

# Taking Religion Seriously in the Public Square

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## **Introduction**

Religion both unites and divides the U.S. public, contributing to the making of more involved, more generous citizens, but also contributing to citizens less tolerant of differences and less amenable to the sort of compromises essential to democratic life.<sup>1</sup> One pervasive civic disagreement is over the question of the proper role of religion in public life—or if there is one.

On the one hand there are those who argue the First Amendment erects a “high and impregnable” (*Everson v Board of Education*) “wall of separation” (Thomas Jefferson, *Letter to Danbury Baptists*) between church and state.<sup>2</sup> At the other end of this continuum are those who argue the U.S. is “a Christian nation” in which the Bible is the proper source of civil law. I note here the distinction between religious and secular worldviews as an example of incommensurable visions of a good life, and my argument is a consideration of a particular form of a serious problem our democratic experiment faces: our political system was designed by men who agreed on basic principles but differed on interests. The system they gave us was designed so citizens might compromise on interests, giving something here, getting something else there. Such a system reflects the normal course of politics as described by James Madison in *The Federalist No. 10* by which one alliance of factions forms around one issue, but this alliance will not be permanent. On a different issue, interests align differently. This constant shifting of alliances prevents permanent blocks from forming and taking over the machinery of government, and will therefore preserve democratic government. Today, however, our deepest divisions are not over matters of interest, but of principle. This is why many “values voters” vote against their own best interest (in practical terms) in order to support candidates and movements that fit (or are made to appear to fit) their moral commitments.<sup>3</sup>

This incommensurability on matters of fundamental principle puts our political system under stress. Without compromise, the work of a diverse and complex public cannot get done. Without intentional education for citizenship, including but not limited to the institution of

school, citizens are unlikely to get better at self-governance than they are today: a sad state of affairs.

In this paper I argue there is some truth within both points of view, but neither is fully accurate, nor is either, taken at face value, useful for meeting the demands of democratic life. I first briefly frame the question of the relationship between religious belief and political advocacy, then consider the role of the First Amendment in considering this issue, after which I briefly consider the nature of a public and public speech, and raise the question of the limits of democratic inclusion. Finally, I briefly offer a few educational responses to the problem of accommodating religious belief in public discourse.

### **Religion and Politics**

The claim there should be a complete separation between church and state is heuristically useful and worth consideration. It is important we distinguish between matters of private and sectarian religious belief and practice on the one hand and public policy on the other. However, the seemingly, rhetorically simple distinction between church and state is more complex than it appears once one understands one's religious beliefs often are foundational in the formation of one's political commitments.

Furthermore, the common claim that morality cannot be legislated is patently untrue. Since most legislation has to do with the way people live together and treat one another, it might be more accurate to say rarely is anything legislated *but* morality. To the extent, then, that at least some significant portion of citizens base their moral preferences about the social order on their religious beliefs, the notion religion can be kept out of politics is preposterous. This is not to say civil institutions and religious institutions cannot be distinguished, but it is to recognize this distinction may be little more than heuristic.

When the Mormon Church organizes to support the passage of California's anti-gay Proposition 8, when a letter supporting passage is read at all congregations, when Mormons are directed to contribute to the referendum campaign, and when Mormons are then motivated to volunteer for the campaign (producing, in effect, an in-kind contribution from the church), two things become immediately clear: (1) religion and politics are closely linked, and (2) nothing even remotely in violation of the Constitution has occurred. Nor was the Mormon Church alone in the California example: Several other religious groups similarly were involved. The Knights of Columbus of the Roman Catholic Church, for example, were the largest single financial supporters of Proposition 8.<sup>4</sup> I want to suggest this sort of entanglement between religion and politics is both inevitable and increasingly the norm rather than the exception.

Nor is the civil status of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people the only such issue. The U.S. Catholic bishops and their respective state conferences have consistently supported use of public money to fund voucher programs so more families can afford to send their children to private (mostly Catholic) schools. This support has come not only from the actions of state and national councils of Roman Catholic bishops, but has shaped both preaching from the pulpit and exhortations of parishioners. Catholics and evangelicals have for decades organized and led the opposition to abortion rights. Evangelicals, for reasons that have to do with beliefs about prerequisites for the Second Coming, are strong supporters of Israel's policies in the Occupied Territories. These are clear examples that a group's or individual's public policy commitments are also expressions of, or at least likely shaped by, religious beliefs and teachings.

Not all instances are quite so clear. The civil rights movement of the '60s and '70s was largely a movement led by ordained clergy, largely but not exclusively from Black churches. Similarly, the leaders of the anti-Vietnam War movement were largely ordained clergy (e.g., Harvey Cox, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dan and Phil Berrigan all preached a biblical pacifism), as were many spokespersons *for* the war (e.g., Joseph Cardinal Spellman, Billy Graham, and Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen all of whom preached the need to oppose "godless Communism"). Whether one was for the war or against it, one wanted it known that God was on one's side.

But there are even more general connections; What is to be said of political and economic liberals who think fidelity to the Gospels requires public policies with a "preferential option for the poor" and a commitment to social justice, broadly construed, according to biblical principles? Is their support for a strong social safety net, universal health care, and a progressive tax code somehow suspect because it is rooted in their reading of the Bible? The concept of responsible citizenship surely cannot be divorced from one's basic and fundamental ideas about what people owe one another, ourselves, and, if people believe they exist, their gods.

This situation is most sharply delineated for those members of the polity who are also members of communities defined by what I call Covenant Christianity. For these citizens, their religious beliefs present them with a world shaped by a covenant with God that dates back to God's covenant with Abraham. In this view, the covenant has remained intact over the millennia, though it has shifted from one community to another. Part of the story the early Christian community told itself was that God had shifted allegiance from the Jewish people to those who became followers of Jesus of Nazareth. The early pilgrim settlers in New England in turn thought the land they settled was a new "city on a hill,"

given them by God as their new promised land, and that the people who settled there had God's protection and support *so long as they lived under and by the covenant*.<sup>5</sup>

The key to understanding this worldview is to understand that those who hold it see their well-being linked inextricably to the morality of the community. According to the Bible, if the community holds to the covenant, it will continue to receive God's blessing and protection; if it does not do so, it will suffer consequences.<sup>6</sup> Pat Robertson's and Jerry Falwell's otherwise incomprehensible claim the attack on the World Trade Center happened because New York City tolerates homosexuality<sup>7</sup> falls within this tradition. Many found their claim either laughable or offensive (or both), yet many of those offended by it are nevertheless moved by Lincoln's "Second Inaugural Address," in which Lincoln uses the same sort of reasoning (albeit much more eloquently than Robertson) to express the thought that the Civil War was God's judgment on the nation, the "woe due to those by whom the offense [of slavery] came."<sup>8</sup>

While the number of U.S. citizens who are biblical literalists and conscious members of the Covenant Community are no majority of the citizenry, they are a significant and dedicated minority, motivated by their devotion to their God and their fear of his wrath. Their number is also augmented by those members of the polity who hold a softer, more amorphous sense that the U.S. is an exceptional nation, in large part because it is the beneficiary of divine protection.

Many of these citizens feel disrespected by what they view as a radical secularism of the public square; they also feel threatened by the possibility of God's wrath. It is this commitment and this fear that are at the heart of much of the political activism of the religious right, as they insist on being heard and accepted on their own terms in civic discourse. This, of course, is exactly the point of contention between the members of the Covenant Community and those secularists who insist any appeal to faith-based reasoning in determining public policy is a breach in the wall between church and state they see as partly defining the U.S. polity.

One problem with this restriction on expression of faith-based policy-thinking is that it essentially gives people of faith who wish to engage in public discourse a choice between being disingenuous and being ignored. For example, I might believe we should have a progressive tax system because it would bring public policy more closely in line with my commitments to biblical imperatives to make society just by providing adequate resources to the weak and marginalized (widows, orphans, and sojourners, in the biblical formulations). However, if my arguments are to have weight in the public square, they must be couched in a language of "public rationality."<sup>9</sup> In short, I cannot give *my* reasons

for wanting to see progressivity in the tax code; I must give *your* reasons (or perhaps *nobody's* reasons). For example, I might argue such policies will increase the gross national product by increasing aggregate demand, or such policies will allow us to fund social security. These claims may even be true, *but it remains democratically significant they are not my reasons for thinking the tax code should be steeply progressive.*

Notwithstanding my example, the idea the U.S. is a uniquely “Christian nation,” while perhaps true in some statistical sense, is deeply and seriously misstated if taken to entail our laws should be a reflection of biblical teaching, notwithstanding instances where the civil order is served.<sup>10</sup> It may be true that the founding fathers, living in the time they did, were more focused on the importance of religion and religious belief. It may also be the case they might have been comfortable with what today might be considered a sort of soft establishment in the form of general approval of religiosity similar to George Washington’s observation that, “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports.... *And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion,*”<sup>11</sup> or President Eisenhower’s more recent declaration that “our form of government has no sense unless it is grounded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don’t care what it is.”<sup>12</sup>

### **The First Amendment**

The precise meaning of *establishment* as used in the First Amendment is argued endlessly today. Some argue the prohibition of establishment would still allow support for “religion in general,” while others argue the prohibition is very broad, preventing the government from supporting even religion in general. I hope to show shortly this argument is both pointless and fruitless for at least two reasons: (1) this is a far more complex and religiously diverse society than the one under which the nation was founded, and (2) the First Amendment, though argued over and endlessly dissected, is specifically designed *not* to resolve the sorts of issues faced today.

As to the first point, it is not an unreasonable interpretation of the words of at least some of the founding fathers to claim they saw religion as something they and their fellows held broadly in common, and that they did not see harm in a government policy that supported, in a broad and general sense, religious belief of some kind, most generally Christianity. It is quite something else to argue from that to the belief they would have endorsed a similar claim in the much more religiously diverse nation that is the United States today. The founding fathers were clearly politicians well versed in the art of compromise, a fact those who today call themselves “originalists” largely ignore.

More importantly, the language of the First Amendment, whatever its meaning at the time of its adoption, is a poor instrument for making decisions about religion in the public square. The First Amendment is not a statement about human rights or religious liberty (or speech, or the press, or any of the other freedoms mentioned in the amendment). The wording of the amendment (“Congress shall make no law...”) makes clear it does not protect the rights of citizens but the right of states to do as they will in these arenas. That is, the First Amendment is a statement of federalism, not of civil rights. It protects the power of states against the federal government, but offers absolutely no protection to citizens against the actions of states.

The current application of the First Amendment is established by interpreting the Fourteenth Amendment so the limits placed on the power of the federal government are henceforth applied against the power of states—the doctrine of *incorporation*. While that theory is easily converted to practice with the other amendments that make up the Bill of Rights (“the right of the people to keep and bear arms”; “No soldier shall...be quartered in any house, without the consent of the owner”; “the right of the people to be secure in their persons...”; and so on), it does not obviously apply to the First Amendment. That is, the Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Amendments clearly stipulate civil rights for individual citizens; there is no such right asserted in the text of the First Amendment. For this reason, it is difficult to discern exactly how the principle of incorporation applies.

But, to repeat, all this is theoretical. Whatever the First Amendment means, people will use their consciences when deciding matters of civil morality, and that is as it should be. That democratic government required citizens both politically informed and morally formed was the civic purpose that led to the experiment in U.S. universal public education. The office of citizen requires that, at least some of the time, members will put the common good ahead of their individual advantage. Without such citizens, democracy cannot function. It will collapse under the weight of unconstrained pursuit of self-advantage. This is not to suggest that only religious citizens can be moral, but rather to stipulate that democratic ones must be.

### **Public Speech**

One fundamental way of conceiving of democratic space is to think of the public as that entity constituted by a common space defined by speech. In this way of thinking, one becomes a member of a public not by speaking but by being heard, *and heard in a certain way*. Specifically, citizens are obligated to hear one another, so their point of view is taken into account, that citizens, as Tom Green<sup>13</sup> put it, hear the other’s speech as candidate for our own. This means that one can, but must not,

effectively remove others from democratic life by the simple expedient of refusing to hear their point of view.

It is in this arena that public education in the midst of incommensurable visions of civic life offers democratic possibility. Those of us strongly influenced by Dewey (and many of us who are not, or at least not directly) see democratic life as finding common ground for the solution of common problems. There are alternatives, but citizens may need to face the fact that there are times at and issues on which compromise is not possible, nor even in some cases desirable if it were so. An example of this would be *marriage equality* or *gay marriage*.<sup>14</sup> Most U.S. citizens today have come to accept the right to marriage equality, feeling, at the very least, that even if they do not approve, it is none of their business. This is a major shift in public opinion in a very short time, but that is not my point here.

Here, I want to point out that this is not acceptable, cannot be acceptable, to those citizens who hold, as a seriously considered and deeply held core belief, that marriage is ordained by God and defined by God's law. The additional piece, that God will punish those nations that do not obey his law, makes acceptance of marriage equality impossible for them. No compromise is possible with Covenant Christians on this issue or similar ones precisely because there is no common ground on which all can stand. For society to accept marriage equality is not just to disagree with members of this community on one specific issue. It is wholly to reject their worldview and moral universe. The democratic problem is to do so respectfully; the educational problem is to teach future citizens how to do so.

### **Limits of Democratic Inclusion**

So, then, I turn to the question of what it means to take religion in the public square seriously. I want to put forth at least three answers to that question. First of all, it means taking into account the profound influence religious belief has on the commitments of those who hold them, especially certain sorts of religious belief I call Covenant Christianity.<sup>15</sup> Second (and as a corollary to the first), it means considering the possibility there may be limits to the degree of diversity a democratic polity can contain and still function.<sup>16</sup> In this regard, it is worth recalling the constitutional system bequeathed to citizens is designed to allow and encourage government by compromise on interests between citizens who agree (mostly) on principles. It may be poorly designed to serve our current need to find common ground when the disagreements are more about fundamental principles than personal or group interests. And third, at the very least it requires engaging in serious discussion of matters of religious belief when they inform preferences on public policy.<sup>17</sup> That means giving special consideration to the concerns of our fellow citizens whose beliefs about salvation and

public policy are closely wound together. At the same time and somewhat paradoxically, the difficult truth is that public policy at times does and must contradict the religious beliefs of some citizens: It means avoiding the condescending and false nostrum that public policies are “neutral” with respect to religious belief when they clearly are not, as the discussion of marriage equality above reveals. Briefly, I now consider each of these requirements.

### **Taking Religious Belief Seriously**

One of the most difficult demands of democratic life is that citizens listen to one another in the sympathetic and thoughtful manner that allows us to hear what the other person is trying to tell us as she or he intends it to be heard. This does not entail, of course, any obligation to agree. But it strongly entails an obligation to listen generously.<sup>18</sup> Because speech only becomes *public* speech when it is *heard* in a certain way,<sup>19</sup> minority voices can be effectively excluded from public discourse simply by one’s refusal to give any weight to the speech of our fellow citizens.

Across the political spectrum one can hear clear examples of how this is done by turning on the likes of Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh, Mark Levin, and so many others who make their living sowing distrust of various bogeymen, including Muslims (“Islamofascists”), women (“Feminazis”), people of color (“race hustlers”), and social activists (“socialists), while demonizing those who disagree as people who hate “America.” On the other side of the political divide is the work of comedians like Bill Maher and George Carlin, both of whom consistently portray religious belief and religious believers as stupid and not to be taken seriously when advocating for their preferences in the public square. Scholarly examples include the work of such as Christopher Hitchens,<sup>20</sup> Sam Harris,<sup>21</sup> and Richard Dawkins,<sup>22</sup> each of whom claims to offer definitive evidence for the lack of a divinity (conceptually as incoherent as proving that the Christian God does exist) and the evil of religion. Finally, there is the everyday level of arguing one should not, for example, credit arguments against marriage equality for the simple reason they are grounded in religious belief and therefore inappropriate bases for making public policy.<sup>23</sup>

Citizens need to be more nuanced in addressing this kind of issue. It is certainly true that some religious communities might condemn abortion. It might follow that orthodox members of such communities would therefore themselves condemn abortion. It would certainly not follow that this would be a reason for civil law to conform to this religious belief so long as any significant degree of disagreement existed in the polity. However, the polity should perhaps pause especially carefully in this and similar arenas, not because of shared belief in the religious views expressed, *but out of respect for citizens who hold such views*. In

other words, where no public interest is directly or strongly affected (and abortion is *not* such a case) perhaps the proper course of public policy is to accommodate when possible the strongly and sincerely held beliefs of fellow citizens. Secular fundamentalists often talk of such accommodation as a state *endorsement* of sectarian beliefs, but I wonder if it might be possible to reconceive it as an act of respect for citizens who hold those beliefs. Again, this would only be possible in cases where such accommodation does not harm the public square.

Note also in this regard such an approach would allow religious citizens to be honest in their public discourse. Consider again a person who supports food stamps, food lunch programs, and other elements of the social safety net because she takes seriously the repeated biblical exhortations to social justice in general and care for children in particular. Under the ideals of public rationality currently employed, she could argue in support of such public policies, but only on secular grounds of rationality all could endorse: increasing students' test scores, preparing students for future economic productivity, or other such reasons.<sup>24</sup> It is at least conceivable that we can do better, that there can be ways for us to hear religious reasons—honest reasons—for policy preferences without committing to granting them special weight.

Taking religion seriously and considering the proper relationship between religion and democratic governance may illustrate the boundaries of democratic tolerance and accommodation. That is to say, there may be a point at which commitments to religious (or other forms of belief) disqualify one from playing according to the rules of democratic life. If democratic life requires compromise, then people who come into the public square with uncompromisable commitments are ill-suited for democratic life. If Dewey is correct and the rules of the game define the game,<sup>25</sup> then people with uncompromisable principles on matters where there is serious and deep division in the body politic are not playing democracy, but some other game.

This does not mean the polity should declare members of particular communities excluded, but should recognize that, by refusing to play by the rules of democratic life, members of the Covenant Community effectively place themselves outside the democratic polity. Members of Covenant Communities are owed serious attention, consideration, and regard. They are owed the liberty to practice their own religion. They and we *ourselves* are owed serious engagement with questions of what democratic discourse entails when a self-identified group of citizens have chosen to not be bound by the rules of democratic decision-making. What they are *not* owed, however, is dramatically to attenuate democracy. They are not owed compliance with their worldview or their desires, however heartfelt these may be.

Finally, secular citizens should stop pretending public policies are neutral when they stand in direct opposition to deeply and sincerely held beliefs of others. It is not a neutral act to support full civil membership and rights for LGBT citizens, to protect by law a woman's right to choose or to have in every other way full equality with men, to teach evolution in science class, or to create sex-education classes that are both accurate and sex-positive. I argue each of these is the proper course of action, but Counts<sup>26</sup> was right: Neutrality is not possible. To say that such policies are acts of civil neutrality is not true, and it disrespects those citizens whom these policies offend. The question citizens must ask is, "how can we commit these violations and be respectful at the same time?"<sup>27</sup>

### **Education and Incommensurability**

I have been considering the failure to deal with religion in the broad political and civil frame. To conclude, I want to suggest that schools' failure to educate for democratic life is a significant contributor to the mess in which the U.S. currently finds itself and to briefly consider some alternatives. In this regard, it is important to note the common school was created, with all its flaws, to create democratic (technically, *republican*) citizens. One of the things schools ought to be doing is engaging young people with serious consideration of the proper form of social life and the kind of people they want to be. Schools should be helping students decide who they want to be, individually and together. More importantly, schools should be in the business of preparing children for their future role of citizen. Part of this is the ability to engage in serious and honest discussion with fellow citizens on issues of significance about which there is disagreement.

Schools should be helping young people understand they are not, and can never be, independent of their fellow citizens; they are *members of* a society and of communities, not just *individuals in* one.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, schools should be helping young people think about the meaning of life and the nature of human flourishing, including the role of religion. And there are both theoretical and practical examples of what this looks like.

Perhaps the most obvious example of a teacher showing how to engage children in serious conversations about "things that matter"<sup>29</sup> is almost anything written by Vivian Paley, but let me use *You Can't Say, You Can't Play*<sup>30</sup> as an exemplar for my argument. In her book,<sup>31</sup> Paley recounts the year she sought to end exclusion of some children by other children in her kindergarten classroom. After discussing the wisdom of such a rule with her children (and with children in the higher grades), she posts the rule one day and begins the process of implementing it.

What is of note here is that the process of implementation is not a matter of imposing consequences for compliance or non-compliance.

Rather, Paley engages her students in an extended, several-month-long conversation about the meaning of inclusion, the meaning of democracy, and the nature of the public square. Of course, none of these words are used (her interlocutors were 4- and 5-year-old children), but these were nonetheless the very issues engaged in the conversation. Further, as Paley herself makes clear to her children and her readers, her own motivation for making this the central topic of her classroom was her reading of scripture in the context of her everyday experience in the classroom.<sup>32</sup> And when asked, she shared this with her students as well.

Specifically, Paley saw the casual cruelty with which her children treated each other in light of her reading of Leviticus: “The stranger that sojourneth with you shall be unto you as the homeborn among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (19:34). She did not *justify* the new rule with reference to scripture, but she did in some sense *explain* the new rule that way. In other words, she gave several good public reasons and justifications for granting all children (and, by extension, all citizens) full membership and full presence in the democratic public square. However, these reasons, as good and as true as they might be, were not in fact Paley’s motivation for conceiving the rule in the first place: That was an outgrowth of the moral architecture given her by her Jewish faith.

A more specific argument for asking students to consider questions of ultimate meaning and the constituents of a good life is presented by Kunzman,<sup>33</sup> who asks readers consider the ways in which opportunities present themselves for schools to facilitate questions about the meaning of a good life and the ways to reach it. Kunzman tells how, in discussing *Brave New World* with his high schools students, he failed to follow the implications of one of his students asking, “Who are we to play God?” Reflecting back on his failure to confront that question directly, Kunzman argues adolescents are certainly able to pursue such questions and quite interested in doing so. The fact that schools rarely take advantage of opportunities to have these conversations, he argues, is one of the ways in which schools fail to serve legitimate ends of democratic education.

In doing so, of course, teachers will sometimes implicate students’ religious beliefs and moral commitments, which Kunzman argues is not only justified, it is a way to improve dramatically the quality of education and the engagement of students. Nel Noddings<sup>34</sup> confronts this argument in more detail, arguing education worth its name will ask students to consider different answers than thinkers have given to questions of meaning, value, morality, and immortality. She explores, in some detail and with great perspicacity, the ways in which sensitive subjects of meaning, religion, and spirituality productively can be

explored with students in a variety of subjects in ways that encourage open-mindedness and meaningful exploration of beliefs both within our own culture and across cultures. How do people answer questions about their place in the universe, the foundations of morality, and the question of immortality, and how have they done so across time and place?

I mean this list to be suggestive, not exhaustive. Many writers, far too many to explore here, indicate either the importance of thoughtfully preparing curriculum content that raises questions and shapes intelligent discussion about issues of ultimate meaning and the nature of a good life, well-lived. Many other writers share their own experience in so doing. Much of the past three decades of reform has been directed at reducing the purposes of schooling from fostering citizenship and human thriving to producing efficient economic units. This is a betrayal of the legacy of both common schooling and democratic governance.

Teaching children to accept radical and incommensurable differences begins with teaching young children to hear each other, as Paley does with her kindergarten children. This is not something that necessarily comes naturally to humans, but neither is it something against our nature. Rather it is a possibility, a potentiality, which, if properly developed, allows one to fulfill the responsibilities of citizenship. This is the proper task of public education: schools created and directed by the public to shape citizens capable of being members of a public. We know what we should be doing, and we know how to do it. The question we must consider is why, as yet, we have not.

### Endnotes

- 1 Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides Us and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).
- 2 This is not, as we shall see, the same as trying to separate religion (or religious beliefs) from politics.
- 3 Frank Rich, *What's the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).
- 4 It is important to note the discussion about marriage equality is a discussion about the *civil* institution and recognition of marriage. Religious institutions are properly presumed to have the right to discriminate, just as the Roman Catholic Church continues to deny divorced Catholics the right to remarry under the auspices of the Church.
- 5 John Winthrop, *City Upon a Hill* (1630). <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/inline-pdfs/Winthrop's%20City%20upon%20a%20Hill.pdf>

- <sup>6</sup> The story of Sodom and Gomorrah is the archetype of communities that do not keep God's law, though this is also the theme of the later prophets as they tried to explain why God allowed the Babylonian exile.
- <sup>7</sup> Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, *The 900 Club* (September 13, 2001). Transcript available: <http://www.truthorfiction.com/falwell-robertson-wtc/>; Video available: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-CAcda\\_8I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-CAcda_8I)
- <sup>8</sup> Abraham Lincoln, *Second Inaugural Address*, Mar 4, 1965. Available: <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres32.html>
- <sup>9</sup> John Rawls, *The Idea of Public Reason in Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 212–254.
- <sup>10</sup> So the fact that “Thou shalt not kill” is a biblical commandment does not suggest we should not therefore prohibit murder. However, it does obligate us to find good reason to have such a law apart from the fact that it was one of the Ten Commandments.
- <sup>11</sup> George Washington, *Farewell Address*, emphasis added. Available: <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=15&page=transcript>
- <sup>12</sup> As cited in Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* 96, no.1 (Winter 1967): 1–21.
- <sup>13</sup> This of course does not imply agreeing with the other, but it does mean taking their positions seriously, which is exactly what we have learned not to do.
- <sup>14</sup> That these two different descriptions purportedly describe the same things, but really do not is an example of just how divisive some issues are: we cannot even find a common language for them. “Marriage equality” implies marriage is marriage, and the debate is whether we should continue to deprive LGBTQ citizens of the right to marry. “Gay marriage,” in contrast, suggests we are discussing some sub-set of “marriage.”
- <sup>15</sup> The basic component of Covenant Christianity sees the United States as the heir of the Abrahamic Covenant: The United States is God's Chosen Land, with special blessings under the Covenant. The implication of this is that public immorality—failure to live according to the Covenant—places the United States in danger of Divine retribution and withdrawal of God's blessing and protection.
- <sup>16</sup> David Blacker, *Democracy Stretched Thin: How Complexity Challenges a Liberal Ideal* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007).
- <sup>17</sup> Robert Kunzman, *Grappling with the Good: Talking about Religion and Morality in Public Schools* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006).

- <sup>18</sup> There are limits to this principle: victims of abuse and oppression, for example, have no obligation to listen with generosity to their abusers and oppressors.
- <sup>19</sup> Thomas F. Green, "Public Speech," *Teachers College Record* 95 (Spring 1994): 369–388.
- <sup>20</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007).
- <sup>21</sup> Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004).
- <sup>22</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008).
- <sup>23</sup> The insincerity of this view is made obvious by the fact that when religious leaders support progressive policy preferences (living wage, anti-nuke, civil rights, immigration reform, etc.), progressives are quite happy not only to accept but to foreground such support. This makes it obvious progressives do not dismiss religious arguments *per se*, but only when those arguments lead to policies they do not like. In such cases, discussion should engage with the issue, not the religious nature of the support.
- <sup>24</sup> Jonathan Kozol, *Children in America's School: With Bill Moyers*, Public Broadcasting Service (Los Angeles: Saint/Hayden Company, 1996).
- <sup>25</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier Books, 1938).
- <sup>26</sup> George Counts, *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1932/1978).
- <sup>27</sup> In this paper I assume more than argue Tom Green is correct and we do indeed owe our fellow citizens this sort of respect.
- <sup>28</sup> This does not mean we are not individuals, but that we are inevitably also, and first, members of some morally normative community (or communities).
- <sup>29</sup> Kunzman, *Grappling with the Good*.
- <sup>30</sup> Vivian Gussey Paley, *You Can't Say, You Can't Play* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
- <sup>31</sup> See my fuller discussion of this book in John F. Covaleskie, "Paley's Paradox," *Philosophy of Education Yearbook*, 2003 (Champaign, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 2004): 330–337; *Membership and Moral Formation: Shame as a Moral and Social Emotion* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2013).
- <sup>32</sup> Paley, *You Can't Say, You Can't Play*, 102–103.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Kunzman, *Grappling with the Good*, 1–2.

<sup>34</sup> Nel Noddings, *Educating for Intelligent Belief or Disbelief* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993).