

THE PROMISES OF CIVIL SOCIETY

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Outline:

1. Civil Society: a new buzz word
2. What civil society is and what it is not
3. How did civil society come about?—a cultural-historical approach
4. Systematic lessons to be learned—a transcultural approach

1. Civil Society: a new buzz-word

The concept of civil society has emerged, or better: re-emerged, recently. The year 1989 has become symbolic of a renewed recognition of the powerful potential of civil society for bringing about a better world, a better society. It is said that Eastern-European dictatorships collapsed under its pressure. Comparable processes took place in Latin America and for example in the Philippines. It was not market forces, nor forces from inside the government apparatus, nor military force that pressured leaders to step down, but it was groups of freely associating people, at first small resistance groups like Charta 77; later in Poland a labor union, Solidarnosc; still later more diffuse but widespread (and more momentary) civil movements like the popular uprisings in The Philippines that ousted General Marcos. Since then, the world has seen what can properly be called an 'associational revolution'.¹

Conversely, these experiences triggered in Western countries a new recognition of the pivotal role of free associations. These had existed and played an influential role in the West for centuries, but their significance was underestimated.² Instead, there was a strong tendency to frame the debate about the good society within the opposition of state versus market, socialism versus capitalism. The possible role of other players was hardly considered. For a long time civil society was a 'lost continent on the social landscape of modern society'.³ It was remarkable that in the United States, for example, one had to rediscover the early nineteenth century writings of De Tocqueville in order to find a clear analysis of the role of the countries' own free associations. And De Tocqueville was actually a rather exceptional figure, coming from abroad to interpret American society.

Civil society now has emerged, at last, as a topic for academic and political debates. Since 1989 it has become a social science buzzword.⁴ Since the term began to be used in the 1980's by

Eastern European dissidents, it has flooded European and North American sociological literature, eventually becoming a global catchword not only for social scientists, economists, political scientists and historians, but also for policy makers, politicians, social activists and international development agencies. Hundreds of monographs and thousands of articles have been published over the last two decades using civil society in the title or in the subject index. Research institutions carrying civil society in their banner are mushrooming around the world. The development of civil society has become a major policy goal of international organizations, both governmental and non-governmental.

The definitions of what civil society is, what is meant and is not meant by the term, which institutions are or are not considered to be a part of it, are almost endless. Browsing through contemporary literature on civil society, one encounters treatises on social movements, on local neighborhoods, on international non-governmental organizations like Amnesty International or Greenpeace, on mutual help initiatives like the Southern African 'stockvels', on voluntary organizations ranging from bridge clubs to national consumer platforms, on labor unions and environmentalist action committees, on Christian churches and the social work done by Islamic mosques, on anti- or alter-globalists and the large annual manifestations of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre and other cities. It all goes under the name of civil society.

2. Civil Society: what it is and what it is not

A recent, much-used institutional definition emphasizes the following characteristics: civil society consists of institutions that are organized, private (non-governmental), non-profit, self-governing, and in which participation is to a meaningful degree voluntary.⁵ This serves as a start, but it is a static definition that does not pay attention to the fact that all these institutions and movements have come into being at some specific time and as a response to specific circumstances, often initiated by specific people, who had a specific goal in mind and who were able to rally other people behind them.

¹ Michael Edwards, *Civil Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004, p. 21 ff.

² Some early exceptions in modern sociology that predated the recent upsurge of interest in free associations are M.E. Bratcher (ed.), *Voluntary Associations*, John Knox Press, 1966; J. Ronald Pennock & John W. Chapman, *Voluntary Associations (Nomos, XI)*, New York: Atherton Press, 1969.

³ Lester M. Salamon, S. Wojciech Sokolowski, Helmut Anheier, *Social Origins of Civil Society: An Overview*, Working Papers of The John Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, John Hopkins University, December 2000, p. 1.

⁴ John Keane, 'Introduction', in: John Keane (ed.), *Civil Society and the State. New European Perspectives*. London: Verso, 1988, p. 2-5, as well as the various essays from Eastern Europe in the third section of the

book, p. 261-398. Mary Kaldor, *Global Civil Society. An Answer to War*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003 refers as well to the use of the term civil society in Latin America during the 1980s.

⁵ This is the definition used by the The John Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project of the Center for Civil Society Studies at the Johns Hopkins University Institute for Policy Studies. See <http://www.jhu.edu/ccss/>

So we need a definition that takes into account that it is always concrete people who take the initiative either to found an organization or movement or to become involved in it and 'join the club'. Apparently, for some reason they feel motivated to do this. This calls for a definition not in terms of institutions but in terms of certain types of action. A first attempt to do so is the following:

*civil society as we see the concept now emerging, points to a wide range of actions,
(not private or family-related though it may stay quite close to the private or family-level,
nor political, though it may be politically-oriented,
nor economical, though it may be directed toward economic actors),
that people, individually but most often together, undertake
in order to care for or heighten the quality of (each) others life or of the world.*

This action-oriented definition obviously does not point to society as a whole but to a part of society, namely the free initiatives and associations of people. In this respect it refers to civil society in a narrow sense. However, the term is now frequently used as well—and always has been in the past - to denote a specific type of society in a more encompassing sense, distinguished, for example from a totalitarian society. In this broader sense we can describe civil society as a society that allows for or even encourages a civil society in a narrow sense.⁶ To put this in a somewhat more formal way:

civil society in a broad sense is a society which maintains public-institutional space for the realization of care-values.

This is an important distinction to keep in mind: civil society in a broad sense and in a narrow sense.

In the tentative definition just given there are three distinguishable but narrowly related phenomena that in contemporary discussions, almost always come together in the one concept of civil society. The first is related to civil society as a specific *space* in society; the second refers to specific *values* or a specific *ethos*, that I have adumbrated with the concept of 'care' (to which I will come back later). As Neera Chandhoke has put it: 'The concept of civil society signifies both a space and a set of values.'⁷ The third dimension is the hidden opposition to that which is *not* the defined object, that which is *not* civil society, or 'uncivil society', its 'rivals' or antagonists.

a. The first phenomenon, related to social space, is that most of the present Western ideals of a good society include as one of their characteristics a plurality of social spheres embodied in a plurality of institutions. Even in the most minimal accounts of civil society a distinction is made between the state and the non-governmental sphere (which is why people often speak of NGOs, Non-Governmental Organizations). But more often the distinction is at least a tripartite one: state, market and civil society. And frequently one encounters in the literature a quadripartite distinction: state, market, private sphere and civil society as a sphere in between all those (often graphically rendered as a triangle:

three angles and a field in between). This has not always been the case. In earlier accounts of the good society, often under this very same name of civil society, the emphasis was much more on the unity of the community, morally but also institutionally. Even in modern times there has been a strong Jacobinist tendency, which advocates giving the state central place in society at the expense of all other institutions.⁸ Today the actual institutional setup and the ideals expressing it apparently have changed, at least in contemporary civil society discourse. Historically, this is a remarkable change. When today we speak of civil society as a good society we mean a society that allows for a plurality of institutions.

b. The second phenomenon is that most contemporary conceptions of civil society imply that people are concerned about and even feel some kind of personal responsibility for the quality of life of others, especially those who are weak and not able to fully stand up for themselves: the poor, the sick, the elderly, the disabled, orphans, the young-and-still-uneducated, and, more recently, also non-human partners in being, like animals and the environment. This has not always been the case either. In earlier accounts of the good or civil society, care for others, especially the weak, was not considered to be an important element of social morality. For example, in societies where a heroic ethic is dominant, caring for others may be thought to weaken more highly valued virtues like courage or physical strength. Moreover, the range of people who are the beneficiaries of caring action can be quite limited, including only one's relatives, one's clientele, or the members of one's own tribe. Here we hit upon a second historically remarkable change, a change in what can be called the moral horizon. It can be very schematically rendered as the relative rise of care-values above agonistic values (which emphasize the struggle for survival of individual persons but especially of communities), together with their universal applicability to all people, regardless of nationality or race.

As indicated, these phenomena, the emergence of distinguishable spheres and the emergence of a 'humanitarian ethos,' are interrelated. For a substantial feature of those distinguishable spheres—i.e. of civil society—is that it is made up of institutions aimed at care: mutual care, social care, education (i.e. care for the young), care for human rights, environmental care, and so forth. Apparently, all those organizations and institutions have emerged in response to an experienced need, an experience that somehow points to a moral gap between the world as it is and the world as it should be, and that appeals to human responsibility. So what is involved is a notion of good action, morally meaningful action or even moral excellence, especially in the public sphere. But as soon as this moral dimension becomes articulated, another question imposes itself: what institution can serve as a platform for this moral action? Can the moral gap be bridged by and in the *polis* as a whole, or should it be bridged by separate institutions? Does bridging the gap and responding to the experienced need

⁶The distinction between civil society in a broad sense and in a narrow sense is not at all unproblematic, but I cannot deal with this problem here.

⁷Neera Chandhoke, 'The Limits of Global Civil Society': Marlies Glasius, Mary Kaldor, Helmut Anheier (eds.), *Global Civil Society 2002*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 45.

⁸Jacobinism is the Rousseau-inspired view according to which the state is the sole and exclusive occupant of the public sphere. The most telling case in point here is the French Act of 1791, called *Le Chapelier*, that prohibited citizens from being members of any intermediate organization and outlawed virtually all guilds and religious charities. See Antonin Wagner, 'Reframing "Social Origins" Theory: The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 29, no.4 December 2000, 541-553.

perhaps require an exodus from the *polis*? What is the appropriate space for certain sets of values?

- c. The third dimension hidden in any definition of civil society is the opposition to that which civil society is not. In this case, this refers to societies in which both the dominant ethos and the concomitant organization of social space is different from what we would expect in a ‘civil society.’ Generally speaking, we can say that the idea of civil society relative to the dimension of space stands as a pluralistic society in opposition to ‘totalistic’ societies, and relative to the dimension of ethos stands as a caring society in opposition to a society in which the dominant ethos is ‘agonistic’.

This leads to the following basic scheme, which will be central to my argument.

Social space ----- Relatively dominant values	Totalistic	Pluralist
Agonistic	(I) <i>Heroic Imperial Societies</i>	(III) <i>Rough Market Capitalist Societies</i>
Caring	(II) <i>Jacobinist Utopian Societies</i>	(IV) <i>Civil Societies</i>

This matrix shows civil society (in the broad sense) as located with respect to two dimensions, a value dimension and a space dimension. As soon as this is graphically visualized, the third dimension comes to the fore: civil society is opposed to both Jacobinist Utopian Societies and Rough Market Capitalist Societies (its direct contemporary opponents) as well as to the Heroic Imperial Societies (its place of origin and its historical opponent).

Of course, a scheme like this can be misinterpreted very easily. The most obvious misinterpretation is that there are rigid, clear cut boundaries between the various types. There aren't. It is just about the relative dominance of certain value clusters and certain conceptions of the organization of social space.

There are no clear and cut boundaries in time either. Societies can move from one type to another, sometimes suddenly, more often gradually. So we have to read the quadrants as gradually shading into each other. In fact, that is just what I am interested in: what are the conditions for social change?

A few words about the two distinct axes of the matrix: The first axis concerns the ideal organization of social space. This is very much a normative dimension. Throughout the history of political thought one encounters very often the image of the society as essentially one, a meaningful whole without spiritual divisions or institutional divisions. The unity of the body politic, or the social body (as a preferred symbol has it), must be preserved by producing the adequate representative, who is thought to embody the unity. Very often this unity is also turned into a spiritual matter by means of what Eric Voegelin has called ‘transcendent representation’.⁹ Plurality is experienced as a

⁹ Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952, p. 52ff. There is an extensive literature on this unifying representation of the body politic, that in recent years has been stimulated by the rediscovery of the splendid monograph of Ernst H.

threat, though sometimes a certain measure of plurality may be tolerated if a distinction is made between public and private: public unity, private diversity. Already in Ancient Egypt the public cults of the gods of the realm were distinguished from a more personal devotion to private mystery gods.

A pluralist conception does not see society as one body or as one community, but as a community of communities— or, as Michael Walzer calls it, a ‘social union of social unions’ or a ‘setting of settings’.¹⁰ In this conception a forced unity is seen as a basic threat to the stability of society. People are seen as having different non-overlapping or sometimes partly overlapping identities and allegiances. The political community in which they participate is just one of many communities, and it should not even be given primordial ranking. Politics is therefore essentially limited (although there can be considerable debate about what these limits actually are). A list of associations may help to bring out the differences between these two orientations more clearly.

<i>Totalistic imagery</i>	<i>Pluralist imagery</i>
one body	different members
civil/political religion	separation of church and state
state-centered justice	spheres of justice
<i>polis</i> valued above <i>aikos</i>	affirmation of ordinary life
substantial representation	aesthetic or procedural representation
everything is politics	politics isn't everything
society as ‘the’ setting	society as ‘setting of settings’
Rousseau	Althusius

Regarding the second dimension, is it good to emphasize from the outset that making a typological distinction between care-values and agonistic values does not mean that it is possible to give a clear cut, list of diametrically opposed virtues or values. What are care-values? They are those values that express the intention of mutually and if necessary asymmetrically recognizing, preserving and promoting the specific dignity and integrity of other human beings and of other partners in being, (like animals and the environment). In the history of ethics there are various formulations given for these values. Famous is Kant's formulation that human beings should treat other human beings always as an end and never as a means. There is the Christian conception of *agapè*, which is in the unsurpassed interpretation of Augustine equivalent to the conscious decision to grant being to others: *volo quod sis*. Or one can refer here to the notion of beneficence as it emerged in the Scottish Enlightenment, for example in Adam Smith's *A Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

Agonistic values are those values that express the intention to win a game, contest or struggle, and in which the outcomes are perceived as a zero-sum game (although sometimes at the end of the day the situation might accidentally turn out to be a win-win situation). Agonistic values are therefore very much oriented toward the desired results. The means toward producing these results (which may include human beings and interhuman relationships) are seen as collateral damage to be minimized or

Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957. Cf. Claude Lefort, ‘The Image of the Body and Totalitarianism’, *The Political Forms of Modern Society. Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*, Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 1986, 292-306.

¹⁰ Michael Walzer, ‘The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism’ in: Amitai Etzioni (ed.), *New Communitarian Thinking. Persons, Virtues, Institutions, and Communities*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995, 52-70; id. ‘The Civil Society Argument’, in: R. Beiner (ed.), *Theorizing Citizenship*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1995.

else manipulated to be conducive to the desired outcome. Alasdair MacIntyre has called these values ‘goods of effectiveness’.¹¹ These values can be employed both on an individual and on a collective level. Agonistic values frame the relationships between the various partners as being essentially power-relationships, and interpret human behavior accordingly, even when certain types of interaction between the partners-in-being gives the impression of the opposite.

We cannot differentiate between these two sets of values by simply referring to certain specific virtues, for whether a virtue belongs to the one or the other set always depends on how these virtues are defined. For example, courage may seem to belong to the agonistic values. However, actively caring for someone in need may require a lot of courage as well.

So the dominant values are better expressed in terms of the reigning icons of the good life. In ancient Athens, for example, the dominant icon of the good life—the successful, meaningful, full life—was ‘The Great King’, the Persian emperor, ‘to be congratulated on his empire’.¹² The Socratic, Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical enterprise aimed at questioning this type of icon and replacing it with other icons, of which ‘the philosopher’ and the ‘philosophical life’ are paramount. Later the Christian community tried to introduce new icons of the good life: Christ himself and the saints—icons of self-sacrificing love. In Athens, in the later clash between the Roman Empire and Christianity as well as in the modern context (as will be briefly indicated in the next paragraph) it is questionable whether challenging the imperial icon really has been successful.

Again I venture a short list.

<i>agonistic imagery</i>	<i>care-value imagery</i>
zero-sum contest	reciprocal growth
homo hierarchicus	homo aequalis
dominium	libertas
self-assertion	self-limitation
survival of the fittest	care for the weak
means	ends
<i>do ut des</i>	<i>do quia mihi datum est</i>
Hobbes	Augustine

I will now offer a brief introduction to the four types of societies mentioned in the matrix above:

Heroic imperial societies are societies organized so as to ensure their survival in case of war, a possibility for which they are constantly prepared and preparing. Both the moral horizon and the organization of social space reflect a conception of the universe that is characterized by struggle, victory and submission. The well-being of the social and political whole depends on the ability to maneuver in this universe and perhaps even on the ability to outmaneuver fate. Political activity is seen as the highest activity, both because of and in spite of its risky

character (though the actual number of people who are actively involved in politics is usually very limited; there is a small political elite and a large, a-political, mass with few rights). Free social spaces are in principle suspect, for they could be places that breed conspiracies. Because relations between tribes and between societies are essentially power-relations, there is a very strong tendency toward a highest sovereign power, an empire. The icon of success is to be an emperor. (Compare this with what was said above about The Great King; it is significant to note that in the Roman Empire many virtues and good deeds that were considered to be characteristics of the good citizen were applied exclusively to the Emperor.)

Note that *within* a heroic imperial society there tends to be a constant oscillation between a state of perpetual tribal war and a situation in which an empire emerges with salvific pretensions that temporarily ends the eternal strife by establishing a ‘Pax Imperii’. Then the ‘wheel of human affairs’ turns again, and the empire breaks apart into (old) tribal units, which resume their eternal strife.

Jacobinist utopias are societies in which care-values are realized (or better: are attempted to be realized) exclusively via political means. The twentieth-century manifestations of this are the well-known totalitarian societies, which have taken various forms. Freedom, equality and solidarity are collectively organized. The utopian society claims to have ended all antagonisms and possible conflicts. The moralization of society is complete and direct, without moderation, mitigation or mediation. The attempt is to design, in the words of T.S. Eliot, ‘systems so perfect that no one will need to be good’.¹³ Independent organizations are seen as a threat to societal unity. They are not necessary anyway, for all important values, especially the care-values, are simultaneously acknowledged, represented and realized by the state. The unity of society is represented in the One Leader, who claims to bridge all possible social divisions. Although many of the practices are probably the same as those in heroic imperial societies, their legitimation is quite different: here the repression of dissenting voices is seen as a vital step toward the moral perfection of the social body and hence the repression is much more fanatic and extreme. Opposition is seen not as a mere rival power but as a morally despicable phenomenon. While in an imperial society those in power are uninterested in the inner lives of their subjects as long as there are no political implications involved, in this kind of utopia the inner allegiance of the citizens is considered to be vital. So there is no boundary between public and private. Even the most intimate sphere is considered to be political. The good citizen, the icon of a meaningful life, is the person who freely submits his own will to the community, who authentically coincides with the ‘volonté générale’, the mystical identity of the community. It is he who, in the terms of George Orwell, ‘loves Big Brother’.

Rough market capitalist societies are those in which there are no mutually shared overarching goals and no civil structures where these goals can be defined. In principle, all kinds of initiatives can be undertaken by the citizens, but practically these possibilities are determined and limited by already acquired economic or - to a lesser degree - political power. Economic life is given a free hand, even though it might result in undesirable outcomes from a moral standpoint. But actually articulating this moral point of view as publicly relevant is seen as hampering

¹¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory*, London: Duckworth, 1981. A more in-depth treatment in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, Notre Dame (Ind.): University of Notre Dame Press, pp. 30-46.

¹² As such this icon appears at the end of Plato’s ‘Apology of Socrates’, and elsewhere in the platonic corpus as someone who is to ‘be congratulated on his empire’ (Euth., 274a). In Gorgias (470e en 524e) the typically Socratic issue is raised whether the Great King can be considered to be happy when we don’t know how he stands in education and justice. He might even have a soul without ‘any sign of health’.

¹³ T.S. Eliot, *Choruses from the Rock*.

economic development, which is perceived as an autonomous 'sovereign' mechanism. In this type of society there is a wide gap between a small upper class which is extremely rich and a large class of extremely poor people. Mass poverty without hope for a more just future is a common characteristic. The amazing thing about this type is that it does not disintegrate into a state of civil war. Yet, civil war is never far away. For that reason there is generally a strong state, not to serve as a countervailing power to the economic powers and to ensure the practical pursuit of equal rights, but to check the population and ensure political stability. There is a tendency among the rich to withdraw into specially protected neighborhoods in order to protect them from what is considered to be the criminality that rages in the poor areas. Both in public discourse and in socio-economic relationships there is a strong distinction between 'winners' and 'losers'.

Independent religious organizations are usually free to exist, as long as they do not politicize. This type of society is not without the presence of care-values, but they are radically privatized and not publicly represented. There are strong 'moral boundaries' between the public sphere that is seen as an arena for private interest and the private sphere in which entirely different values might be cherished.¹⁴ So formally there is a free economy, a free church, a strong state (very often with a dominant role for the army), and a free private sphere, but they are all segregated by moral boundaries. These societies are able to create moral indifference, moral invisibility and moral distance.¹⁵ Characteristic is what can be called a 'tautological differentiation': business is business, politics is politics, religion is religion, my family life is my family life - and there are no points of interaction between these different value-spheres. Each of these spheres is closed, absolute, sovereign. And the inherent logic of sovereignty calls for a highest sovereignty, a place which in this type of society usually is occupied by the economic sphere.

In general, the level of trust between citizens is low, and the level of corruption tends to be high. The general level of violence is high, as well as the threat of military violence.

The icon of a successful life here is the captain of industry, the economic entrepreneur, who has close relationships with the army or runs his own paramilitary group and who is able to create a privately closed paradise on the basis of a large business imperium. Within these self-centered worlds, entirely different values are dominant: caring father, shrewd businessman.

Civil societies (here taken in the broad sense) are societies characterized by a publicly recognized plurality of social spheres, which is not just regarded as a matter of fact but is affirmed positively. Care values are publicly represented and institutionally 'incarnated' in hospitals, nurseries, and orphanages, but also in action committees and mass organizations. The complex relationship between the role of care-values and the role of other societal values like economic profitability or military requirements is a matter of constant compromise. There is a constant friendly struggle between different types of values, which results in a mutual limitation. The differentiation that has taken place here is not tautologically closed but porous. Values spill over from one sphere in the other, always creating debates and unrest. How much should

economic considerations play a role within an institution that is explicitly organized around care values? How much should care values be realized within the economic sphere (compare the movement toward socially responsible companies or the discussions about the 'stakeholder-shareholder' relation)? This rather muddy and fuzzy character of civil societies makes the moral status of civil society questionable in the eyes of the Jacobinist utopians, who claim to realize a much better world, a perfect world.

And yet, the actual realization of care values in civil society is relatively high due to the operation of a value threshold: if the realization of a certain value is jeopardized too much, the representatives of this value gain in credibility and are more likely to be heard. So, through all the struggling, debating, wheeling and dealing, something takes place which can be called a 'simultaneous realization of values'.

Especially the boundaries between the private and the public sphere are porous. In a civil society the family is typically not seen as an escape from but a preparation for the public sphere, a sphere in which to a certain extent some of the same values can be exercised as are practiced within the family: trust, self-limitation, mutual cooperation, care. So family life in a civil society is an important source of what during the last decade has come to be called 'social capital', especially mutual trust.¹⁶

Characteristic of a civil society - as in a utopian society - is the high moralization of social life. All spheres must articulate and legitimate themselves in moral terms: politics in terms of human rights and justice, economics in terms of individual creativity and social responsibility, media in terms of controlling power and exposing abuses, etc.

In the public sphere of a civil society a friendly competition and friendly struggle takes place between the different care values: freedom and personal creativity, equality and the mutual recognition of rights, solidarity and compassion. All have their public institutional representation and all are somehow porous in regard to the moral pull of other values; this prevents a radicalization and absolutization of one value. Which of these value complexes are relatively dominant in a certain day and age is rather contingent and changes back and forth through time. This constant (but limited) oscillation between different values is the direct source of a characteristic *topos* that constantly accompanies civil society and that is debated academically and discussed in living rooms and bedrooms: the idea that society is in moral decline. These debates are genuine and are not just the regularly occurring moral panic. There is indeed constant moral change which points to the fragility of civility: the rivals of civility are never far away. Both the utopian alternative and the rough market exert their temptations right within civil society. Civil society could perish from the earth—or if not from the earth, at least from this particular part of the earth.

The icon of a meaningful life in civil society is inherently plural too: the successful businessman-turned-philanthropist, the politician-not-going-to-war-but-preventing-it, or the true professional following a calling and not earning a salary but an honorarium.

¹⁴ The phrase 'moral boundaries' refers to Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries. A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, New York/London: Routledge, 1993.

¹⁵ For these terms, see Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989.

¹⁶ For the relation of trust and civil society, see Adam Seligman, *The Problem of Trust*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. On trust and social capital, Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993 and Francis Fukuyama, *Trust*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1995.

Note that in three of the four societal types I have used the term sovereignty. It seems to me that this theme of sovereignty helps bring into focus what civil society is and what it is not. This cannot be elaborated here but I plan to do this elsewhere. Can a civil society be desirable?

It all depends on one's moral framework. From a more utopian point of view civil society seems to be morally defective, a muddy complex of compromises. If one lives in or adopts a heroic value scheme, civil society appears weak and effeminate. From a rough market point of view it looks inefficient, time-consuming, and bothersome. So what moral framework justifies civil society?

My claim is that a Christian moral framework justifies civil society, and more particularly, the rather orthodox variants of it, which simultaneously emphasize human greatness and human weakness, human responsibility and human sinfulness. I would even claim that civil society in the sense just adumbrated has been Christianity's most important social contribution to world history. It did not come about in a day. It has taken centuries. And yet, there is a clearly identifiable path from early Christianity to what is called today, civil society, both in the broad and in the narrow sense.

3. How did it come about? A cultural approach

Historically, the primary move has been from (I) to (IV), from heroic-imperial to civil societies, though for a long time civil societies were few and far between. The following outline of the story of its development necessarily entails a very Western bias. But the focus of my paper as a whole is not—or does not intend to be—Eurocentric or westo-centric. The point is not to exalt the West, but to trace the specific dilemmas, the opportunities and the threats, the blessings and the temptations of civil societies, as they have emerged in the West. Perhaps there are things we can learn, for better and for worse.

I would like as well to trace the specific interaction between Christianity and culture, interaction that in itself is unavoidable, but that always has its own pitfalls and opportunities. So perhaps as fellow-Christians we can learn from one another's inculturation stories. For while our Christian faith is not tied to one specific, neither is it a-cultural. Rather, it is a faith of many cultures simultaneously and of no culture in particular. It enters into every culture and is at the same time critical of each culture.

I think that the central question to be posed regarding our discussion of civil society is, to put it most simply: what are the preconditions for the phenomena just indicated to emerge, both for a civil set of values and for a civil space?

My own reflections focus especially on the preconditions concerning experiences and ideas about life and the cosmos and about man's role in it, preconditions that are in the class of religious experiences, experiences of meaning, experiences of moral push and pull. More abstractly and precisely put: we will look at the preconditions that deal with the basic experiences and articulations of order in society as they are related to experiences of the divine, of the cosmos and of man. Does the emergence of the idea and the practice of civil society presuppose some basic intuitions about man, gods and the world?¹⁷

By taking this approach I take issue with all approaches that claim civil society to be a secular, modern phenomenon. It isn't so today (for still today, all over the world, religious inspiration and affiliation turns out empirically to be the single most important factor in predicting civil society involvement), and it never has been in the past. Religion, and in particular the Christian religion, seems to be a crucial, though in sociological literature a very much neglected factor in the emergence of a civil society both in the broad and in the narrower sense.

In this context I can only point to some crucial turning points and episodes in the history of social and political thinking and social and political practices, in which mental bridges and barriers were crossed that eventually paved the way toward the practice and the idea (in that order) of an institutionally diverse society in which is embedded an ethos of care.

The antecedent to the emergence of civil society is the societies of the heroic-imperial type. There have been quite a number of these, enough to justify the hypothesis that it is somehow the default option of mankind. Think of the great and small empires that we encounter in Biblical times: Assur, out of which Abraham was called, and Egypt, out of which Israel was called; the Babylonian empire (out of which the first remnant was called); the Persian Empire; the Roman Empire (which is the background of another called-out community, the Christian *ecclesia*). Perhaps mankind has an inherent inclination to either dominate others or to be impressed by the dominating power of others, to be impressed by statues with golden heads (but watch their feet!). So we encounter warring tribes and cities, and every now and then one tribe or city becomes the dominant power and develops into something called an empire. This political situation is reflected in ancient interpretations of the universe itself and especially of the gods: the universe is often portrayed as the result of a primordial war between different gods, and the gods still are experienced as warriors. The most powerful god ends up as the protecting deity of the empire. His reign is never secure, as the empire is never secure. In the background there is the dark power of fate, setting a meaningless limit even to 'eternal' empires. We remember the tears of the victorious Scipio at the scene of Carthago's burning, and we remember the 'mene, mene, tekel upharsin' in the Book of Daniel.

We encounter several attempts to break away from this heroic-imperial constellation. The first attempt for which we have historical evidence is definitely Israel's exodus—an event very much underrated in the history of political ideas. In fact, one never encounters a single line in the standard histories on Israel, on the idea of the covenant-under-God, on the role that is played by Davidic imagery in the Western conceptions of kingship, on the crucial idea of a duality between king and prophet. The history of political ideas has been entirely taken over by secularists. Time to reclaim ground here! But I will not do this here, although I will come back to this.

We encounter another, much later, attempt in the classical world, both Greek and Roman, in what Aristotle coined as *koinonia politike* and later Cicero as *societas civilis*, phrases that are the ancestors of our present-day term 'civil society'. Characteristic of these attempts is that the well being of the political community is experienced as the responsibility of each citizen (although the actual number of citizens is small in relation to the population as a whole). However, the notion of well-being, and therefore well-doing, is deeply colored by a

¹⁷ This line of questioning, of course, puts me more in the Weberian than in the Marxian tradition (to use for once this rude dichotomy).

moral horizon in which the honor and glory of the city remains pivotal. We often encounter a strong ‘civil spirit’, a moral vision that inspires people to loyalty, courage and liberality for the sake of their own city or *patria*. Quite often this is paired with a distinction between an inner and an outer morality. This implies that the institutional energy is focused on society as a whole, which should be powerful and honorable among all nations.

However, in the background there remains operative an ontology of fate and power. This precludes any perception of the universe that could justify a non-violent or non-domination-oriented pattern of human behavior. The general spirit remains ‘imperial’; this can even be sensed in Pericles’ Funeral Oration, a document often quoted as the self-declaration of Athens as precursor of a modern civil society. Therefore the internal unity is regarded as crucial, and people who present this are sentenced to death (as the case of Socrates makes clear). Activities that enhance the wellbeing of the society as a whole are very often acts of singular members of the community, the so called benefactor or ‘*eu-ergetes*’. Private associations (of which there are quite a few in the ancient world) are truly private. The public sphere is not a platform for a plurality of free associations, but as a whole is itself an association. So public life consists of individual citizens or of family groups, but not of free associations. As soon as associations do develop a public role and begin to debate political issues, for example—they are seen as a threat to the stability of the public sphere (as the fate of the *collegia* in Rome makes clear¹⁸).

Eventually the classical world becomes the cradle of the most powerful and splendid empire ever, the Roman Empire. It is not a civil society in any recognizable meaning of the term, but the all-powerful divine figure of an emperor is the culmination of classical politics.

The moral horizon in the West was redrawn by Christianity. This gave rise to a new type of civility, that which can be described as a compromise between a transcendent vision and a reticent, immanent world. The new community envisioned by St. Paul had its citizenship, its *politeuma*, in heaven. This, on principle, did not imply a withdrawal from this world but a new way of living in it and of obeying a new law, not the law of power and glory but the law of *agapè*. In light of the transcendent vision, the classical civil morality and its concomitant public sphere were found wanting. Over against the ethos of pride, honor and civil courage, the Christian ethic concentrates on the notion of *agapè* and denial of self. Worldly glory is vainglory, *vanitas*. Doing good is not intended to be visible to others, but only to God. This does not present a problem, for being a Christian also means a mental exodus from the classical *do ut des*-scheme toward a scheme basically inspired by divine grace: *do quia mihi datum est* (I can give because much has been given to me).

Therefore *energeteia* is now meant to be hidden, a private act, rather than a public display. But it is public in the sense that its beneficiaries are not confined to an inner, private circle, but are found on the streets, in the naked public square, along the roads: they are those who are in need for whatever reason. So the private act requires public presence: for example, buildings are built or bought to serve as shelter houses for the disabled, the homeless, the poor, the orphaned, etc. Publicity no longer is the goal of the good deed, but it maintains its place as a prerequisite for it.

Moreover, the new community claims the right to make its own judgment on the nature of worldly affairs. The central pattern that determines the relation between the new community and the world, in particular the state, can be called the *potestas indirecta*, the attempt to invite and persuade the present world to become a better world, not by force and not by taking over the responsibilities of worldly institutions, but by making moral judgments about their functioning. Institutional energy is refocused on a new type of institution, the church, as a free association. However, the church is not a purely privatized institution (as a *collegium licitum*) but from the beginning aspires to play a public role (and hence becomes a *collegium illicitum*), not recognizing the divinity of the Emperor, and actively living out a different perspective on life, becoming involved on a relatively large scale in the care of the poor, the sick and the needy.

Furthermore, this precarious construction gave rise to a type of community that at first sight might be thought of as ‘uncivil’, the monasteries. But even the contemplative orders perceived themselves as existing for the wellbeing of all. Moreover, they embodied a new sense of the dignity of human labor, which had been despised in antiquity, but now was recognized as an essential part of the human condition. *Ora et labora* was St. Benedict’s dictum. And even a purely hermetic monk like St. Pambo refused to eat anything for which he had not previously worked.

However, Christianity really entered the civil sphere in the establishment of the medieval cities of Northern Italy and especially North-Western Europe. These cities could be called an experiment in Christian civility.¹⁹ The exodus from the bondage of feudalism turned out to be a societal experiment of world-historic significance. The city is a worldly, though not at all a secular community (this is often confused), based on *promissio* and *pactum* and aimed at jointly realizing Christian social ideals. Perhaps no thinker was better able to express these basic ideas than Johannes Althusius, writing around 1600, at the end of the era of the free cities.

In a way similar to what had happened in the natural sciences, reading Aristotle forestalled for centuries the actual study and interpretation of the empirical data of politics. Freed from the Aristotelian hangover, political theorists were now able to interpret the unique political experiment of the Western cities. This is the reason why—with a slight variation on Pocock’s famous ‘The Machiavellian moment’ and inspired by Von Gierke—I speak of the ‘Althusian moment’. Out of an explicitly Christian inspiration was formulated in the medieval cities what can be called a western value coalition of free participation, social justice and care for the weak which are, still the key elements of many accounts of civil society, more so than classical elements. Moreover, we find here a keen sense of a differentiated social structure, in which different human activities are given their own institutional setting, in guilds, religious orders, lay orders, hospitals and orphanages, what came to be known as ‘universities’ (although the name *universitas* was a common name for all kind of corporate bodies, all guilds for example could be called *universitates*), and of course in an Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education.

¹⁹ I draw here especially on Anthony Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present*, London: Methuen 1984; Lewis Mumford, *The City in History. Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961.

¹⁸ G.W. Duff, *Personality in Roman Private Law*, London: Cambridge University Press 1938 (1971 repr.), 95ff.

So we must take issue here with a genre of interpretations of Christianity that was often inspired by German Pietism, and that interprets this religion as entirely otherworldly.²⁰ These interpretations tend to overlook the impact of Christianity, exactly because it had the duality of otherworldliness and this-worldliness, even in its more contemplative expressions.

Crucial for the proper functioning of this value coalition was the eternal possibility of repentance and a new beginning, the possibility of experiencing guilt and forgiveness. It served as a constant reminder of the fallibility and the temporal character of the civil experiment. It safeguarded both on an individual and on a collective level, its non-utopian character.

For as soon as the awareness of imperfection and hence the willingness to self-limitation erodes, the civil experiment is in jeopardy. It becomes vulnerable to various absolute threats, either the temptation of viewing the accumulation of wealth as the central goal of the civil experiment, or the temptation of creating an even much better, perfect world (and both temptations often exert themselves simultaneously: accumulated wealth triggers the longing for a perfect world in those who are deprived of this wealth).

So these efforts to establish civil societies are threatened by new absolute (or as I call them metaphorically: sovereign) powers: state absolutism (eventually totalitarianism), religious fanaticism (eventually today fundamentalism) and market possessivism (eventually unbridled capitalism). A first threat was the emergence of the national state, culminating in a (for the West entirely) new type of government—absolute kingship. The actual term ‘sovereignty’ has this movement as its cradle, although quite soon it was noted that this new term had a kinship with older Roman imperial symbols like *majestas*.²¹ We can identify this movement as a revival on a national scale of the heroic-imperial form: *rex est imperator in regno suo*.

A second absolutizing movement started to manifest itself within the medieval civil town societies but really took off in the late 17th and 18th centuries. While in medieval times economic transactions were officially still considered to be part of man’s moral intercourse, with morally determined prices (the *justum pretium*) and no interest, and while someone like John Calvin in the 16th century still considered the market to be an expression of inter-human solidarity²², and while in the 17th century Dutch Republic wealth was still considered somewhat of an embarrassment²³, in the late 17th century the market came to be seen as a sphere of ‘possessivism’, of officially sanctioned greed and selfishness. So in the eyes of 18th century thinkers, the modern economy seemed to be based on a subversion of the

moral, civil order.²⁴ Although several attempts were made to counter this new market-sovereignty and reconcile civil morality with the new economic order, these attempts failed.

A third sovereign or absolute movement with which any notion of civil society had to deal was the rise of religious fanaticism, which set out to imbue entire societies with one religious spirit, unable to acknowledge the temporal character of the Christian presence in the world. We see this emerging in the many apocalyptic and millenarian movements in medieval times (as Norman Cohn has portrayed them so vividly).²⁵ This is the background of the Jacobinist-utopian strand in Western history.

It is interesting to analyze how it apparently became impossible to formulate an adequate answer to one of these various rivals of Christian civility without paving the way for one of the others. When people like Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau were revitalizing the medieval, Christian symbolism of a civil society as based on a covenant or as they call it a compact of free and equal people, one can easily see that Hobbes targeted the absoluteness of religious strife, Locke the absoluteness of divine kingship and Rousseau the uncivil, isolating effects of private property. The very same symbolism (duly allowing for all the differences between the way they construct their argument!) is used toward quite different types of absoluteness. And interestingly: in order to counter the one (religious fanaticism, causing the English Civil Wars), Hobbes actually creates the other (the absolute state)! And the lack of public spirit and solidarity leads Rousseau to the creation of a notion of positive freedom (as Isaiah Berlin and Jacob Talmon have pointed out) that comes dangerously close to totalitarianism. Locke counters divine kingship by stressing the property rights of people, thus paving the way for what C.B. MacPherson has called the possessive individualism of early capitalism.²⁶

However, while it turned out to be increasingly difficult to realize the Christian value coalition on the level of society as a whole, we see since the 18th century a remarkable income of extra-political, public organizations that somehow take on the responsibility of realizing key elements of this value coalition. These organizations were, as indicated, not a new phenomenon; quite a few of them had existed for centuries. However, they took on new roles and new forms.

It seems advisable to interpret this as a protest movement against the disparity, the ominous divide, between the moral aspirations of Western culture on the one hand, and the actual developments of society at large, and particularly of politics and economics, on the other hand. Civil society as we know it today surged, because civility had lost out over against sovereignty. From now on the civil aspirations were embodied only in a part of society, and civil society was no longer a moral qualification for society as a whole. The term itself even fell into disrepute.

Neither the sovereign state with its *raison d’etat*, nor the sovereign economy with its invisible hand mechanism, seemed to qualify as embodiments of the civil hopes, as they had been articulated already in medieval times. In this vacuum new carriers were

²⁰ An example of this is to be found in Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958; Arendt speaks of a ‘Christian hostility toward the public realm’, 73ff. In the background here is probably the typically German theological debate between an existentialist interpretation and a more cultural interpretation of Christianity as was given in the so called ‘Kulturprotestantismus’, a school in which the figure of Ernst Troeltsch stands out.

²¹ Govert J. Buijs, ‘Que les Latins appellent maiestatem’ An exploration into the theological backgrounds of the concept of sovereignty’. in: N. Walker (ed.), *Sovereignty in Transition*, Oxford: Hart Publishing House, 2003, pp. 229-257.

²² Andre Bieler, *La pensée social et économique de Jean Calvin*

²³ Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches. An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. London, 1987.

²⁴ Louis Dumont, *From Mandeville to Marx. The Genesis and Triumph of Economic Ideology*. Chicago, 1977.

²⁵ Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium. Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1957.

²⁶ C.B. Macpherson, *The political theory of possessive individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, London: Oxford University Press, 1970.

created, non-governmental and non-profit, free associations, many of which displayed overly high moral ambitions. There also emerged the large social movements.

But at this very moment the ‘fragility of civility’ comes again into view. Without the awareness of human limitations, human frailty and propensity to sin, and cut loose from the actual responsibility to embody moral visions in the core institutions of society, only the sky was the moral limit. Many civil associations and movements in the 19th century not only pursued high moral goals, but became outspokenly utopian. The 19th century became the scene of the great moral clash between realism and utopianism, or, in the words of Max Weber, between the Sermon on the Mount and bureaucracy, between ‘Gesinnungspolitiker’ and ‘Machtspolitiker’. Civil society, far as it became a secular phenomenon, was self-defeating.

It was again the Christian tradition where a kind of middle road was brokered. Much of non-utopian, non-revolutionary concrete social work was organized by churches and by orders and associations.²⁷ Although ‘caritas’ has become infamous, especially in the 19th century and especially for its failure to deliver the hoped-for perfect world, it at least tried to improve the world in concrete ways by alleviating, all too concrete suffering. At the same time, the Christian tradition gradually developed a non-utopian structural critique on economics and politics, which has been called ‘Christian social teaching’ (with a Catholic and a Protestant branch). Closely connected were many people who felt inspired by the Christian tradition to help develop non-utopian varieties of socialism.

Therefore, we see the development of civil society that walked a middle road between resignation and despair on the one hand, and utopianism and the longing for a total revolution on the other.

4. Some systematic insights

If we analyze these historical episodes not as mere contingencies but with a keen eye for their systematic meaning, we may gain insight into what may be the necessary conditions for a civil society to emerge and to survive.

My tentative assumption is that there are five crucial ‘mental bridges,’ the crossing of which makes it possible to develop the practice and the idea of civil society in the contemporary sense. One can say that these elements together form a moral horizon for civil society:

- a. the presence of an inspiring vision or moral push in which care-values become central, as opposed to, for example, various kind of warrior ethics, or to the modern neo-Darwinian ethical paradigm of winners vs. losers. It is clear that in the West the Christian tradition has provided exactly this kind of a vision.
- b. a spill-over of the scope of care-values from family relationships to other inter-human relationships, perhaps even into some kind of experience of the brotherhood of all mankind (not excluding very concrete and local instances of this abstract notion). The beneficiaries of ‘care’ should be not only the inner circle of one’s own kin, but people in need, regardless of color or race or sex or political status. Again it was Christianity that brought into the world the

awareness of the equality of all men and women before God (Galatians 3:22). Although it has taken centuries for the implications of this notion to unfold, the notion itself has been a revolutionary germ in Western culture and has stimulated time and again a pressure toward equality and solidarity.²⁸

- c. the decentralization of the state or the community-as-a-whole as primary actors in public life. Again, it was the flat-out denial by the Christian church of the divinity of the emperor that triggered the awareness of public-institutional possibilities outside the state. One can find meaning, both as an individual and as a community, outside the political structures.
- d. the experience of personal responsibility in a world that might not be controllable but that, at the very least, allows for or even invites meaningful human action. Although Christianity had to struggle with fatalism and although the Gnostic temptation was never far away, there has been a constant and consistent search for an ontology, a picture of the universe that would make agape meaningful. The doctrine of the world as created and loved by God, and hence the affirmation of ordinary life and work, and especially care, provided a foundation that classical antiquity was not able to create.²⁹ The way in which especially the Cappadocian Fathers tried to bring together the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa* is still relevant and sometimes even has a Reformational ring to it.
- e. the search for appropriate ways of working together, hence for appropriate institutions, ranging from informal movements to full-blown formal organizations. Part of the secret of the Christian church was that it indeed was an institution; not an ephemeral movement, but a free association of people, really covenanting together *coram Deo*, constituting by far the oldest freestanding organization in world history, outlasting even all hitherto known empires.³⁰

What further conclusions can be drawn from this picture?

1. People in all corners of our globalized world are asking how one can build a civil society, an apparently desirable phenomenon. Can Islam provide a framework for civil society, both in the broad and in the narrow sense? Can Confucianism? Can Hinduism? These are the questions that we face. My historically informed definition of civil society would be something like:

Civil society emerges where over against a sovereign power people, recognizing each other as free and equal, make a mutual promise to pursue other standards than those that are embodied in the sovereign power, in particular standards of care, and where they find an institutional form to embody this promise.

²⁸ This is the reason for a renewed interest in Paul among philosophers, especially in France. I mention here Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: La fondation de l'universalisme*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997. Worth mentioning as well are Julia Kristeva, Giorgio Agamben and Gianni Vattimo (Italy).

²⁹ Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*, Hanover/London: University Press of New England, 2002 speaks of a ‘revolution of the social imagination’ brought about by early Christianity, 1.

³⁰ With the possible exception of the Egyptian empire, but this depends on the latitude of definition that one allows regarding one empire. In the Egyptian case I would prefer to speak of a succession of several distinct empires.

²⁷ Annelies van Heijst, *Liefdeverklaring*. Cf. Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion. The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.

Thus civil society is essentially a *network of mutual promises*.

Put in this way, the promise-trick seems to be repeatable anywhere and yet; it remains questionable whether the preconditions for successful communities of promise can be fulfilled in a context other than a Christian framework. For me this is an open question on which I hope to do more research in the future.

2. So while it may be difficult or hard for other religions and worldviews to come up with the ingredients for civil society, conversely it is the case that Christianity, the Christian Church, has great potential to build civil society, both in a narrow and perhaps in a broad sense too, all over the world. Civil society is the place to be for the Christian church, and if there is no civil society, it is the place for the Christian Church to create, as it has done all over the world already, and particularly so in the last decades.³¹
3. However, as I have made clear, civil society has strong rivals who have almost succeeded in letting it 'perish from the earth' (to play on Lincoln's Gettysburg Address). Theoretically it is possible that while Christianity may be able to build a civil society, it is not always equally equipped to provide the context in which it can be maintained. Perhaps other religions would do better in this respect, for they might be more capable of warding off utopian tendencies, or in maintaining a sense of social justice: the temptations for the free, responsible Christian individual might just be more than he can bear. In this line of thought, perhaps Christianity was only an instrument to set the individual free, but unable to control that free individual.
4. But there is reason for doubt. For the rivals of civil society only gained power when the heart of the Christian value coalition, the 'salvific economy' of guilt and forgiveness and the concomitant awareness of human fragility and sinfulness, became lost. While an integral Christian tradition may be hard to maintain, it is at the same time the heart of civil society and it is hard to beat.
5. But being involved in (creating) a civil society calls for an active, vigilant church and active, vigilant Christian communities, with a keen sense of 'do quia mihi datum est'. It calls for a church and a Christian community open to the needs of the world, and intellectually active in analyzing the various sovereign threats as they emerge time and again in politics, economics and other areas of life.
6. It also calls for a revival of the *potestas indirecta*, the desire to make free, independent Biblical judgments on worldly affairs and to urge the integration of moral, or better, normative points of view within the practices of everyday life, in economics, law, international relations, and in relations between different ethnic groups. The practical side of this *potestas indirecta* is the claim for freedom to do what is right, to have institutions and practices that embody and reflect the ethics of the coming Kingdom.

³¹ Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.