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The Public Role of Religion and the Response of Public Theology

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Abstract: This study discusses theological assertions concerning the public role of religion in post-secular societies. In the context of religion's renewed emergence in the public sphere, it is being called upon to overcome the beliefs of individual and private realms and actively assume the role of a participant in the common goal of a better society. Religion, in this context, is not confined to the personal sphere but is recognized as a crucial participant in shaping a more desirable societal landscape. Religion holds the potential to renew the spirituality of citizens, foster a sense of belonging, and contribute to the formation of social ethics. In response to these circumstances, Christianity is engaging with a new theological methodology known as public theology, proposing a public role for the church and advocating for the public participation of Christians. This study aims to propose public roles for the church and theology in post-secular societies.

Keywords: public theology; secularization; post-secularization; public church; common good

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1. Introduction

Recently, religion has been called upon to assume a new role in the public sphere. Following the Enlightenment, religion seemed to lose its societal significance in the public domain due to secularization. However, in recent times, there has been a revival of interest in spirituality and a longing for authenticity, leading to the resurgence of religion. As religion is re-emerging in the public realm amid secularization, a reevaluation of its role is ongoing.

This goes beyond merely asserting the necessity of religion on a personal level. It extends to recognizing the need for ethics in the formation of community, the shaping of social ethos, and the establishment of political foundations to obtain a consensus. In response to this evolving landscape, Christianity has adopted a new theological methodology known as public theology. This approach seeks to restore the public dimension of theology, which has been somewhat overlooked in the Christian tradition. It aims to rediscover public theology as the church's engagement in the pursuit of the common good.

Of course, public theology is not the sole theological approach endeavoring to engage with the challenges posed by secularization and post-secularization. Radical orthodoxy emerges as a distinctive theological methodology in this discourse, offering a nuanced response characterized by its emphasis on liturgy and a reevaluation of pre-modern Christian tradition. In confronting secularization, radical orthodoxy prioritizes the retrieval of transcendence and the sacred within public discourse and societal structures.

However, this article will propose a role for Christianity as a public religion through public theology, rather than a theological methodology like radical orthodoxy, as it attempts to respond through the church's social engagement. It uses a public theological perspective to examine the role of the church and theology in a post-secular society. Within this framework, public theology serves as a methodological tool for analyzing the evolving dynamics of religion, society, and politics in contemporary contexts. Furthermore, in response to public theology, I will suggest how Christianity can engage in public life,

actively participating in the collective endeavor to foster a more ethical and inclusive societal framework.

2. Secularization and Post-Secularization

At present, religion is undergoing both secularization and post-secularization simultaneously, as it transitions from traditional religious paradigms to adopt new forms of spirituality. Secularization denotes the phenomenon where religion loses societal significance in the public domain. Traditional religious symbols, doctrines, and institutions not only lose influence but also experience declines in the number of followers, clergy, and religious institutions. As religion integrates into secular society, the religious becomes increasingly akin to the societal, and transcendent doctrines evolve into rational principles, transforming into practical ethics.

The social functions traditionally undertaken by religion have become differentiated as a result of secularization, leading to the establishment of autonomy and specialization within various societal domains. The transformation of religious landscapes due to secularization has resulted in a transposition of religious power and capabilities. The divine forces are undergoing a shift, transforming into human-centered religions where spiritual influence and abilities are replaced by human knowledge, actions, and institutional mechanisms. This transition signifies a profound alteration in the religious landscape, reflecting a shift from a transcendent, otherworldly focus to a more human-centered and pragmatic religious orientation.

However, simultaneously, post-secularization is also being observed. Religions that have proliferated through globalization offer unique identities, reshaping individuals' attitudes, values, and community cultures. Recently, these religions have even begun to have political voices. In 1977, American sociologist Daniel Bell, discussing the future of religion, foresaw a 'return of the sacred' as a revival of religion (Bell 1977). Religion has not disappeared; instead, it is emerging as an even more critical factor—politically, economically, and culturally. This phenomenon is not confined to the Western world, as, globally, religion is experiencing a renewed emergence termed 'post-secularization.'

Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead argue that Western Europe, including the United Kingdom, significantly prefers 'spirituality' over 'religion,' opting for personally driven spiritual practices rather than adhering to traditional institutional norms and regulations (Heelas and Woodhead 2004, pp. 2–10). Grace Davie, in explaining the interrelationship between modernization and secularization in Europe, suggests that modernization does not necessarily lead to secularization in other regions, citing the examples of the United States, Singapore, and Korea. She contends that the religious situation in Europe is exceptional and that secularization and modernization manifest differently in other parts of the world, such as America, Africa, and certain Asian countries (Davie 2002). Peter Berger disagrees with the notion that secularization is a universal and common societal phenomenon, arguing instead that secularization and late secularization unfold in diverse forms. He perceives secularization's impact as being more pronounced among individuals familiar with modern industrialization, particularly males, urban dwellers, and those engaged in non-traditional occupations, as well as among younger generations. Additionally, he notes that secularization is more evident in Protestant and Jewish contexts than in Catholic ones, and is occurring predominantly in Europe compared to other countries, with the United States being an exceptional case where Christianity is growing (Berger 1967, p. 108).

Of course, the phenomena of secularization and post-secularization manifest differently in non-Western societies, necessitating nuanced examinations within academic discourses. In contexts such as communist countries, where official recognition of religion is absent, the state often assumes a quasi-religious role, imbued with symbols and rituals that evoke quasi-sacred sentiments among the populace. This phenomenon reflects a form of state worship, wherein political ideologies and leaders are venerated akin to religious figures. Conversely, in many countries in the Global South, indigenous religions play a significant role in shaping political structures and guiding societal norms. Here, the inter-

twining of indigenous religious beliefs and practices with political governance underscores the complex interplay between spirituality and power dynamics. Such contexts challenge conventional Western notions of secularization, highlighting the persistence of religious influence in shaping social and political landscapes. In Islamic or Hindu countries, religion and politics have not historically been separated. In countries that have never experienced secularization, this discussion may seem irrelevant. But if we expect a healthy role for public religion, we need to rethink the debate in post-secular discourses. Peter Berger argues that secularization is not simply a decline in religion or a loss of influence, as is often the case in the West, but comes in many different forms. The term modernization is a Western-centric concept. In Asia, especially in Japan and the Middle East, modernization has occurred in close relationship with religion and, in many cases, different religious backgrounds have positively influenced technology and economic development (Peter Berger 2014, pp. 68–72).

Also, the resurgence of religion does not necessarily lead to healthy civic engagement. In his book, Tim Alberta considers how evangelicalism can embrace them in the face of religious extremism in the United States. In the context of post-secularization, white evangelicalism in the US, combined with nationalism, has taken on a form that is close to the extreme right. In a context where religion needs to play a healthy role, the politicization of religion only leads to a false idolatry of the state (Alber 2023).

However, Jürgen Habermas declared the end of metaphysical philosophy in Western society and proposed the necessity of a post-metaphysical philosophy. He suggests that religion provides meanings and insights that cannot be explained or approached through reason alone. Religion offers insights that cannot be perceived as part of the modern worldview. Habermas acknowledges the epistemic validity that religion provides while abolishing strict distinctions between faith and reason. He adopts an open attitude, suggesting that the content and characteristics of faith can be learned even within the concepts and language of philosophy. In other words, by opening up the philosophical possibility of religious understanding, he accepts the role of religion as a catalyst for morality, as Kant proposed. Habermas labels such a society a post-secular society (Habermas 2008, pp. 245–46). Post-secularization is a phenomenon in Western societies where religious beliefs and practices are visibly re-emerging in the public sphere (Graham 2013, p. 46).

The public sphere is not exclusive to secular individuals, excluding religious institutions and believers. Religion is called upon to explore alternatives in realms beyond the reach of rationality and political institutions in secular society. A society driven by secular desires, maximizing individual interests, finds itself exposed to the limitations of state intervention and consensus politics. Not only does secular society fail to foster a sense of community, but it also fails to provide emotional stability and the foundation of life for those who live without roots. Public religion does not exist solely for the benefit of its members. The role that religion, as a part of society, should undertake is not limited to the spiritual and transcendental realms alone. In addition to establishing public virtue as an alternative to secularism, religion must attempt various forms of participation for the betterment of society.

3. Religion's Public Role

3.1. Reshaping Ethics and Rediscovering Meaning

Post-secularization does not aim for religion to operate again as a singular power in the public sphere. Rather, it calls for a positive recognition of religion's role in the public domain, complementing secular limitations and providing alternative values and ways of life. Religion can help individuals realize the meaning and value of life in everyday existence, while also offering a moral and ethical foundation to citizens and undertaking social responsibility by proposing public policies to the state and caring for the socially vulnerable. Duncan B. Forrester suggests that, in a secular society, public theology is crucial for restoring weak ethical foundations and reinstating societal values and trust. This is essential because contemporary society faces public issues, such as the justice

debates between John Rawls and Michael Nozick, which are not easily resolved through rational dialogue alone. The notions of justice and peace advocated by secular society bear significant resemblance to the concepts of divine justice and shalom (peace) in the Christian tradition (Forrester 1989, pp. 4–5). This is rooted in the principle of neighborly love, as outlined in the Bible. Pursuing justice without love and peace inevitably leads to the creation of a surveillance society that emphasizes punishment and coercion. Justice must always be accompanied by love.

Democracy fundamentally relies on mutual respect through rational dialogue. In democratic societies, mutual respect and empathy towards one another are essential for smooth communication in the public sphere. In societies tending towards individualism, meeting and finding solidarity in the middle ground are indispensable for pursuing mutual interests and collective prosperity. In such circumstances, restoring ethics based on social consensus is an important task. Public religion should not only reshape the meaning and value of individual lives but also shape the ethos of society as a whole. Rebuilding ethics as a common foundation in a pluralistic society is almost impossible using the democratic system alone, highlighting the role of religion, which emphasizes spirituality, community, and relationality.

Ronald Thiemann also regarded the church as a 'school of virtue.' Thiemann argued that abolishing the dualistic thinking of modernity, which distinguishes between private and public, religious and secular, enables individual moral decisions to become important criteria in numerous political and public issues. He further claimed that such moral and theological reflections, based on the Christian tradition, make it impossible to exclude faith from the public sphere (Thiemann 1991, p. 19).

Modern society, overly optimistic about human reason, failed to recognize the inherent limitations of human nature, nurturing romantic expectations that contracts and agreements would bring about a perfect political system. However, as secularization progresses, various harms are becoming evident. While individual freedom is enhanced, it is not easy to restrain human desires towards materialism. The public sphere, which could mediate various conflicts between nations, races, genders, and generations, is collapsing.

Charles Taylor proposes the necessity of expressive individualism as opposed to exclusive individualism, suggesting that this strengthens reciprocity in the public sphere and leads to diverse social imaginaries within the public sphere. In *A Secular Age*, Taylor characterizes modern society as the 'Age of Authenticity.' In secularized societies, modern individuals have lost sight of the meaning and purpose of life, and their genuine freedom has been diminished. To address this, Taylor proposes a restoration of 'authenticity' and 'truth' through religion. The modern longing for authenticity not only evokes a desire for spiritual matters but also urges a transition to a reflective and relationally centered life while cautioning against moral laxity (Taylor 2003, pp. 22–36). Charles Taylor argues that Western societies have lost transcendence in the process of secularization and have constructed an 'immanent frame' that centers human reason within the natural order. In secular societies, humans have lost sight of the final goal and live for their prosperity, but Taylor argues that worship of God is the ultimate goal and that it is through this that transcendence can be brought to Earth. Through the recovery of transcendence, religion can rediscover the good values and meanings that modern society has lost (Taylor 2007, pp. 15–18). The spiritual and transcendent values preserved in religious traditions emphasize reciprocity, relationality, and responsibility; these alternative values are worth considering in secular society.

In the secular age, religion emphasized spiritual individualism, enhancing human inwardness. However, in the late secular age, religion is moving towards social transcendence based on authenticity. In the modern 'closed world,' personal and metaphysical epistemologies dominate, but in the 'open world', moving towards transcendence, there is a strong tendency to pursue communal, relational, and spiritual meanings. In the late secular society, religion not only contributes to social maturation based on the legitimate ethics that citizens must possess but also stimulates healthy internal motivations in individuals, encouraging their participation in civil society. A disenchanted society that is losing

its religiosity may misunderstand religion as superstition or fanaticism. However, in a re-enchanted society in which religion plays a public role again, it rejects the dualism of modernity and moves towards an integral society by integrating reason and faith, the spirit and body, and the mind and heart (Taylor 2011, pp. 38–41). Religion not only provides standards and modes of life beyond self-reflection but also offers values, visions, ideals, and other foundational elements for communities and civil societies. The belief systems shared by religions guide not only each community but also dedicate themselves to societal order and the common good.

Kevin Vanhoozer argues that what is needed in the postmodern transition emerging from the latter half of the 20th century is not philosophical or socio-political changes, but rather spiritual dimensions. He mentions that the spiritual is not only the foundation of beliefs and actions but also a prerequisite for shaping new lives. He emphasizes that the spiritual dimension can manifest within society and culture, rather than being reduced solely to the individual, and describes the crisis of postmodernity as a spiritual transformation and crisis occurring across society as a whole. The emergence of autonomous reason in modernity, including Enlightenment thought, has led to human pride and arrogance, which, in turn, led to a perception of oneself as being inherently good, which eventually leads to anthropocentrism (Vanhoozer 2011, p. 23). This approach acknowledges that spiritual and transcendent elements, which became taboo in the public sphere due to secularization, are not necessarily separated from the public sphere but can contribute to the formation of human culture and a societal ethos.

3.2. Forming Community and Identity

Religion traditionally confers identity upon its members and provides a sense of belonging within the community. In a fragmented world, religion fosters interconnected networks that are woven through various human relationships, enabling individuals to live as connected and integrated beings rather than as isolated or detached entities. The significance of religion's public role is underscored by the decline of civil society. Robert Putnam, analyzing American society in the 1960s and 1970s, points out that, in recent decades, participation in civic domains by ordinary citizens has steadily decreased. He argues that religion plays a crucial role in the revitalization of civil society and considers the interpersonal networks possessed by churches as a form of social capital that is necessary for this endeavor. Local churches serve as vital venues where individuals can acquire the relational skills needed to engage in other civic organizations, obtain essential information about the community, and build trust among residents through the establishment of personal connections. Since human identity is shaped within the community through encounters with various relationships and the traditions, rituals, and narratives inherent to that community, the identity bestowed within religious communities can not only provide individuals with a role, allowing for social integration in the post-secular society, but can also provide a sense of belonging, exerting a significant influence on their formation of a worldview and their attitudes towards life.

Religion provides a sense of belonging to its members as a political (or social) community. While there are various perspectives on discussions regarding faith outside religious communities, religion still maintains a sense of community and allows for close relationships to be established. Religion does not advocate for a 'community of alterity', which emphasizes exclusion and difference. Instead, it seeks to foster a global community characterized by finding common ground, embracing a 'community of sameness', and promoting solidarity and consideration for one another as part of a 'community of life'.

The formation of religious communities based on social capital is one of the most significant resources that religion possesses. Recently, among public theologians, there has been a growing effort to view the human resources of religious communities as a form of social capital. In particular, Elaine Graham distinguishes between 'religious capital' and 'faithful Capital', asserting that religious capital refers to tangible assets such as buildings, budgets, and people, while faithful capital encompasses intangible characteristics such as

vision, values, beliefs, and trust (Graham and Lowe 2009, pp. 40–41). Recognizing religion as the most influential institution that is capable of instilling a sustainable community and personal identity by establishing a cohesive focal point in fragmented secular societies is crucial.

In fragmented secular societies, individuals often experience a loss of identity due to the collapse of traditional communities and the breakdown of families, a phenomenon exacerbated by the advancement of digital media. As values and meaning are not formed in isolation but through participation in communities that share belief systems, modern individuals who lack a sense of belonging cannot derive vitality from communities. The participatory and communicative characteristics inherent in religious communities transcend practical limitations and offer alternatives for the formation of a sense of belonging and identity. Religion, far from merely shaping individuals' inner lives and private habits, also shapes and transforms relationships and cultures, providing stability, connecting to the transcendent realm, discovering true happiness, and guiding lives of solidarity. Community, therefore, serves as an extended family—a primary space in which individuals experience what true community means in a secularized society, whether through deep or loose solidarity fostered by faith.

3.3. Forming Common Good

Religion forms one axis of public reason. Despite misconceptions that religion is irrational or superstitious, criticisms labeling individuals who live by specific faiths as antisocial or separatist are somewhat misguided. Faith and reason can coexist harmoniously and serve as complementary axes when living as democratic citizens.

As Habermas points out, public reason is inseparable from the traditions of the past, and a strict separation between public and religious reason is almost impossible. Furthermore, religion is essential in shaping political justice and public discourse (Calhoun 2011, pp. 80–81). Habermas looked to faith to find the factors that influenced the formation of public reason in Western societies, hoping to overcome the narrow rationalism of science. Human reason, which has been extremely developed since the Enlightenment, cannot be self-fulfilling, and it is almost impossible for reason to provide a sense of goodness as a basis for the formation of universal values (Calhoun 2011, p. 84). Nicholas Wolterstorff understands the European Enlightenment as a widespread cultural phenomenon rather than an intellectual one, arguing that it was a human-centered way of life that emerged after the collapse of Christian tradition and church authority.

Rational humans live self-centered lives in understandable ways. In a society oriented toward rational living, efficiency is recognized as a social value, and the pursuit of personal gain is recognized as virtuous rather than greedy. In other words, in a secular society, it is difficult to form a commitment to others and a shared vision. To understand how ethical discourse in modern society has been shaped, we must look to religious ethics. While one does not need to be persuaded by theological arguments, Stout believes that the study of religious traditions teaches us about the importance of morality. The secularization of public discourse does not exclude the claims of religion, which have played an essential role in people's lives, and so we should consider the theological as part of our understanding of moral language (Stout 1988, pp. 187–88).

If we exclude religion from the public square in discussions of the common good, we lose an important ethical resource in a pluralistic society. The secularizing stance of excluding religion is not only unacceptable in a democratic system, it is inconsistent with the spirit of democracy, which is the collaboration of the many and the diverse. Of course, religion needs to be communicated in a way that allows for rational dialogue in the public square. Habermas suggested that religious language needs to be 'translated' into public language in anticipation of religion's public role. The idea is that religion can compensate for the limitations of the secular in public affairs through rational dialogues based on universal values.

Since the emergence of the modern state, religion has remained a central pillar of civil society and a powerful influence on individual lifestyles, and the recent interest in the spiritual, and the revival of religion, shows that the theory of secularization has been a fiction. Religion has not withdrawn from the public sphere and become privatized or preoccupied with spiritual matters, as secularization theorists claim, but has itself become public (Casanova 1994, p. 220). In a pluralistic society, the emphasis on religious identity can be a source of conflict and contention, but the original significance and values of each religion are fundamentally a good resource for social stability, as well as an important resource and starting point for the promotion of the public good.

The loss of the idea of the common good has led to the loss of a system of shared values and has led to the development of societies that reinforce extreme individualism. (Gorringe 2011, pp. 23–24). While religions seem to have developed systems of doctrine and ritual based on their particularities, many are deeply connected to the common good of society. The new visibility of religion in post-secular societies calls for a new role for religion in social policy and discourses regarding equality and human rights. Secular societies will need to consider how religious and faith-based values and language should be incorporated into public services and government guidance as religion re-emerges (Graham 2013, p. 11). Rather than excluding religion, public resources should use religion to rebuild the broken social good, teach citizens how to live ethically and serve as a common foundation for civil society.

Of course, the public return of religion in post-secular societies can be misunderstood as a repeat of Christendom, as it was in the Middle Ages. But after secularization, religion is no longer magical or superstitious. As Habermas argued, it is a religion that is capable of rational communication in the public sphere, and one that can communicate rationally with secular reason (Habermas 2011, p. 23).

Miroslav Volf divides religion into world religion and local religion. He says that while local religions seek the prosperity of their tribal gods and their group, world religions claim what is true, just, and good for all human beings, regardless of their local culture (Volf 2015, p. 101). In other words, as a world religion, public religion claims a good that goes beyond everyday prosperity and is concerned with a higher good. It offers universal values, connecting the human chain and providing transcendent, spiritual, and relational meanings that go beyond the physical world. Religion should provide stability for individuals in a rapidly changing world, discipline human desires—which have become materialistic in a capitalist society—and guide us to form a sense of community and public life. It is impossible to exclude religion from the public sphere. It is also impossible to allow for only one religion and ideology in a society. Given the pluralism of democracy, the principles of respect and inclusion must operate in a post-secular society, as many religions and ideologies are syncretistic. Religion can provide stability and direction for citizens in changing circumstances, and it can discipline their desires when they are overwhelmed by the pleasure-seeking culture of consumerist societies.

While religion often justifies violence and sometimes seems to impede the advancement of science and technology, it is not an obstacle to healthy globalization but rather can provide a better way, contributing to human flourishing and the formation of a moral framework. The social imagination of religion can be a great help in this regard, as the public visions and proclamations of values for society that cannot be found in secular societies must originate from something beyond reality. In a pluralistic society, religion can be both a source of conflict and a unifying force. In such a reality, religious engagement is not an option, but a necessity, and discussions about the common good that are considerate and respectful of the other are needed.

4. Public Theology's Response

How can Christianity respond to a post-secular society that is increasingly emphasizing the public role of religion? Since the 1970s, the concept of public theology has been emerging in Christianity. Rather than church-centered social engagement, Christians are

engaging in solidarity and dialogue as members of society and addressing common issues together. As José Casanova noted, in the political anomie that followed the fall of the Soviet Union, the Orthodox and Catholic churches of Eastern Europe provided social stability and served as emotional pillars for their citizens (Casanova 1994). However, it is still difficult to define what public theology is and how it is practiced. This is not only because the academic features of public theology are vague and cannot be defined, but also because it responds variously to the circumstances and issues of each region and time. Nevertheless, public theology aims to practice collaborative ethical behavior and foster character in the process of shaping and reshaping civil society. It must have the wisdom required to live out God's law and covenant while continually following God's guidance (Stackhouse 2007, p. 422). Public theology takes the methodology of public conversation. In the public arena, through rational communication with various publics, it addresses public issues through interdisciplinary research and proposes the church's participation and action. Thus, the methodology of public theology is both dialogical and engaged.

The Christian's public responsibility is to live in God's presence with all in the fullness of the life he offers. The kingdom of God is the dwelling place of all life, and God rules over it as he created the world. Because life in the fullness of the world is both God's creative providence and Christ's work of salvation, theology must continue to engage in public discourse about flourishing life (Volf and Croasmun 2019, pp. 79–83). As Wolf argues, the Christian faith is a public faith. A life filled with the Spirit of Christ is one that is committed to the flourishing of all humanity and creation, and to living the abundant life that Jesus brings (Volf and McAnnally-Linz 2016, pp. 12–13).

Influenced by Charles Taylor, Andrew Root argues that not only is it necessary for modern society to experience the fullness of time through the Christian tradition, but also to turn away from selfish growth and rapid achievement and move toward authenticity (Root 2021, p. 11).

Public theology must address 'public issues and concerns' and engage in open discussion of theology and ethics with people of other faiths and non-Christians. As a result, it will have a direct impact on the social fabric and the lives of citizens. Harold Breitenberg argues that, in the Christian tradition, 'public theology' should be understandable and accessible to those both inside and outside the church, helping the church to interact with civil society and providing a means of theological reflection for faith communities and individuals. Public theologians, he says, can engage all citizens in thinking about how Christian belief and practice can inform 'public life' and the 'common good' while finding ways to make it 'communicable' and 'acceptable' (Breitenberg 2003, p. 66). Not only are religious values and practices an important resource for future public discourse, as Habermas hoped, but as Tracy argues, excluding the language of values will do nothing to advance discourse for the common good (Graham 2017, p. 130).

Perhaps the most prominent examples of religion's public engagement are those of Martin Luther King, who pursued nonviolent resistance to achieve black liberation, human rights, and religious freedom, and Gandhi, who was committed to the liberation of India. Furthermore, there are the Buddhist movements that rose up for the liberation of Cambodia in the 1990s, with pilgrimages, and Sulak Sivaraka in Thailand and Thich Nhat Hanh in Vietnam, who also practiced nonviolent activism for social justice. Muslims have done the same, with Indonesia's first president, Abdurrahman Wahid, attempting to establish civic participation and democracy for non-Muslims, and Iran's Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, a longtime advocate for the human rights of African Muslims (Hollenbach 2002, pp. 96–97).

How should Christianity respond to these calls for a greater role for religion in public engagement? There are two possible responses. One is to strengthen social engagement 'outside the church' for the 'common good' and social justice, and the other is to return 'inside the church' to build communities faithful to tradition and doctrine while forming 'alternative communities' in civil society. Public theology is a movement outside the church that aims to overcome the privatization of faith and restore the public nature of Christianity, which has become a religion for individuals. In an increasingly globalized and pluralistic

society, where different religions, cultures, languages, and races coexist, and where civil society is becoming more civil than ever, Christianity must reclaim its public character.

Andrew R. Morton cites Duncan Forrester as the scholar who laid the groundwork for European public theology, noting that Forrester made clear that not only is the gospel public but that theology is the discipline that practices the public nature of the gospel. He criticized the dichotomous thinking of 20th-century theology, which tended to ignore the fact that the public affects the private, and he rejected the idea that religion or theology is a form of subjective action or conditionality, independent of the real world (Morton 2004, p. 26). Duncan Forrester points out that modernity has forced religion to remain in the private sphere under the influence of secularization. Theologians of the past have always addressed political issues from a theological perspective, and Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin, in particular, actively addressed social problems and attempted to transform them. He argues that theologians' commitment to society is inescapable, and that the political importance of theology was almost universally accepted until the Middle Ages. The church has also engaged with political power in one way or another, bringing the kingdom of God in tension with secular authority (Forrester 1997, p. 11).

This theological framework of public theology can encompass the domain of mission, which involves the public proclamation of the gospel. Gregg Okesson argues that churches should witness to the gospel by engaging in the 'thickness of the public realm' of which they are a part. He suggests a public engagement with the gospel that is based on a thick identity as a church that takes into account the various contexts and elements of the public realm in which the gospel is communicated, like Clifford Geertz's thick description, rather than a piecemeal presentation of the gospel or social engagement (Okesson 2020, p. 5).

Rather than being confined to a Christian discourse, the discussion of Christianity's public life calls for interdisciplinary research to analyze the challenges and contexts of the times and how Christianity's distinctive interpretation and practice can contribute to society. Christianity will need to renew its identity as a public institution and prepare itself to take on the public role of religion in a post-secular society by practicing the public discourse of biblical teaching and church tradition.

5. Conclusions

In a post-secular society that calls for a public role in religion, Christianity is attempting to respond through public theology. The concern of public theology is not limited to issues and discourse within the church community. It takes a broader theological perspective of the kingdom of God and engages with all areas of creation, including civil society issues. The relationship between church and state has been the subject of considerable debate within the Christian tradition, and has been an ongoing topic since Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and more recently, public theology and communitarianism. William Stora argues that public theology should not only be ecumenical, global, local, and ecclesial, but also transnational, enabling collaboration among collective and diverse international institutions to take root in global civil society (Graham 2013, p. 75).

Thus, public theology is not merely concerned with the public, but with a particular kind of theological methodology in relation to the public. It seeks the common good for all, which transcends any religious or denominational concerns. Public theology is also public because it contains procedural standards of dialogue and consensus within a methodologically pluralistic public sphere. Public theology confronts the secular philosophies and religious orientations of the world of non-Christians and explains theological positions in their language. It engages in the activity of translation to communicate with professionals, laypeople, and non-religious or non-Christian people at the interface of religion and secularity. Furthermore, public theology is public because it is believed to serve a wider audience, beyond the boundaries of faith.

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