an educational philosophy that says, ‘Get an education, to get a good job, to get stuff.’ The chief danger is that children come to believe this without ever articulating it to themselves, and without ever recognizing that there are alternatives. Schools, I think, are more likely to promote this than to critique it.”<sup>79</sup>

In some sense this prevailing myth – including the things that serve as a means to its fulfillment – can be considered a contemporary idol.

Idolatry is a feature and consequence of imperial enculturation. For my purposes, idolatry translates into an immoderate attachment or devotion to something. Throughout the period of exile, Yahweh’s prophets not only attack physical bondage but also the seduction by idols of “pagan” cultures. “The deadly charge of idolatry, which is the preeminent weapon in the prophetic arsenal against injustice, whether that idolatry is the worship of power or money, sits at the center of prophetic resistance to imperial nations”(West, 2004, 18).

One cause of Israel’s oppression was that Egypt’s mode of existence was connected to foreign gods; and “foreign gods” need not merely be the transcendental sort. Brueggemann points out that faith formation is a process of choosing gods “that may not be chosen apart from a particular mode of social existence” (Brueggemann, 2001, 26). As Israel’s liturgical process makes clear, systems of language and rhetoric, prevailing myths, and dominant claims of truth that shape personhood can also become the object of idolatry. The objective of an imperial ideology is securing mass devotion to the illusion that something is absolute and given, thereby arresting inquiry and critique: “Numbness does not hurt like torture, but in a quite parallel way,

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<sup>79</sup> Kenneth Strike, personal communication with author (March 2005).

numbness robs us of our capability for humanity” (Brueggemann, 2001, xx). Doing so legitimates the imperial ideology and causes individuals to become numb to the internal pain and discomfort that signals a need for alteration.

Seriously contesting the subconscious numbness that is the result of enculturation by an imperial ideology is a major responsibility of prophetic believers in their role as citizens. Prophetic citizens can fulfill this role by awakening fellow citizens to its presence and helping to delegitimize the pain caused by its prevailing myths.

#### Contest the Effects of Obdurateness

To be obdurate is to refuse to give in to persuasion or become hardened against moral influence. This concept suggests an unwillingness to open oneself up to an alternative reality. For example, the Exodus narrative reports that Pharaoh’s heart was hardened and he, consequently, refuses Moses’ command to “let the people go.”<sup>80</sup> One could argue that Pharaoh was incapable of imagining reality without the slaves. Still, it is not just Pharaoh that suffers from this condition. Later in the narrative, the Israelites perhaps reflect obdurateness by complaining about their ambiguous status in the wilderness and pining for the familiarity of their oppressive former reality.

One is susceptible to obdurateness whether one has been enculturated by a provincial ideology or not. Even prophetic imagination itself is not immune to it. Walter Brueggemann notes that Israel’s process of faith formation is ongoing in its dynamic because “old forms of social imagination tend to become new modes of

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<sup>80</sup> Exodus 7:14.

oppressive ideology in need of critique” (Brueggemann, 1987, 24). He believes that continually returning to the primal texts (Exodus) and its root metaphors (covenant, kingdom) enables believers to remain receptive to new realities and new hopes.

What, therefore, might be the source of obduracy? Enculturation can abet obduracy (by promoting narrow-mindedness). Whether this occurs or not seems dependent upon the ideology at its core. For example, some past approaches to political socialization, like those mentioned in chapter two, were inhospitable toward ethnic, cultural and religious minorities. These expressions of enculturation reflect obduracy insofar as they represent a refusal to adjust to changing social realities (e.g., expanding religious and ethnic pluralism). In this sense, they were “imperial” and intentionally oppressive towards those families whose reason refused to stomach the sectarian beliefs imposed through the enculturation. Moreover, though, such provincial approaches to enculturation deliberately enslaved those students who likely unquestioningly accepted their truths. Those students’ sense of truth was shaped in a manner that their capacity to entertain alternative truths was greatly diminished.

Another source of obduracy is an absence of self critique and social imagination. The failure to sustain an ongoing critique of personal behavior as well as public and private social arrangements in light of one’s moral ideals usually results in an unconscious settlement with what social convention and popular opinion understands to be right and true. That settlement consequently cultivates obduracy because human preferences and expectations preserve social reality according to an imperial ideology. It is those that are or have become “comfortable,” according to the Reverend Jesse Jackson, that most fiercely resist change. Therefore,

the role of the prophetic citizen is to disturb the most tragic form of comfort: the kind that is impervious to injustice and the suffering of those who are most disturbed and oppressed by it. To neglect this responsibility is to undermine society's capacity and willingness to cultivate social imagination. And in a liberal society based upon free citizenship, and in which political legitimacy is achieved through deliberative processes, the inability to entertain alternative social realities would seem to create a formidable obstacle to the exercise of reciprocity and tolerance in social interactions.

How then might prophetic citizens contest obduracy? Walter Brueggemann insists that within prophetic communities their liturgical recital is ongoing, meaning transformation is continually revitalized. His exposition of the three dimensions of Israel's process of transformative faith formation serves as an example of how private (religious) associations might shape attitudes and practices that adequately contest obduracy. Prophetic citizens could then employ the confrontational "prophet versus king" model of political protest, as exemplified in the Old Testament, in the public sphere. There is a rich tradition of public protest in America, from oral methods like Billy Graham's and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s public addresses to more demonstrative confrontational methods like those mentioned earlier: boycotts, picketing, and public marches. These examples of protest and resistance strategically "defamiliarize" what is ordinarily obscured by the everyday and that which often entirely escapes our notice (Greene, 1988).



### Summary

These are very general and intuitive observations concerning a vision of citizenship consistent with the prophetic tradition. By no means do they exhaust the responsibilities, concerns, and objectives of the tradition. However these two general roles represent the fundamental commitments of the prophetic vocation. Prophetic citizens must address enculturation and obdurateness while also engaging in social action that creatively confronts oppressive and unjust social policies, norms, and practices.

Dominant secular culture does not always or often reflect sacred prophetic values, particularly with respect to how the least advantaged in society are viewed and treated. As a result, we are all susceptible to tacitly contributing to forms of oppression. The prophetic tradition aims to contest idolatry and obdurateness through disruptive faith formation. Walter Brueggemann's discussion of Israel's transformative liturgical process is one example. It involves the appropriation of a normative memory and governing metaphors through the use of a historical narrative.

Brueggemann insists that the alternative consciousness that is so important for prophetic ministries to cultivate and nourish has two functions: to criticize and to energize. The criticizing function attempts to dismantle the dominant consciousness by delegitimizing and rejecting the present ordering of social reality; while the energizing function serves to stimulate hope and fervent anticipation for God's promise of the newness of another time and situation toward which the faith community can move.<sup>81</sup> He notes: "The task of prophetic ministry is to hold together

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<sup>81</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 3.

criticism and energizing, for I should urge that either by itself is not faithful to our best tradition. Our faith tradition understands that it is precisely the dialectic of criticizing and energizing that can let us be seriously faithful to God” (Brueggemann, 2001, 4).

The prophetic tradition focuses on ideological oppression that denies a lively communal imagination and resists newness. Prophetic citizens are to be custodians of an alternative consciousness and a paradigm of social reality, ensuring that the dominant culture and consciousness does not marginalize belief in the fact that things can change and that social reality is not fixed because God, the central figure of faith formation, remains dynamic and active.

### *The Prophetic Tradition and Liberal Democratic Suspicions*

In chapter 3 I analyzed arguments that underscored the negative aspects of religion and that served as exemplars of those that are critical of religious education. Harry Brighouse argues that justice requires that each child has a significant and equal opportunity to live a life that is good for them. Therefore, he believes that providing children with a realistic opportunity to become autonomous adults is the fundamental value that should guide the design of education policy. Accordingly, the criterion he uses to judge religious associations (not necessarily with respect to citizenship) is their ability to facilitate autonomy. In other words, their willingness and capacity to explore alternative doctrines or views and the reasoning deployed within those views, and in so doing provide prospective adults a wide range of choices that could be theirs and an instrument for selecting well among them.

Amy Gutmann argues that democratic societies have a strong interest in cultivating the skills and virtues that enable the conscious social reproduction of their political norms. According to Gutmann, the most significant of those skills is the capacity to deliberate among alternative forms of personal and political life, and the most indispensable virtue is mutual respect – for the liberty and rights of other citizens. Therefore, an inevitable function of education in liberal democratic societies is to develop the intellectual and moral capacity necessary to deliberate rationally among competing views (something she calls democratic character). Consequently, the criteria she uses to judge religious associations with respect to citizenship are their ability to foster mutual respect by exposing members to alternative views and reasoning that conflict with their own, and their ability to cultivate deliberative capacities in their members.

Lastly, Eamonn Callan asserts that the reasonableness (reasoned moral consensus needed to establish a vision of justice) that political liberalism depends upon is funded by reciprocity. Acceptance of the burdens of judgment supports the reciprocity and mutual toleration that public reason must promote when citizens select the principles of justice that undergird society. Therefore, political liberalism yields an education that invites citizens to question the absolute truth of their comprehensive doctrine and inadvertently promotes autonomy. As a result, the criterion he uses to judge religious associations with respect to citizenship is whether they foster reciprocity by securing acceptance of the burdens of judgment; and to a lesser extent whether they foster deliberative capacities in light of members' need to contribute to an overlapping consensus by appealing to public reasons.

I have stated that in their effort to reveal how religion or religious education is inherently inconsistent with the development of democratic character and autonomy, the critiques of these authors: 1) present a vision of religion based on radical or extreme religious groups; 2) give insufficient weight to the importance of freedom of conscience; and 3) tend to assert “hard” interpretations of autonomy and citizenship. Based on their discussions, I established three criteria that I believe are fair in judging religious associations in light of liberal citizenship. These criteria concern autonomy and democratic citizenship. They are:

- (1) religious groups must not attempt to completely shield their members from views that do not affirm the supposed truth of their beliefs;
- (2) religious groups must respect the freedom of conscience and religious liberty of those who hold other religious views or who hold none; and therefore must not employ the apparatus of the state either to compel others to hold or practice their religion or to compel the state to enforce moral conceptions that cannot be justified apart from their religious convictions;
- (3) religious groups must honor the core values of citizenship (reciprocity, tolerance and mutual respect), and religious people should not hold or act on the view that those who hold alternative moral or religious convictions are unworthy of fair treatment or equal rights as citizens.

Now I will apply these criteria to the prophetic Christian tradition and explain how it satisfies them. In doing so I will also demonstrate how the prophetic tradition holds up against general objections regarding religion training. These objections

express a negative view of the role religion might play in shaping character and socializing good liberal democratic citizens.

- I. Does socialization within groups that adhere to the prophetic tradition completely shield members of those groups from views that do not affirm the truth of their beliefs?

In defending the prophetic tradition against this criterion, it is important to note two things about it. First it is not isolationist. Second, it is not sectarian. These two characteristics effectively protect it from charges that it somehow shields adherents from competing views. The fact that it is not isolationist means that it is not afraid of the world. Instead, it demands engagement with society and intends for those who adhere to it to be critically aware of the competing values and ideologies shaping social reality. By saying that it is not sectarian I mean to suggest that it advances no particular doctrine. While it demands justice, it seems to lack any detailed prescriptions that precisely define or establish the substance of justice and how it is best achieved. The prophetic tradition does not represent one way of life or conception of the good among others. Neither does it present itself as one view, among many, for consideration or choice. It does not advance a view about the authority of scripture. In as much, it cannot be interpreted as sectarian although its adherents find support for it from within various sectarian doctrines.

Rather, it is much closer to a vision of justice that can be held by people of different theological persuasions about a range of issues. It functions to identify injustice and oppression through critique from within particular historical circumstances. For instance, it criticizes those who might attempt to transform religion into rules and regulations in a manner that forsakes the meaning of love and

justice. But because the prophetic tradition is not locked into a doctrine or does not express a theory of justice, per se, this suggests that its adherents are willing to be enlightened about the substance of justice.

Because of the attention it focuses on critiquing prevailing ideologies and social arrangements, the prophetic tradition perhaps can be viewed as instrumental towards developing one form of autonomy. That form of autonomy has to do with the capacity to examine or appraise ideas, constructs, and moral or truth claims. Through disjunctive faith formation it seeks to sustain an imaginative vision of what ought to be (i.e. an alternative reality) and to cultivate a critical consciousness that enables adherents to discern corrupt ideological values shaping the world around them. That alternative vision is governed by a morality which serves as both a compass for organizing social reality and a measuring stick for evaluating contemporary culture.

The disjunctive process acts as a control against the kind of servility Brighouse, Gutmann, and Callan fear, but in the public sphere – on a political level – as well as in the private. At the same time, the prophetic tradition is not oblivious to the dangers of uncritical adherence to an ideology (especially that expressed through one's own comprehensive doctrine). The liturgical process of faith formation is disjunctive, intending to impinge upon, assault, and shatter conventional ideas and any absolute shaping of social reality: "Israel practices a liturgy that intends to develop the capacity to discern modes of oppressive ideology, critique them, and act apart from them" (Brueggemann, 1987, 12). The prophetic tradition implies that every doctrine warrants continual critique so as to not become static and corrupt.

Hence, the form of autonomy the prophetic tradition seems to emphasize is less concerned with promoting rational choices among competing options. Instead, its substance mirrors the insight that evil corrupts reasoning and erodes freedom. Aristotelian Christians have suggested that this view is consonant with Aristotle's view that choices shape habits and character such that certain kinds of choices become more difficult as the character is damaged.

Nevertheless, the prophetic tradition might be viewed as facilitating choice to the degree that it enables adherents to critique provincial ideologies in a way that releases their social imagination regarding how they envision society operating. It may follow, then, that a prophetic tradition that stands in judgment of the culture might well contribute to autonomy, if in no other way by showing what could count as an option.

- II. Does the stance of the prophetic tradition warrant respect, by those who adhere to it, for the freedom of conscience and religious liberty of those who hold other religious views or who hold none? In other words, does the prophetic tradition tacitly or directly permit adherents to use the apparatus of the state to either compel others to hold or practice their religion or to compel the state to enforce moral conceptions that cannot be justified apart from their religious convictions?

A very easy assumption to make about the prophetic Christian tradition is that it is theocratic. This is because when it calls people to justice there is a "Thus saith the Lord" justification casting a shadow behind the appeal. It seems as if the prophetic Christian tradition assumes that the people it addresses are a covenantal community. But, obviously, Americans are not a covenant people called by God and such an appeal, theologically justified, would be objectionably theocratic in a public context.

Technically, a theocracy amounts to clerical establishment, wherein a government is ruled by or subject to the authority of the clergy of a particular faith. A contemporary example might be Iran. Because America does not represent a covenantal community of this sort, devoutly religious citizens may not articulate the implications of the prophetic tradition in a theocratic manner. Therefore, we must consider another view of theocracy.

A softer view of theocracy might be holding the commands of one's faith or sect as the norms of the political culture. Right wing religious conservatives like the Christian Coalition would seem to view their religious commands in this way. While those who adhere to the prophetic tradition hold religious commands, they do not do so in a way that is congruent with this softer view of theocracy.

The prophetic tradition is more akin to a set of values and orienting principles regarding equality, freedom and social justice. It expects the political culture of any society to operate according to these values, but not for reasons native to any specific doctrine. The core political values and constitutional norms of a liberal democracy can be interpreted by those who adhere to the prophetic tradition as an expression of the commitments of that tradition. One might argue that the prophetic tradition has shaped the constitutional norms of America. Therefore, I argue that the prophetic tradition warrants respect, by those who adhere to it, for religious freedom and freedom of conscience (as political values that fund justice).

When adherents of the prophetic tradition speak in modern liberal democracies, they do not speak to a covenant community in which the covenant created the civic order. They speak to fellow citizens concerning their civic



responsibilities. Those who adhere to it perform the prophetic function of calling Americans back to their highest political ideals (when these ideals are congruent with the prophetic tradition's core values). While it cannot be assumed that congruence between prophetic and liberal ideals will always be the case in a liberal democracy, it is generally the case (considering that liberal political values and constitutional norms are congruent<sup>82</sup> with the prophetic tradition).

Consider the ease with which The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. shifted between appealing to the values of liberal democracy and those of the prophetic tradition during his fight against the causes of racism and social injustice. In public addresses within secular contexts he employed them as if they were of one cloth; but few have ever thought that the Reverend was confusing his audience with a church congregation and, hence, violating their conscience. Even if he considered himself allowing the voice of God to speak to the state (about how it is violating its own basic norms of justice), he did so in a manner that continues to remind non-believing citizens that even if they do not hear the call to justice as the voice of God, they must nevertheless hear the voice of justice. “[The legacies of prophetic Christianity] marshal religious energies for democratic aims, yet are suspicious of all forms of idolatry, including democracy itself as an idol. They preserve their Christian identity and its democratic commitments, without coercing others and conflating church and state spheres”(West, 2004, 163).

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<sup>82</sup> By congruent I am suggesting that the political conception of justice located in the prophetic tradition (apart from the “God” language) and the constitutional values of a liberal democracy generally (1) have the same content and (2) lead to the same behavioral expectations and courses of action.

This leads back to a discussion about justification (e.g., “Thus saith the Lord”) and whether the prophetic Christian tradition can accept liberal democratic norms of public speech which require that argument be conducted in a secular language in the public square. There are at least two ways to respond to this question, and they reflect two views regarding the use of religious premises in public discourse. One view is adamantly opposed to it and sees the use of anything other than public reason as inappropriate. This view argues that using religious premises in the public square shows a lack of respect for the freedom and equality of non-believing citizens. A second view sees the notion of public reason not so much as a constraint on what can be said in the political arena as much as it is a constraint on what can be used as justification for state power (Rawls & Rawls, 1999; Wolterstorff, 1997). This view is more or less equivalent to the first prong of the Lemon test for establishment claims.<sup>83</sup>

Considering this distinction, it would appear that religious adherents of the prophetic tradition would violate the norms of public speech required by the first view but not the second. Yet if the norms of the prophetic tradition are overlapping with the constitutional norms of liberal democracy then these norms are also to be taken for granted. In this case, the norm of non-coercion would be honored.

In calling the nation back to its higher ideals or “better self” the prophetic believer seeks to do so in a manner that does not make non-believers subject to any religious authority, so long as, as I have said, the nation’s higher ideals are viewed as an acceptable instantiation of God’s call to justice. The tradition is opposed to

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<sup>83</sup> In its 1971 decision *Lemon v. Kurtzman* the Supreme Court pronounced a three-pronged inquiry commonly known as the *Lemon* test for use regarding establishment-clause analysis. To withstand *Lemon* scrutiny, the government conduct (1) must have a secular purpose, (2) must have a principal or primary effect that does not advance or inhibit religion, and (3) cannot foster an excessive government entanglement with religion.

absolutism – considering it the enemy of imagination – and does not seek to impose a way of life. Again, it is consistent with many forms of pluralism and expresses tolerance for alternative yet congruent worldviews and ways of life. The values of the tradition do not prescribe any divinely mandated political model of government. Rather they provide a general moral framework from which civic reflection begins and against which political policies are measured.

- III. Does the prophetic tradition value the core values of citizenship (reciprocity, tolerance and mutual respect) and accept that religious people should not hold or act on the view that those who hold other convictions are unworthy of fair treatment or equal rights as citizens?

Based upon the discussion above regarding the prophetic tradition's respect for religious liberty, freedom of conscience, reciprocity in public speech, and tolerance for pluralism, this question appears to have an obvious answer. I believe that answer is yes. The religious vocation implicit in the prophetic tradition is congruent with the core values and capacities of liberal citizenship.

One reason believers who adhere to the prophetic tradition would recognize the political freedom and equal rights all human beings share as liberal citizens is because of the conception of personhood the tradition affirms. At the core of the prophetic Christian tradition is a metaphysical conception of the person that supports an egalitarian political ideal. The grounding for this view of personhood (*imago dei*) signifies a fundamental commonness humanity shares at the moment of creation and affirms the dignity of all persons regardless of their social status. Therefore, from a prophetic stance, the scope of fair treatment (i.e. justice) incorporates everyone, and no particular community or set of beliefs is especially favored or excluded. Behavior

holds precedence over belief; that is, behavior aligned with God's prophetic values, namely justice.

The egalitarian impulse within the prophetic tradition in fact ups the ante for justice. In a very real sense, the tradition requires that adherents keep track of the humanity of every human being, especially those who would behave inhumanely and dehumanize *them*. Just because individuals may choose to behave in an oppressive manner, this does not void the dignity and freedom they possess as a consequence of being created in God's image. The prophetic tradition is concerned about justice being extended to the oppressor as well as the oppressed because it understands that oppressors are victims (of ideology) as well.

In a culture where many citizens are also believers the prophetic tradition can provide motivational force to the call for justice. It can do so because any comprehensive doctrine aligned with the prophetic tradition provides grounding for the content of the overlapping consensus.

In the next chapter I will discuss an historical example of a prophetic community attempting to fulfill the lofty ideals of justice. My focus will be on the prophetic tradition as expressed within the Black Protestant Church in America.

## Chapter 6: The Prophetic Tradition within the Black Church

### *The Black Church*

From the perspective of this author, the Black Church existed prior to the emergence of independent religious organizations and institutions during the late 18th and 19th centuries. I believe it was born during private religious meetings among slaves, which have come to be called the “invisible institution.” The Church was black in the sense that it was exclusively comprised of enslaved blacks whose differing worship style and cultural norms demanded avenues for religious expression. Whether they referred to themselves or thought of themselves as Negroes at the time is less significant. These early black Christians formed a “self-conscious, self-assertive, inner-directed institution” in spite of the fact that their self-concept was heavily informed by the norms and presuppositions of white Christianity. I hold this view because the core identity of many Christianized slaves remained impervious to the pervasive and degrading influence of white theological and racial presuppositions. It was this self-consciousness, I assume, that led to the establishment of separate worship experiences that were compatible with their self-concept as children of God. C. Eric Lincoln seems willing to acknowledge as much when he says, “...the Black Church is not the Negro Church reborn, neither is it the white church replicated. And yet in some sense it is both of these” (Frazier & Lincoln, 1974, 110).

I do not assume that the theological orientation of the adolescent and “invisible” Church differed fundamentally from that of its later institutionalized manifestation with respect to the affirmation of a religious view of personhood.

Apparently C. Eric Lincoln feels differently in *The Black Church Since Frazier* (1974), for he uses this argument as a yardstick to draw a distinction between the “Negro Church” and the “Black Church.”

Of the former he claims it died in the “savage sixties” when “the call to full manhood, to personhood, and the call to Christian responsibility left no room for the implications of being a “negro” in contemporary America”(Frazier & Lincoln, 1974, 106). Lincoln apparently views the Negro Church as absolutely conditioned by proscriptions rooted in the white presuppositions of racial superiority. While black Christians were certainly conditioned by them, this does not mean they were psychological captives of such notions.

Conversely, Lincoln describes the Black Church as “a self-conscious, self-assertive, inner-directed, self-determined institution” guided by black Christians accustomed to a sense of dignity and self-fulfillment. Yet he acknowledges a persistent ambivalence within the Church because of the implications of being both Christian and black in America: “At times it has seen itself as a less perfect counterpart of the white church, striving for parity in perfection....On the other hand, the black church has been much maligned for being Black – a “nigger institution”” (Frazier & Lincoln, 1974, 113). This does not sound like a church unconditioned by the presuppositions of traditional white Protestantism. Neither should one assume that slaves lacked some compelling sense that their social status was the product of human vice rather than divine will. The New Testament would have provided blacks with sufficient reason to view slavery as an unnatural condition that violates God’s vision for human existence.

I will borrow a subsequent characterization of the Black Church by C. Eric Lincoln to establish a working conception of the same for my purposes in this chapter. Due to the nature of the black experience and the centrality of religion in the development of that experience, Lincoln suggests that no disjuncture exists between the black church and the black community.<sup>84</sup>

“The black church is then in some sense a “universal church,” claiming and representing all blacks out of a long tradition that looks back to the time when there was only the black church to bear witness to “who” or “what” a man was as he stood at the bar of his community”(Frazier & Lincoln, 1974, 116).

Cornel West (1999) echoes elements of Lincoln’s conception of the Black Church in his description of the same.

“The black church – a shorthand rubric that refers to black Christian communities of various denominations that came into being when African American slaves decided, often at the risk of life and limb, to “make Jesus their choice” and to share with one another their common Christian sense of purpose and Christian understanding of their circumstances – is unique in American culture. This is so because it is the major institution created, sustained and controlled by black people themselves; that is, it is the most visible and salient cultural product of black people in the United States. ...[T]he black church signified and signifies the collective effort of an exploited and oppressed, degraded and despised, dominated and downtrodden people of African descent to come to terms with the absurd *in* America and the absurd *as* America. The black church was a communal response to an existential and political situation...” (West, 1999, 426-427).

Rather than use some historical period that carelessly attempts to designate African-Americans’ psychological autonomy from white racist theological presuppositions, this portrait of the Black Church instead signifies an institution that has continually served to validate black humanity and incorporate the black community as a whole.

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<sup>84</sup> Frazier, E. F., & Lincoln, C. E. (1974). *The negro church in america*. New York: Schocken Books, 115-116.

*Evidence of the Prophetic Impulse in the Black Church*

“A man is not a thing – until he has lost his dignity: until he is no longer the image of God. Violence or non-violence is irrelevant to whoever has already been dehumanized by want of compassion in another. To be human, to be a person, that is the principal thing; and to insist on being so regarded, that is the minimum responsibility a man owes himself, his aggressor, and his God” (Frazier & Lincoln, 1974, 147).

African Americans have had a peculiar existence in the United States. They are the only group in America that achieved their status as full citizens after suffering a transition from that of legal property. Yet, in spite of the hatred and discrimination that accompanied this transition, blacks have always held America’s political values dearly and at times it seemed as though they were the only ones who did.

Historically, the Black Church has been the hub of spiritual revitalization and political mobilization within the African American community. Its distinctive socio-cultural perspective has given birth to a mode of citizenship that generally consists of civic action aiming toward social and moral reform in the larger society. This is done primarily through the critique of corrupt state policies and the dominant cultural ethos (Paris, 1985, 11).

The very existence of the Black Church could well be considered the outgrowth of a prophetic impulse. That impulse, or tradition, has had extensive expression within the Black Church. During their enslavement blacks somehow derived meaning from the bible that was contrary to what their white Protestant masters sought to convey to them when they initially introduced Christianity. Many whites (mis)used the bible as a tool to resign slaves to an inferior status and pacify them with a future hope in the eternal, thus advancing a message of predestined subjugation. This message essentially suggested, “Your status is divinely ordained,



therefore willingly accept it.” Blacks, however, discovered that the bible contained other notions regarding their status in the human family; and such notions had implications on how they internalized their circumstances (Noll, 1992, 79). A prophetic impulse stimulated these early Christians to secure full personhood in a society that aggressively refused to recognize it, which is what catapulted the birth of what has become the Black Church.

In the midst of the dehumanizing institution of chattel slavery, spiritually desperate, yet hopeful and resilient, slaves established what has come to be known as “the invisible institution” (Frazier & Lincoln, 1974, 23). It consisted of loosely assembled groups of slaves that secretly met and nurtured a spiritual consciousness rooted in an eschatological religious vision (Paris, 1985, 1). From this seedbed of faith an independent institutional black church eventually emerged. The church was anchored by an anthropological religious principle that nourished a collective identity within blacks that exceeded the parameters of the narrow white Christian conception of the human family. This principle affirmed the equality of all persons and it had normative implications for the thought and action of the black community as well as the dominant racist culture as a whole: “[A]ll of its citizens have the experience of freedom and the necessary resources for the full actualization of their potentialities”(Paris, 1985, 2).

In this chapter I will discuss expressions of the prophetic tradition in the Black Church by examining three themes: 1) the prophetic birth of the black church through conscious departure from corrupt theological presuppositions of traditional white Christianity; 2) the Black Church as nurturer of prophetic imagination through

liturgy; 3) the Black Church as locus of socio-cultural emancipation and transformation of America's racist social order.

I. Birth of the black church as prophetic act through conscious departure from the racist presuppositions underpinning the theology of the white church

The systemic racism that once thoroughly corrupted American society must have seemed an indomitable force to blacks, particularly during slavery. Built upon the proposition that blacks were inherently inferior and not fully a part of the human race, white supremacy aimed at their total psychological annihilation (Paris, 1985, 4). Yet, the spirituality of enslaved blacks proved to be indomitable and epitomized a relationship between religion and culture that differed from that of whites. Blacks' mode of spirituality also illuminated truths about Christianity itself.

Though many blacks worshiped within white congregations that were, presumably, theologically and morally untroubled by the institution of slavery, some blacks nevertheless underwent a unique religious experience. First, their ethnicity and social class caused them to experience worship from a distinct sociological perspective. They were primarily spectators of their master's formal culture and customs. This social perspective likely enabled them to discern the moral incongruity between the religiously grounded moral beliefs of whites and their socio-political practices. Second, it is likely that their social status caused them to encounter the biblical narratives (either directly or mediated through their masters) from the perspective of the oppressed. Peter Paris provides one example of this when he writes, "It was Richard Allen's interpretation of the "second great commandment" – "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" to mean "thou shalt give equality to black

people” – that caused the organization of Richard Allen’s AME Church” (Paris, 1985, 18). Hence, blacks formed correlations between their own earthly circumstance and the possibilities God made available for biblical characters of similar circumstance ostensibly *because of* their unmerited suffering. Black spirituality accentuated an elemental truth within Christianity impervious to the influence or control of white Christians. “That core was as accessible to blacks as it was to whites, and it was thereby appropriated” (Noll, 1992, 199).

What specifically is this elemental truth in Christian theology? At the core of Christianity is a conception of personhood reflected in the Latin term *imago dei*. As was mentioned in chapter 4, the idea represents a fundamental commonness humanity shares at the moment of creation, insofar as every person is created in the likeness of God or in God’s image. It can also be interpreted as expressing a relationship between God and humanity. Because all are equal under God all are considered equally worthy of God’s redemptive grace, meaning no one community or group is favored or excluded. The prophetic Christian orientation endorses this view of personhood, which supports an egalitarian social ideal or worldview.

Considering the social and legal obstacles to literacy for slaves (Frazier & Lincoln, 1974, 17), prohibitions against their unsupervised assembly for religious purposes, and the degree to which the Christian gospel was distorted in white churches, it was no small effort for enslaved blacks to discern the principle of equality at the core of Christianity. “There was some misgivings and in some instances strong opposition to acquainting the Negro with the Bible....[I]t was also feared that the slave would find in the Bible the implications of human equality which

would incite the Negro to make efforts to free himself”(Frazier & Lincoln, 1974, 18). Religious historian Mark Noll acknowledges the irony in the experiment involving slavery and Christianity on the part of white Christians when he observes that the religion used to support the slave system became a means toward counteracting its inhuman influence (Noll, 1992, 205).

Slaves, in all probability, appropriated the principle of equality at the core of Christianity because it validated some part of themselves that suspected, in spite of intractable evidence, that their status and circumstances were not divinely ordained or merited by the natural law of the universe. “With the “death of the African gods”...black people creatively appropriated a Christian worldview – mainly from such dissenters in the American religious tradition as Baptists and Methodists – and thereby transformed a prevailing absurd situation into a persistent and present *tragic* one, yet sustained and empowered by a hope against hope for a potential and possible triumphant state of affairs (West, 1999, 427). The principle of equality under God and evidence of God’s concern for the poor and oppressed in the biblical narrative energized the slave’s initiative to do more than merely endure their social plight. Walter Brueggemann has suggested that “we are energized not by that which we already possess but by that which is promised and about to be given” (Brueggemann, 1987, 14). Their appropriation of the anthropological principle is consistent with Israel’s appropriation of an alternative conception of life and personhood from the Exodus narrative. In as much as its intent is to assault and disorient conventional conceptions of reality and truth, this alternative social vision served as an epistemological critique of their contemporary social reality.

Peter Paris (1985) describes this biblical doctrine of equality as an anthropological principle at the heart of what he calls “the black Christian tradition.”<sup>85</sup> Paris views the black Christian tradition as a normative orientation for blacks that should not be interpreted as mere abstract moral principles. Rather, he believes it should be more accurately understood as a constellation of religious and moral values preserved in black institutions and expressed in speeches, deeds, and actions. Accordingly, the equality of all persons under God (which Paris uses interchangeably with the principle of non-racism) is the most fundamental element of the black Christian tradition. Paris posits that the tradition has been the principal criterion by which black Americans assess the conditions affecting their common life.

“Their basic source of authority has been that to which they have been unreservedly committed, namely a biblical anthropology which they believe strongly affirms the equality of all persons under God regardless of race or any other natural quality. This doctrine has been the essence of the black Christian tradition and the most fundamental requirement of its churches. Its discovery soon revealed to blacks the basic contradiction implicit in the religion of white Americans: the contradiction between this biblical understanding of humanity and the practices of the white churches” (Paris, 1985, 11).

Paris suggests that by appropriating an idea that “had only an abstract rhetorical appearance in the white churches,”<sup>86</sup> blacks had grasped the essence of the Christian faith and salvaged it from the clasp of white racism.

II. Black church as nurturer of prophetic imagination through sermons, hymns and spirituals.

Rather than flee the plantation or devise various ways to revolt, many slaves coped with their seemingly fixed predicament by establishing their own clandestine

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<sup>85</sup> Paris, Peter J. *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985, pxiii.

<sup>86</sup> Paris, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches*, 18.

religious associations. These later became known as the “invisible institution.” Their attempt to create a surrogate world for themselves enabled the preservation of some semblance of autonomy and dignity (Paris, 1985, 5).

Through independent worship, blacks were able to imaginatively envision an alternative future reality that differed from their contemporary one in one crucial sense: it was governed by a non racist conception of personhood that viewed every human being as equal under God. Notwithstanding a concurrent preoccupation with the hereafter, slaves focused on doing more than merely surviving in this world. Over time, a shared affirmation of the anthropological principle enabled blacks to more critically evaluate the dissonance between it and the prevailing norms and messages that shaped the larger society.

“[The black Christian worldview] put the pressing and urgent problem of evil at its center. Furthermore, the major focus of the *prophetic* black Christian worldview...was on marshaling and garnering resources from fellowship, community and personal strength (meditation, prayer) to cope with overwhelmingly limited options dictated by institutional and personal evil” (West, 1999, 427).

Assessing the incongruity between societal and religious values became a normative tradition for blacks and this activity influenced the socio-political agenda of the institutionalized Black Church.

How might the Black Church have passed on the prophetic principle of equality to its members and continually sustained this new critical consciousness within them? In other words, what might constitute the elements of the “liturgical” (to borrow Walter Brueggemann’s term), or sustained, process by which the Black Church has nurtured its prophetic worldview over time? Historically sermons and spirituals have been an important means by which the Black Church has facilitated

the appropriation of the biblical doctrine of equality. But before discussing them I would like to provide a little sociological context to spirituals and sermons and some of their common content.

From its earliest to its most contemporary expression, the Black Church has provided a structured religious setting in which blacks could give expression to their deepest feelings. The church has given “voice” to the pathology African Americans have inherited as a result of having undergone a transition from legal property to the status of free citizens. By pathology I speak of a dilemma stemming from the “double-consciousness” once described by W.E.B. Dubois.

“[T]he negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder”(Washington *et al.*, 1965, 214-215).

The pathology concerns the moral and socio-political ambiguity blacks experience with respect to their self-understanding, stemming from life in a racist society. This ambiguity constantly impacts their daily existence. Thus, the tension for African Americans has always regarded “How is it possible to be both black and a nigger?”; and, “How is it possible to be both Christian and American?” The former question reflects an irreconcilable, yet enduring, dilemma between their appropriation of a biblical principle of equality<sup>87</sup> that affirms the dignity of their makeup, and their

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<sup>87</sup> The principle of equality also has political roots in secular doctrines like liberalism. Yet, for my purposes here, I make it the property of Christian theology because in the context of the historical

reluctant but often subconscious acceptance of a hegemonic social construction of blackness as evil and inferior. The latter question represents a tension between maintaining their fidelity to an egalitarian worldview (a non-racist society) that is anchored by a biblical anthropology, and sustaining their commitment to the political principles of a nation whose dominant cultural values and norms “helped mold a common racial destiny in which they could take no small amount of pride”(Paris, 1985, 29).

As a whole, black Americans, and especially black Christians, have shown a high susceptibility to this ‘pathology of identity,’ and in some sense the Black Church is a product of it, as well as a retardant to it. Separate religious worship permitted open and honest expression of the pain and ambiguity the American experience produced in blacks. Correspondingly, the Black Church is arguably the only institution that has adequately ministered to its symptoms, especially considering that they are primarily spiritual in nature. Coincidentally, singing and preaching have been both the primary means through which blacks have voiced and processed this pain and also the means through which faith, perseverance, and social imagination have been regularly renewed.

Two of the most basic liturgical components of Christian worship are sermons and music. The former provide spiritual illumination and guidance, while the latter stimulates and sustains a spiritual state of being. Both have been indispensable in the Black Church, particularly during its most rudimentary stages when it merely consisted of secretive religious meetings among the enslaved. Cornel West (1999)

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experience of black Christians in America’s liberal democracy, the principle of equality had a long history of acquiescence to the dominance of white supremacy and other cultural ideologies.



identifies three principal African resources in black Christianity,<sup>88</sup> and suggests that the first, a “kinetic orality,” permeated black prayers, sermons, and hymns. “Fluid, protean, and flexible oral stylizations of language gave black church life a distinctively African American stamp – a stamp that flowed from black cultural agency in a society that tried to deny and downplay any form of black agency and black creativity” (West, 1999, 428).

The distinctiveness of African American spirituality is largely expressed through the sermons, hymns and spirituals that are such a common feature of their worship. These elements of black Christian worship express a hope in a future to come as well as encourage perseverance in the present (Noll, 1992, 205). Cheryl Sanders (1996) discusses the hopeful, future-oriented quality of black sermons and black sacred music and their capacity to fund perseverance. Using Walter Brueggemann’s interpretation of the prophetic poetry of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and second Isaiah in his effort to understand themes of exile and homecoming with respect to the Hebrews’ experience in Babylon, Sanders examines the exilic experience of African American Christians in America. She asserts that a liturgical rehearsal of sacred truths on the part of an exiled faith community both sustains an impetus to resist assimilation by imperial values, and also provides a “future-giving memory” that invigorates their abiding pursuit of “home.”<sup>89</sup> Regarding how black sacred music funds perseverance, Sanders refers to William Herbert Brewster’s account of why he wrote the gospel song “Move On Up a Little Higher”:

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<sup>88</sup> The second and third principal African resources in black Christianity identified by West are a “passionate physicality” and a “combative spirituality” (West, 1999, 428).

<sup>89</sup> Sanders uses dual notions of home: Both as a geographical place and as a cultural or spiritual space where covenantal values have currency and credibility.

““Move on up a Little Higher” was not only a Christian climbing the ladder to heaven, but it was an exaltation of Black people to keep moving. You come out of slavery, you have an opportunity to get on your ladder and keep on climbing. Don’t stop when you make one; make another” (Sanders, 1996, 149).

With regard to the presence of a future-giving memory in spirituals she notes:

“The verse in Jesus’ parable of the two lost sons, in which the prodigal son “came to himself” (Luke 15:17), was cited by Brueggemann as a subtext for a fresh proclamation of the gospel to the exiled church in America. In his view, the “gospel” is that we may go to a home not situated in the “consumer militarism” of the dominant value system but rather in God’s kingdom of love and justice and peace and freedom” (Sanders, 1996, 149-150).

Sermons, hymns, and spirituals comprise elements of an unofficial liturgical performance that has enabled the Black Church to nurture a prophetic consciousness. The sermons and spirituals echo aspects of Israel’s liturgical process of disjunctive faith transformation as described by Walter Brueggemann (1987) in chapter 5; namely the critique of ideology, the public processing of pain, and the release of social imagination. I will analyze a few exemplary spirituals and one sermon in light of how they reflect these three elements and general features of the prophetic tradition.

Spirituals:

1) *The Driver*<sup>90</sup>

O, de ole nigger-driver!  
O, gwine away!  
Fust ting my mammy tell me,  
O, gwine away!  
Tell me ‘bout de nigger-driver,  
O, gwine away!  
Nigger-driver second devil,  
O, gwine away!  
Best ting for do he driver,  
O, gwine away!

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<sup>90</sup> Sernett, Milton (1999). *African American Religious History: a documentary witness* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Durham: Duke University Press, p133.

Knock he down and spoil he labor,  
O, gwine away!

This spiritual exemplifies a critique of ideology. Its language presents a paradox in the sense that while the ideology of racism and the system of enslavement that it supports is critiqued, this is done employing racist language (the term nigger). The use of the term on the part of slaves to describe themselves reveals the manner in which their identities appropriated their oppressor's constructs. On the other hand, this appropriation clearly did not eliminate the capacity for slaves to critique the system and racist constructs from an alternative perspective (religious/Christian); hence the "devil" language.

2) *Motherless Child*<sup>91</sup>

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,  
A long ways from home –  
True believer, a long ways from home.  
Sometimes I feel like I'm almos' gone,  
A long ways from home.  
Then I get down on my knees an' pray –  
Way up in the heavenly land home  
A long ways from home.

I believe this spiritual exemplifies a public processing of pain. As Brueggemann claimed, once an oppressed group is capable of critiquing an imperial ideology they are then more cognizant of the pain they have felt as a result of it and are thereby more willing to articulate that pain. "The grieving of Israel is the beginning of criticism because it means that one acknowledges pain caused by a false myth – a broken promise" (Brueggemann, 1987, 12). The "almos' gone" phrase illuminates the spiritual weariness the enslaved bore. Yet the singing of this spiritual

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<sup>91</sup> Robinson, A.B.L. (1992). *The Teachings: Drawn from African-American Spirituals* (1<sup>st</sup> ed.). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, p32.

may have somehow alleviated that pain merely through the releasing of the emotions in separate corporate worship.

3) *We Shall Overcome*<sup>92</sup>

We shall overcome,  
We shall overcome someday;  
If in our hearts we do believe,  
We shall overcome someday.  
We'll walk hand in hand;  
We shall all have peace;  
We are not afraid;  
God is not through with us yet...  
We shall overcome someday,  
Oh, if in our hearts we do believe,  
We shall overcome someday!

This spiritual has been used by presidents, persecuted Europeans, and most memorably by activists during America's civil rights movement. Its declarative voice ("We shall") arouses confidence and faith. Overcoming is its central theme. I believe it releases social imagination because the song conjures up images of an alternative reality: walking hand in hand in peace. It also reminds of a purpose God has for the oppressed (or humanity) that transcends the present circumstances.

Sermon:

*What Man Lives By*, The Reverend Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays<sup>93</sup>

"No man can live without faith in himself – a sense of inner security. A child must learn early to believe that he is somebody worthwhile and that he can do many praiseworthy things. Without this hope, there would be nothing for him to do but to commit suicide. Furthermore, man could not live hopefully without believing that he counts for something in this world. The greatest damage that the white man did to the black man through slavery and

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<sup>92</sup> Robinson, A.B.L. (1992). *The Teachings: Drawn from African-American Spirituals* (1<sup>st</sup> ed.). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, p28.

<sup>93</sup> Benjamin Mays served as the president of Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia from 1940-1967 (personally mentoring Martin Luther King, Jr.) and was also a long time president of the Atlanta Board of Education (1970-1981).

segregation was to beat him down so much that millions of Negroes believed that they were nobody. *The hopelessness and despair of so many black youths today lie in the fact that they have never believed that they have dignity and worth as human beings.* If the emphasis on blackness and black awareness today means that black people are beginning to be proud of their heritage and proud of being what they are – black –apologizing to no one – not even to God – for what they are, it is a good thing. *Man lives best by a belief that he is somebody, God's creature, and that he has status not given to him by man but given to him by God.*

“Man must believe that however hard the road, however difficult today, tomorrow things will be better. Tomorrow may not be better, but *we must believe* that it will be. Wars may never cease, but we must continue to strive to eliminate them. We may not abolish poverty, but *we must believe* that we can provide bread enough and to spare for every living creature and that we can find the means to distribute it. We may not exterminate racism, but *we must believe* that different racial groups can live together in peace, and we must never cease to try to build a society in which the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man become realities.

“In other words, man must live by faith in God – faith to believe that *God sustains good* and not evil, *peace* and not war, *truth* and not lies, *justice* and not injustice, *integrity* and not dishonesty....

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but man must live by his dreams, *by the goals he strives to reach, and by the ideals which he chooses and chases.* What is man anyway? Man is flesh and blood, body and mind, bones and muscle, arms and legs, heart and soul, lungs and liver, nerves and veins – all these and more make a man. *But man is really what his dreams are. Man is what he aspires to be.* He is the ideals that beckon him on. Man is the integrity that keeps him steadfast, honest, true. If a young man tells me what he aspires to be, I can almost predict his future.”

“It must be borne in mind, however, that the tragedy in life does not lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach. It isn't a calamity to die with dreams unfulfilled, but it is a calamity not to dream. It is not a disaster to be unable to capture your ideal, but it is a disaster to have no ideal to capture. It is not a disgrace not to reach the stars, but it is a disgrace to have no stars to reach for. Not failure, but low aim is the sin”(Italics mine) (Philpot, 1972, 35-37).

I have quoted Mays at length because this sermon includes many expressions of the prophetic tradition in addition to a few elements of Israel's liturgical process.

The initial paragraph reveals evidence of the anthropological principle appropriated

by and reinforced within the Black Church. Mays highlights the pathology within black Americans as he critiques the ideology of racism that buttressed chattel slavery and America's discriminatory socio-political system.

In response, he appeals to the anthropological principle of equality by reminding his listeners of their inherent dignity and exalted status as creatures of God. One also sees evidence of the persistent effort in the Black Church to replenish hope within a dispossessed people despite difficult social circumstances. But Mays does so not by directing attention to an eternal world out yonder, but by encouraging faith in one's ability to accomplish socio-civic – might I say prophetic – objectives: peace, caring for the poor, reasonableness or tolerance, and social justice.

Lastly, notice the release of social imagination evident in the focus Mays places on one's dreams and goals. While he does not, by erecting a vision of an alternative world, predetermine for his audience what their dreams or goals should be, he does challenge a strictly corporeal view of humanity by emphasizing the significance of the abstract: ideals, virtues, and the danger of a self-defeating psychological paralysis.

III. Citizenship as religious vocation: from appropriation of prophetic values to the transformation of America's racist society.

Christianity had one of two effects on the enslaved: it either served as an opiate (as it was intended to do), reconciling Africans to their destiny as laborers and property;<sup>94</sup> or it invigorated their human-ness (as opposed to it-ness), prompting resistance and,

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<sup>94</sup> To be fair, in many instances it did. “[S]ome masters became convinced that some of the best slaves – that is, those amenable to control by their white masters – were those who read the bible” (Frazier & Lincoln, 1974, 18). For further reading see Susan M. Fickling, *Slave-Conversion in South Carolina: 1830-1860* (University of South Carolina, 1924).

ultimately, transformation. “Religious faith emboldened slaves to disobey masters in order to meet together for worship and song, to labor diligently with an eye toward freedom, at least for coming generations, and even to escape. In this determination to find freedom – in Christ and in this world – the Southern slaves shared the commitments of their free Northern peers, where leaders in the church were often leaders in the struggle against slavery as well”(Noll, 1992, 205). In the many instances in which the Christian gospel transformed, rather than stifled, slave consciousness, the effects were not merely spiritual but also political.

Walter Brueggemann (1987) posits that prophetic texts are themselves acts of imagination that propose alternative worlds. He insists, though, that while these texts must be viewed as materials that fund prophetic action through methods rooted in the texts, they nevertheless require that efforts to affect social change in contemporary contexts be carried out imaginatively and daringly in ways appropriate for concrete circumstances. “The black Christian tradition puts forward a principle of opposition to racism that is not merely formal. The nature of its content must be decided in every context and hence must vary – not in its moral quality but in its practical relevance” (Paris, 1985, 16). The Black Church has needed to be strategic, cunning, subtle and most importantly prophetic in its efforts to reform the morally corrupt aspects of America’s sociopolitical landscape, especially considering the disproportionately small amount of economic and social capital blacks have had. Blacks’ attempts to overhaul longstanding cultural norms that were economically profitable, legally enforced, and culturally acceptable would be done at a risk to their

safety, particularly during chattel slavery when political power was monopolized by whites.

This section will discuss the prophetic efforts of the Black Church to align the dominant sociopolitical culture with God's sacred values (equality, freedom and social justice). In this regard, one might consider the Black Church as promoting a vision of citizenship that amounts to a religious vocation. That vocation being the actualization of an egalitarian society grounded in a biblical anthropology that establishes the equality of humankind. First, I will discuss how the appropriation of prophetic principles gave rise to a religious vocation with characteristics tantamount to a vision of citizenship. Second, I will discuss two functions of the religious vocation of the Black Church: the priestly and the prophetic.

When black Christians appropriated the biblical doctrine of human equality under God they did not merely endorse an interpretation of the bible that varied from that of most white Protestants. They in essence elected a new God and renounced an old one. Walter Brueggemann notes that "faith formation is a process of choosing gods....In choosing this new God...the peasant community always found it had also chosen a new mode of social existence along with the new God. This God may not be chosen apart from a particular social existence" (Brueggemann, 1987, 26). The sense of superiority most white Americans felt corrupted their understanding of Christian doctrine and thereby justified a racist conception of personhood which made non-whites inferior and exploitable. The god of their religious worldview therefore co-signed the oppression of blacks, not only during slavery but up through most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Conversely, that god of the prophets – in whose image all



were created and who played an active role in liberating the poor and oppressed – provoked a consciousness in blacks which roused their expectations for an altogether different social existence. When blacks appropriated the god of equality and denounced the god underwriting their persecution, in some sense they also accepted responsibility for the interests this new god held for all humanity, particularly the poorest and oppressed.

The Christianized slaves most likely derived their sense of religious vocation from Old and New Testament accounts of God’s liberating acts directed towards the physically and spiritually oppressed. And like the prophets, from Moses to Jesus, whose missions were issued directly from Yahweh, the Black Church has understood that in order to “overcome social injustice and thus bring about a society in which all people are equally respected as bearers of God’s image”<sup>95</sup> it too would bear the responsibility of leveling an ongoing prophetic critique against the racist social system that legitimated their domination and dehumanization.

The black Christian tradition’s rooting in the anthropological principle establishes its normative orientation and preoccupation with sociopolitical concerns. Peter Paris suggests that the black Christian tradition naturally integrates morality, religion, and politics.

“[I]n our view, the theological grounding of this anthropological principle established its religious character while the anthropological focus specified its social relatedness. In other words, the black Christian tradition represents a form union of the eschatological and the sociopolitical realms, never the one apart from the other. In summation, morality, religion, and politics are united whenever this formal principle is actualized in the thought and practice of those persons or institutions wherein racism has no reality” (Paris, 1985, 18).

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<sup>95</sup> J.W. DeGruchy, *Christianity and Democracy: A Theology for a Just World Order*, 11.

The biblical doctrine of equality constitutes the foundation of the ethical claims and political initiatives of the Black Church. Conceptually, then, the Black Church views many aspects of political action and civic engagement related to citizenship as a religious vocation. However, it should be understood that the religious vocation the Black Church considers a requirement of faith is not an effort to prepare liberal democratic citizens. Such requirements flow from a commitment to a biblical worldview that compels regardless of the kind of government they live in.

Peter Paris notes that the black Christian tradition exercised both “priestly” and “prophetic” functions: “the former aiding and abetting the race in its capacity to endure the effects of racism, the latter utilizing all available means to effect religious and moral reform in the society at large”(Paris, 1985, 11). These two functions are representative of the energizing and dismantling functions Walter Brueggemann (2001) asserts are the focus of the alternative consciousness prophetic ministries must cultivate and nourish. “The criticizing function attempts to dismantle the dominant consciousness by delegitimizing and rejecting the present ordering of social reality; while the energizing function serves to stimulate hope and fervent anticipation for God’s promise of the newness of another time and situation toward which the faith community can move....I should urge that either by itself is not faithful to our best tradition” (Brueggemann, 2001, 3).

Representative of its *priestly* function, the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century independence movement of the Black Church was an effort on the part of black Christians to institutionalize the egalitarian and prophetic aspects of the Christian gospel that they had appropriated. As blacks became literate and capable of

purchasing their freedom, black denominations arose in the North like the African Methodist Episcopal Church founded by Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, self-taught former slaves disenchanted with the discrimination they faced in white Methodist churches. Black Baptist congregations were also created (again, largely in the north and post-Civil War in the southern US), but at a much slower rate because they were largely independent and lacked the organizational structure of Methodists. Other black Christians separated from white denominations and founded the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church as well as the Colored Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Around 1890 the National Baptist Convention was established<sup>96</sup> in an attempt to reduce the influence of white national Baptist organizations and maintain more of a separate social and cultural existence from them.

One of the most significant consequences of the development of denominational churches was the role black Christian institutions began to play with respect to serving as a welfare agency within the black community by rendering social services as well as spiritual outreach. “After the Civil War, the black churches rapidly became the center for black culture generally as well as for black religious life” (Noll, 1992, 341). Learning how to minister to themselves and become more autonomous necessitated that blacks become more concerned about formal education.

The involvement of the Black Church in initiatives like the Underground Railroad, abolitionism, and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950’s and 1960’s are indicative of its *prophetic* functions. These initiatives were in large part efforts to address the incongruity between America’s dominant cultural values and its own biblical understanding of equality, freedom and social justice.

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<sup>96</sup> It later split into two groups.

The problem of racism has been a particular focus of the religious vocation of the Black Church. This is because racism has been the dominant cause of inequality and oppression for blacks, and thus the central obstacle to the egalitarian social ideal endorsed by the prophetic tradition. Peter Paris summarizes the Black Church's prophetic understanding of citizenship as religious vocation in the following way:

“Clearly, those black churches which have been faithful to the black Christian tradition are moral institutions. Their *raison d'être* is inextricably tied to the function of opposing the beliefs and practices of racism by proclaiming the biblical view of humanity as they have appropriated it, that is, the equality of all persons under God. Thus their moral aim is theologically grounded. The doctrine of human equality under God is, for them, the final authority for all matters pertaining to faith, thought, and practice. In short, its function in the black experience is categorical, that is, it is unconditional, absolute, and universally applicable” (Paris, 1985, 14).

Because the political values that legitimate America's liberal democracy are basically consistent with those of the black Christian tradition, the Black Church has considered its religious vocation as contributing positively to the civic health and functioning of American society. The Church has no history of attempting to impose Christian doctrine on the larger society by endorsing a specific social structure or some supposedly divinely mandated political model of government. Rather, like the 2<sup>nd</sup> century ekklesia it has sought to liberate “the least” in society by critiquing socially acceptable, yet in some sense morally decadent, practices that actually cause America to fall short of her own constitutional values and norms of justice.

This mission represents the prophetic vocation of the Black Church: calling a community back to its better nature. Historically black Christians have viewed that “community” as the American republic, and understood its political principles as reinforcing the anthropological principle of equality at the heart of Christianity. But

America's more harmful cultural values – apartheid, nationalism, materialism – have often distorted the true meaning of those principles. Black Christians have not attempted to make America Israel and enforce Christian doctrine as secular law. They have mainly wished to prompt America to uphold its constitutional promises to every citizen, which began with demanding that their full humanity and citizenship be affirmed, socially and politically, by a nation that has never really done so. Considering that the Black Church has a long track record of confronting social and political forces that abet oppression by fostering discrimination, inequality, and physical and psychological bondage – that essentially frustrate the fulfillment of America's political values (and more importantly, their own religious convictions) – it is clear to see how the prophetic tradition has influenced its religious worldview.

Few have embodied the aims of the black Christian tradition – calling America back to its better self – than the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.:

“In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to cash this check — a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy....I have a dream that one

day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> The "I Have a Dream" speech, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

## Chapter 7: Conclusions

In the early days of the American republic it was assumed that religion was a primary course of civic virtue. However, that view was to some respect rendered suspect, especially since World War II, because it was expressed via a kind of Protestant establishment in state supported schools.

Of late a literature has developed with a more negative view of the role of religion in promoting citizenship. This literature notes three main themes. First, concern about the spillover of illiberal values into public life due to socialization infused with patriarchy (the correspondence principle). Second, a concern for individual autonomy due to uncritical adherence to inherited beliefs and minimal exposure to alternative views. Third, a concern for the cultivation of democratic values due to a kind of radical sectarianism that places them at risk.

Here arguments have focused on religious groups that are anti-intellectual and isolationist. *Yoder v Wisconsin* (1972) and *Mozert v Hawkins County Board of Education* (1987) are two Supreme Court cases that have played a central role in shaping these arguments. While most authors at least note that not all groups are like this, the overall effect of this literature has been to permit these groups to stand for religion generally via assumptions that they differ from other groups only in being more extreme (that all are the same, but some differ in degree although not in kind) and via the failure to seriously consider the educational implication of other religious traditions.

In this dissertation I have argued the following claims regarding this more negative view of the civic importance of religion. First, the correspondence principle

does not provide a convincing account of the relationships between private associations and civic virtue. John Rawls's (1972) view of the development of a sense of justice and his idea of an overlapping consensus (with the provision that in fact the notion of an overlapping consensus is well served if it is well supported by one's comprehensive doctrine), along with the civil society argument advanced by Robert Putnam (1993; 2000), suggest it is very likely that religious associations are a significant means for cultivating civic virtue and preparing liberal citizens.

Second, any view of liberal democracy that shows religion to be broadly incompatible with autonomy and democratic character faces certain objections. One, it is inconsistent with freedom of conscience. Any state policy enacted for the purpose of regulating the affairs of religious associations would place freedom of conscience at risk and perhaps unjustly undermine the ability of religious groups to impart their beliefs and fulfill their unique function in the lives of adherents. Two, it ignores the broad acceptance of "free faith" by most religions (a commitment related to autonomy). Three, it ignores major religious traditions that emphasize civic responsibility and social justice (commitments related to democratic character and democratic governance). Arguments that are able to show that religious education is inherently inconsistent with the development of democratic character and autonomy tend to assert "hard" interpretations of these values. However, according to "softer" views of democracy and autonomy it is far less clear that democratic character and autonomy are inconsistent with any but the most radical religious orientations.

Arguments that do not allow *Yoder* and *Mozert* to represent all religion must come to terms with the fact that other religious traditions may have quite different



implications for citizenship. This dissertation has explored one such religious tradition: the prophetic tradition. The prophetic tradition has been prominent in Judaism and Christianity. The core features of this tradition are: it expresses a paramount concern for equality, freedom and social justice; it is undergirded by a conception of personhood that views every human as created in the image of God; its conception of personhood supports an egalitarian social ideal that seeks to affirm the dignity of all persons regardless of social status; the establishment of a covenantal relationship between God – who serves as an active agent in liberating the oppressed – and humanity form its roots in the Old Testament; it promotes responsibility for the moral health of society by advancing a religious vocation aimed at eliminating the gap between social conditions and covenantal standards of humaneness, but in a manner sensitive to social and historical context (e.g. proclaiming that a concrete community or society operate in a particular way).

I have shown how most of these features are represented in the Protestant Black Church in the United States. I have also defended this tradition against the charge that it is theocratic, and that it risks autonomy and democratic character. Hence, in the prophetic tradition there exists a religious orientation whose educational implications for civic virtue differ quite significantly from the *Yoder* and *Mozert* analyses. I assert that the strand of faith encountered within the prophetic Christian tradition necessarily implicates involvement within the political dimension of life in all its aspects – cultural, economic, and governmental. I also assert that this strand of faith sustains a vision of citizenship that constitutes a religious vocation for believers

qua citizens that is broadly compatible with and supportive of central liberal democratic values – namely reciprocity, mutual respect, tolerance, and justice.

While the cultivation of civic virtue is the special responsibility of the state, its development does not fall within the exclusive domain of state institutions. Religious associations can be effective sites because for the development of civic virtue because of the experience of association they provide as well as the particular beliefs and values they are able to promote (not necessarily citizenship focused, but conducive to developing civic virtues). This study should be interpreted as concerning itself with the socialization received through religious education broadly speaking, and not just specifically through religious schools.

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