Scriptura 46 (1993), 24-49

HOW SHOULD A PUBLIC WAY OF DOING THEOLOGY BE APPROACHED?

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Abstract

In an attempt to discern some guidelines for the South African debate on a public way of doing theology, it may be helpful to draw on recent debates on the issue of public theology in the USA. I will argue that the call for a public theology should be understood against the background of the 'American experience' of the problem of privatization in a pluralistic culture (section 1). Since it is not always clear from the USA debates what the phrase 'public theology' actually means, I will identify some characteristics of a 'public theology' (section 2). The two rather different approaches of David Tracy and George Lindbeck (and their respective colleagues) to such a public way of doing theology will be analysed at length (section 3). Some brief comments on a public way of doing theology in the South African context will then be ventured (section 4).

1. Public theology and the problem of privatization

The plea for a public way of doing theology, expressed by USA theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr and John Courtney Murray and, more recently, by Martin Marty, Robert Bellah, Max Stackhouse, Richard John Neuhaus, David Tracy and others, should primarily be understood against the background of the 'American experience' of the problem of privatization in a pluralistic culture (see Tracy 1981b:113). Hannah Arendt's (1959:22v) [1] analysis of the differences between the public and the private spheres of the classic Greek *polis* may be helpful in understanding this privatising tendency.

1. Arendt's analysis of the Greek *polis* may be criticised as being far too romantic; that it does not take the complexities of the (post-)modern society into account; that it is based on a nostalgic idea of a 'golden age' which never really existed; that it had a darker side to it as well (imperialism, slavery, sexism, etc). Arendt's vision of a society in which there is open dialogue on all the important public issues is, despite these criticisms, nevertheless equally relevant (Bernstein 1986:37-8).

According to Arendt a distinction was made in classic Greek culture between the public sphere and the private or domestic sphere. In the private sphere one was limited to daily routines and the chores of housekeeping, cooking, etc. To be limited to this private sphere implied literally de-privation to the ancient Greeks: to be refused access to the sphere of the *polis* like a slave.

The freedom experienced when participating in the public sphere stood in opposition to these limitations of the domestic sphere. The public sphere implied freedom and equality to participate in the more 'exalted' forms of life like drama, art, philosophy, sport, dialogue and politics in which men (women were excluded) could distinguish themselves. [2] Arendt (1959:32-3) comments:

> The *polis* was distinguished from the household in that it knew only 'equals', whereas the household was the center of the strictest inequality. To be free meant both not to be subject to the necessity of life or to the command of another and not to be in command oneself ... to be freed meant to be free from the inequality present in rulership and to move in a sphere where neither rule nor being ruled existed.

The sphere of the *polis* was, however, also distinguished from the *societas*. The *societas* was characterised by fixed social patterns, social status and role playing. A greater degree of conformity could therefore be identified. This was not the case in the public sphere:

> The public realm ... was reserved for individuality; it was the only place where men could show who they really were (Arendt 1959:41).

Palmer (1981:18) adds:

> In ancient Greece, the public life was the only life worth living. In public, free men dealt with matters of moment and mutual concern, shaping their common destiny.

The following connotations of the 'public sphere' could be identified: 1) Everything happening in the public sphere could be seen or heard by everyone present and therefore enjoyed a maximum degree of *publi*-city. 2) The public sphere was the area where people could gather without overcrowding one another - precisely because it was the primary *locus* for distinguishing oneself. 3) In the public sphere decisions were literally taken democratically and through persuasion - not by force (Arendt 1959:26). Dialogue as the means of taking decisions was therefore extremely important within this public sphere:

> In ... a polis or community, persuasion, not violence or manipulation, is the quintessence of public life, and persuasion itself involves free and open debate among equals in which there is an attempt to clarify, test and purify opinion (Bernstein 1986:37).

2. Public life obviously includes a dialogue on political issues, but is not restricted to politics. It also includes issues concerning education, state administration, sport, culture, art, etc (see Palmer 1981:35f).

These values prevalent in the classic Greek *polis* stand in direct opposition to the modern tendency towards privatization. In his work, *The fall of public man* (1976), Richard Sennett describes the historical process in Western culture in which the role of the public sphere was systematically pushed to the periphery. This led to a situation wherein people actually prefer to withdraw from the demands of public life to find security and comfort from the rush of a technocratic society in the intimacy of private life:

> The traumas of 19th century capitalism led those who had the means to try to shield themselves in whatever way possible from the shocks of an economic order which neither victors nor victims understood. Gradually the will to control and shape the public order eroded, and people put more emphasis on protecting themselves from it. The family became one of these shields (Sennet 1976:19-20).

This withdrawal into private life is actually interpreted positively. Sennett (1976:4) comments:

> We have tried to make the fact of being in private, alone with ourselves and our family and intimate friends, an end in itself.

Palmer (1981:21) adds:

> We have lost the vision that the public life is worth living.

The word 'public' often also has somewhat negative connotations, for example with reference to 'public transport', 'public telephones', 'public parks', 'public facilities', etc.

This tendency towards privatization, caused by the processes of specialisation and segmentation in a pluralist society, and helped along by the affective apathy towards the overdose of claims to one's attention, eventually has a destructive influence on different aspects of society:

The privatization of the techno-economic sphere has led to a loss of dialogue on the value and role of technology in society - with the result of an instrumentalisation of rational discourse and the deadly effects of a technocratic society (Bernstein 1986:33, Tracy 1981a:8). The scale, complexity and semi-independence of the political sphere has also inhibited democratic processes and political dialogue on issues of social justice. This resulted in political bureaucracies and elitisms (Tracy 1981a:9-10).

In such a society the role of artists - the 'antennae of the race' (Ezra Pound) - is marginalised. In pre-Enlightenment cultures art had a more evident meaning within its social and/or religious contexts. Art had more than a merely aesthetic function; its purpose was to disclose the basic values and truth claims of society. Since the Enlightenment the value of art has increasingly been evaluated on a subjective-aesthetic level. It became a matter of taste and, *de gustibus non est disputandum*! The interplay between art and society has therefore been lost. In fact, as Hans (1978:3) points out,

> The appreciation of art becomes a momentary experience that provides pleasure for the person precisely because it removes him (or her - EMC) momentarily from reality; thus, art becomes a respite from reality rather than a means of acquiring knowledge about reality. The two realms become increasingly discontinuous.

Where art is marginalised in a pluralist culture, religion becomes privatised (see Luckmann 1967:67-107). With the increasing complexity and autonomy of the economic, technological and political spheres, religion lost its function to provide an all-inclusive interpretation framework through which the reality structures, the *nomos* and *ethos* of a particular society, could be discerned. Religion no longer defines reality as a whole; it has become one segment of society besides others. The relevance of religion has therefore gradually been limited to certain necessarily private issues like family life, sexuality, personal skills, self-fulfillment, etc (Berger 1967:132). Through this process of privatization religion has become something that one can afford to ignore. It is a matter of private belief and taste; anyone has the right to hold whatever religious beliefs he or she wishes - as long as it doesn't 'interfere' with public life! Religion therefore appears to be part of the problem rather than a solution to the problem (Bernstein 1986:44-5).

These processes have led to a 'naked public square' (Neuhaus 1984), where no attention is any longer given to the moral (and indeed religious) dimensions of social, political and especially economic life (Hollenbach 1976:292). The specific role and contribution of religions to discern the basic values of society as a whole is in danger of being lost in a pluralist culture. A lack of any penetrating ethical discourse on political and economic issues may therefore arise.

It is very significant to note that theological institutions (with some important exceptions) have often come to accept this situation of religious privatization. They then no longer try to have an influence in the wider academic world nor in the spheres of politics or economics. They rather accept their position as part of the marginalised segments of society. Theology is rather taught in isolated theological seminaries purely for the benefit of a particular confessional tradition. The sole purpose of theological training is the preparation of pastors for the ministry and it concentrates primarily on issues regarding private life. Theology therefore becomes politically and academically [3] marginalised; it becomes merely the self-expression of a particular church tradition (Tracy 1989:194).

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3. Cady (1988:286) describes the resulting theological discourse within the enclaves of these academically marginalised theological institutions: Within many circles, particularly academic circles, theology is dismissed as a form of parochial apologetics. Rather than appealing to a universally shared human experience, theology roots itself in the scriptures and traditions of specific communities. Instead of employing discourse which all share, theology appropriates the symbols and events of a particular people. Rather than engage in open inquiry, theology appears to presuppose certain truths as the fundamental givens of its reflection.

It is against this background of the problem of privatization in a pluralistic culture that the call for a public way of doing theology in the USA should be understood. It is, however, important to keep two other considerations in mind as well:

a) It is possible to construe the public/private contrast in different ways. Arendt's analysis tends to portray a picture of two completely separated realms; the emotional space of intimate personal relationships and the more impersonal institutionalised social structures. Mutually exclusive private and public realms are, however, not conceivable. Even highly marginalised groups (like some theological institutions) continue to exert some social and political influence. It is also possible to distinguish between private interests (of one particular individual or group) and public interests, i.e. the *res publica*, whatever would allow society at large to flourish (Kelsey 1990:21). The particularity of the interests of an individual or group is, in terms of this distinction, not necessarily detrimental to society at large. In more familiar Christian terms: the church may not be 'of this world' but may continue to be 'in the world', being of service to the needs of society.

The significance of these (and other [4]) ways of explaining the private/public contrast will become evident in the discussion on two different approaches to a public theology. It at least suggests and warns that a particular analysis of 'privatization' may already influence the meaning attached to a 'public' way of doing theology. This will have to be kept in mind throughout the discussion in the next section on the characteristics of a 'public' theology. These characteristics may be analysed differently. It is, however, also important not to obscure the specific problem which was discussed in this section i e the problem of a 'naked public square' where a discussion on appropriate values for society at large is urgently needed. The link between the call for a public theology and the problem of privatization in a pluralist culture will therefore be emphasised in the following discussion.

b) It is also important to note that privatization as a root problem of a pluralistic society should not be overemphasised. David Tracy has, for example, shifted his emphasis in *Blessed rage for order* on the crisis surrounding the cognitive status of Christian truth claims, to the problem of privatization in *The analogical imagination*, and to the problem of radical ambiguities in his work *Plurality and ambiguity*. It may therefore be important to look critically

4. Kelsey (1991:19-27) analyses four ways in which the public/private contrast is often construed: 1) two separate realms (personal, intimate relationships and social institutions); 2) two different forms of knowledge (knowledge available only to those priviledged to share a particular experience or language and knowledge presumed to be open to public scrutiny, 'universally' available to all 'rational' human beings); 3) two different ends for human action (in the interest of a particular individual or group or for the flourishing of society at large); 4) different material factors which shape perceptions of what may actually count as 'social goods' and what is merely 'individual goods' (every proposal of what defines 'society as a whole' would reflect the material interests of those defining the proposal). Kelsey's analysis clearly demonstrates that the question how a public theology should be approached (if at all) is influenced by this construal of the private/public contrast.

at the emphasis on the problem of privatization itself (see my own comments in section 4).

2. Some characteristics of a public way of doing theology

a) The call for a public theology firstly involves that the concrete issues disputed in the public sphere(s) should be a primary concern in theological agendas as well. A public Christian theology is thus an attempt to discuss the moral and religious dimensions of some of the urgent public issues and to illuminate these with reference to the symbols and doctrines of Christian faith (Cady 1987:198).

In the call for a public theology it is argued that Christian theology may make some important contributions to the search for appropriate values in the political and economic spheres of society. In fact, the public spheres of society may themselves show an interest in and may still acknowledge the contributions which the various religious traditions may yield to a conversation on basic values (Kaufman 1985:14). The various religious traditions, and Christian theology in particular, may make some valuable contributions because they address some of the most fundamental questions of human existence (like the search for truth, the value and meaning of human life and death, the possibility of something trustworthy amidst all the anxieties and suffering surrounding humankind, etc). Tracy, for example, argues that: '... theology should play a role in the public realm because theology helps us all to ask the kind of reflective questions which all reflective human beings ask' (1984:231-2).

Public theology therefore clearly involves an urgent plea thát theology should take its place in the public sphere. This can be regarded as a first important characteristic of a public theology.

It may be important to ask whére these public spheres (in which Christian theology is called to become involved in) are actually situated? It may be argued that, in general, the market place can be considered as the paradigmatic example of a public sphere. This is also the impression conveyed by Arendt's analysis. The problem with this metaphor is, however, that this paradigmatic market place no longer exists in modern industrial cities which are far larger in size than any Greek *polis* (although the market place continues to play this role in many African towns) and that no theologian seems to work literally in the 'market place'. How should this suggestive metaphor then be interpreted?

One possibility is to extend or to modernise the metaphor by including local examples of public spheres where people (strangers) may meet and engage in conversations, i e examples like city parks, squares, cafe's, pubs, festivals, fairs, etc (Palmer 1981:37f). More universal examples would obviously include the public roles of the press and television. Theologians do, in fact, often make contributions through these public media.

Tracy's (1981a:1-46) very influential distinction between the three different publics of theology may be helpful to further concretise this public sphere in

which theological reflection ought to take place. Tracy asks by way of sociological analysis the question who the groups are which form the addressees or 'publics' of theology. He identifies three groups i e the academy, the church and the society at large. Tracy argues that some theological works (mostly trying to explore, analyse, refine or defend the cognitive status of theological truth claims apologetically) are mainly produced within universities and are primarily addressed at scholarly audiences. Other theological works attempt to render hermeneutical service to the church in her continuous attempts to reinterpret the Bible and the Christian tradition in and for contemporary contexts. Yet other theological works are aimed at the various individual, social, and structural needs and problems present in society at large (Tracy 1981b:115). The call for a public theology is often focussed on this role of theology in the larger society (the political and economic spheres). In the rest of this contribution I will follow this general tendency (although not exclusively).

b) Public theology does not only require an interest in and concern about public issues. After all, that is true of the (verbal and more brutal) wars which are waged on these issues as well. It is not sufficient to merely articulate and promote the values, interests and strategies of a particular religious or theological tradition in the public sphere(s). It is also important to develope adequate strategies to resolve the sometimes radically different views and manifestos propagated in the public sphere.

The call for a 'public' way of doing theology therefore usually includes a call for the cultivation of an authentic public life. It is not only important to discuss public issues but also to create opportunities where a sensitivity for public issues is developed and where these issues can be debated through open dialogue and persuasion. This plea is well articulated by Bernstein (1986:46):

> I am advocating that what ought to be our primary concern is with cultivating those types of public spaces in which individuals can come together and debate; can encounter each other in the formation, clarification, and testing of opinions; where judgment, deliberation and *phronesis* can flourish; where individuals can become aware of the creative power that springs up among them; where there is a tangible experience of overcoming the privatization, subjectivization, and the narcissistic tendencies so pervasive in our daily lives.

Public life (in all three the publics which Tracy identifies) is therefore closely related to *dialogue*. It not only implies a call to become involved in dialogue on public issues. It also promotes a certain kind of dialogue, having particular rules. These rules for public dialogue include at least a willingness to articulate one's point of view as clearly as possible, to listen carefully to other's arguments, to do justice to these arguments in contra-arguments and to be willing to change, if necessary (Tracy 1987:19). Attempts to formulate and clarify these rules or criteria for dialogue usually centre around concepts of rationality. In an academic context an Enlightenment or positivist understanding of

rationality may prevail whereas more practical forms of rationality (*phronesis*) may be emphasised in the political and economic spheres. I will return to the importance of these notions of rationality in the debate on public theology.

It is also important to note that, in the USA (somewhat unlike in South Africa), the value of theological contributions in the public spheres cannot necessarily be taken for granted. Christian theologians may wish to take part in dialogues on public issues but their contributions are often viewed with some degree of skepticism (if weighed according to the rules and criteria esteemed in the respective public spheres). It is, for example, a question whether Christian theology really has something to contribute to the complexities of economic, and political life. In the academic sphere some may question the cognitive status of theological truth claims and disregard the value of theological contributions in intellectual life. Others may even doubt the value of theological abstractions for the daily life of the church as another public of theology. If Christian theology wants to make contributions to debates on public issues it cannot merely appeal to the scripture or the Christian tradition as if such appeals will settle the issues at hand; it will have to defend its truth claims in a way accessible to others in the public spheres (Placher 1989:156).

It is therefore often necessary to actively defend the value and public status of theological contributions in all three its publics. The call for a public theology in such a case does not only involve a plea that theology should takes its rightful place in the public sphere where its contributions will naturally be valued. It also accepts the agenda that the possible value of theological truth claims will have to be defended in the public sphere. This often leads to questions on a meta-level whether such a public defense of theology is possible and how such a public theology should be approached methodologically - if at all(!). As I will indicate in section 3, no consensus exists in Christian theology in the USA on these questions.

These attempts to defend the public status of theological truth claims (i.e. that Christian theology is actually of public value) could be identified as the second important characteristic of the plea for a public theology in the USA. In other words, a public way of doing theology not only has implications for the content of theological reflections but also for the public *status* accorded to such reflections (Cady 1987:196).

c) Cady (1988:292f) adds a third characteristic of a public way of doing theology i.e. that of a specific style of doing theology. She argues that if theology would like to make any contribution in the public sphere (society at large) it needs to adopt a style accessible to the general public. A public theology should therefore be intelligible to a greater audience than merely other academic theologians sharing the same particular theological jargon. It is not necessary to discard the value of all technical theological work but if theologians wish to make any contributions in the public sphere it needs to adopt a style accessible to its addressees. Cady's comment (1988:292) on a

public style of doing theology serves as a reminder to all theologians (including the present author) and is worth quoting at length:

> Theologians, typically, write for publication in scholarly books and journals. Extensive references to the literature and endless qualifying footnotes have become the hallmark of this form of writing. Adopting the jargon of other philosophers and theologians has also become standard practice. Writing in Heideggerianese, Whiteheadeanese, or Derrideanese not only restricts one's audience to professional theologians but it narrows it further to those who share this particular discourse. Following the model of the sciences, theology has become a specialized area of expertise. To what end however? What purpose, beyond professional advancement and recognition, motivates this professional style in theology? Theology clearly lacks the practical applications of sophisticated technical and practical studies in the natural and social sciences. Without such applications, a highly professionalized theology is merely an insulated and ineffective form of discourse perpetuated by an elite. This is true even for the so-called 'political' and 'practical' theologies that are seeking to combat the personal and private focus of modern religious life.

Cady's argument illustrates that theological institutions have not only been privatised and absent from the public sphere. Due to the segmentation and particular complexities of the numerous theological disciplines, a dialogue between the various theological disciplines often prove to be rather difficult in itself. This only illustrates that the question as to how such a public way of doing 'theology' should be approached, is by no means unproblematic. How should the issues of public life be approached and what does it actually mean to defend the public status of theological truth claims? Which criteria comes into play for a public defense of theological truth claims and by whom are these criteria to be identified?

In recent debates in the USA two rather different approaches have been followed to attempt some answers to these necessarily more meta-theological questions. These two approaches can roughly be identified with reference to the Chicago and Yale 'schools of theology' in general and the persons of David Tracy and George Lindbeck in particular:

3. Two approaches for a public way of doing theology

a) David Tracy has actively taken up the challenge to defend the *public status* of Christian theology in numerous contributions (see Tracy 1975, 1977, 1981a, 1981b, 1984, 1989). In his contributions Tracy concentrates especially (but not only) on the second of the above mentioned characteristics of a public theology, i e the question of how (according to which methodological criteria) the public status of theological truth claims could be defended.

Tracy argues that if theological discourse is addressed at the three publics he identified, it is also responsible to explain theological truth claims in a 'public' way. It must in other words be communicated in a form accessible to the respective publics, taking the plausibility structures present in each of the publics into account. If this process of communication between theology and its publics succeeds, then one may speak of a *public* defense of theological truth claims. Tracy does not in this way want to subject theology to any criteria which may be demanded by publics external to theology itself. However, successful communication is only possible in terms of criteria acceptable to both theology and its publics. What are these criteria and how can they be identified - if at all?

Tracy argues that, in general, public discourse is *rational* discourse:

To speak in a public fashion means to speak in a manner that can be disclosive and transformative for any intelligent, reasonable, responsible human being' (Tracy 1981b:114). [5]

Rationality, the enduring (if problematic) ideal of the Enlightenment (see Tracy 1990a:1), in this sense involves the attempt to render truth claims accessible to a potentially universal community of inquiry. For Tracy the Enlightenment tradition in America implies,

> ... the attempt to develop a public realm grounded in a rationality open to all, rooted therefore in a consensus appropriate to every community of inquiry (Tracy 1989a:201).

Consensus may not always be forthcoming but it remains a valid hope, a hope in search for some *shared* (and not merely private) truth (Tracy 1989a:202).

Tracy knows, of course, that this emphasis on rationality does not solve much. He is quite aware of the lack of consensus concerning the concept 'rationality' (Tracy 1986:116, 1990a:45) and often emphasises that any positivistic or scientistic interpretation of rationality has become discredited due to a growing awareness of the historical, cultural and linguistic situatedness of the *different forms of rationality* (1986d:115-7). Tracy therefore distinguishes between various forms of rationality and the various relevant criteria required in each of the three publics of theology (see 1990a:38-47):

i) The criteria relevant to an academic context are specifically the cognitive criteria of coherence with what we otherwise know or, more likely, believe to be the case (Tracy 1990a:3-4). This is closely related to the ideals of intersubjective validity prevalent in the various sciences. Criteria like logical coherence, non-contradiction and a discursive way of arguing are obviously important in an academic context. Rationality and a public way of doing theology in this context therefore imply the following:

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5. The terminology is a variation on Lonergan's well-known transcendental imperatives: 'Be attentive! Be intelligent! Be reasonable! Be responsible!'

> ... meaning and truth available to all intelligent, reasonable and rational persons through persuasive argument (Tracy 1981b:116).

Placher (1989:156) explains Tracy's motive in this context:

> In the contemporary university, Tracy feels, appeals to tradition and authority carry little weight and get one quickly dismissed as an obscurantist. He wants the intellectual community to take Christian theology seriously, and that means explaining and arguing for it in terms that community will accept.

ii) A different notion of publicness, different criteria and a different form of rationality functions within the church as second 'public' of theology. In the church it is important that theological statements should have a disclosive power to help the church in its understanding of the Bible and the Christian tradition and to enrich the church in its concrete daily life. It is, of course, more difficult to assess the publicness of these disclosures of truth and meaning. It is often assumed that it is not possible to attain the same level of consensus in conversations on 'meaningful possibilities for an authentic human way-of-being-in-the-world' than is presumed to be possible in scientific experiments. It is therefore a legitimate question whether it is at all possible to identify intersubjective (i e public) criteria for adequate disclosures of a authentic way-of-being-in-the-world.

Tracy approaches this problem through an analysis of the category of 'classics'. He argues that the mere existence of classics in a culture indicates that certain texts and cultural expressions are generally (inter-subjectively and thus publicly) considered to be significant for a discussion of truth, meaning and values within that culture. A classic therefore has inherent public status (Tracy 1981b:14). Through an analysis of the category of 'classics' Tracy searches for conditions and criteria rendering classic (and therefore public) status to a particular work. Classics are for Tracy 'public' in a second sense of the word: although a classic is rooted in a very particular context, it gains a disclosive power, speaking to a potentially universal audience, because it expresses, through its very intensified particularity, some aspect of a shared human experience (Tracy 1981a:132).

iii) Tracy also identifies another form of publicness relevant to the society at large as the third public which Christian theology addresses. In this public the transformative potential of any theological truth claim is critically assessed. The consequences of Christian action and beliefs are thus evaluated ethically from personal, social and structural perspectives. Such an ethical reflection has become increasingly important due to a growing awareness of the socio-political reality of power in all discourse (1990a:47). In this ethical reflection the contexts of suffering, oppression, alienation, etc should be taken into account especially.

The public defense of theological truth claims therefore requires, for Tracy, a particular form of rationality and a particular set of criteria for rationality [6] in each of the three publics of theology.

Tracy's defense of rationality has raised the suspicions of several critics. The criticisms centre around a scepsis concerning the universalistic pretensions of an Enlightenment form of rationality i.e. the assumption that rationality is an a-historical, universal and transcendental characteristic of all (relatively intelligent) human beings. Giurlanda criticises Tracy's defense of rationality in the public sphere as yet another form of foundationalism (i.e. the attempt to base or finally ground all truth claims on some or other fixed Archimedes-point - for example in a Cartesian *cogito*). Giurlanda (1987:260) comments:

> Tracy can find no escape from 'privacy' ... but in foundationalism.

Cady (1987:196) also thinks that Tracy's notion of rationality in the academy (which is akin to an Enlightenment understanding of rationality) and his more explicit hermeneutical notion of rationality in the church is more in tension with one another than Tracy is willing to acknowledge. Cady (1988:287) argues:

> Discounting the myth of an a-historical, universally shared human reason, philosophers including Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Heidegger, have increasingly stressed that reason is inextricably rooted in a specific historical and cultural matrix. Reflection takes place in and through a linguistic medium that reflects the assumptions, values and interests of a particular time and place. A common human reason, or common human experience is ... a false construct that obscures the irreducible particularity of human life and thought.

Tracy would, however, agree with this emphasis on the particularity of different forms of rationality. He admits that there is no absolute standpoint or universal criteria for judging truth and rationality. He does not want to set some general, overarching theory of what it means to be 'rational', which Christians and everyone else must accept before real conversation can begin (see Placher 1989:154). He has also argued that an autonomous, universal and objective form of rationality can no longer be taken for granted to sort out differences of opinion in 'rational' disputes or to defend the public status of theological truth claims (1990a:45). With the rise of postmodernism it seems that more than rather particular traditions of rationality are not forthcoming (see Tracy 1986:119). Tracy furthermore questions the universalistic presuppositions of the Enlightenment's understanding of rationality:

> The acknowledgement of the role of language (and therefore history) in all understanding combined with the awareness of the large role uncon-

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6. Tracy identifies the following criteria: 1) cognitive criteria of coherence with what we otherwise know, or, more likely, believe to be the case; 2) disclosive criteria based on the hermeneutical notion of truth as primordially 'manifestation'; and 3) ethical-political criteria on the personal and social consequences of our beliefs (Tracy 1990a:901).

> scious factors play in all conscious rationality have made theologically necessary transcendental forms of reflection not impossible, but far, far more difficult to formulate adequately than modern theology (including my own) once believed (Tracy 1990a:902).

Tracy does, however, reiterate his belief in the Enlightenment values of open inquiry, persuasion through argument and conversation. It is not a dismissal of the rationality of the Enlightenment which is called for but rather a broadening of the various concepts of rationality (see Bosch 1992:110). Although Tracy shares the postmodernist critique of modernism [7], he still values the hopes of modernity:

> The hopes of modernity, including modern theology, are noble ones. I have shared these hopes, especially in my book *Blessed rage for order*, and to a large extent I still do ... In both society and church, the need to fight against obscurantism, mystification and outright oppression is as clear now as it was in the 18th century. The need to defend reason, often against its presumed guardians (e.g. positivism and scientism), remains clear to all not tricked into intellectual and moral languor by too-easy assaults on the modern heritage.

One may wish to agree with these ideals of dialogue on public issues, open inquiry, persuasion through argument and a search for consensus as shared truth. Placher (1989:160), for example, considers these to be laudable aims. He does, however, raise some questions on the concrete strategies used to defend the public status of theological truth claims by explaining it in categories which are supposed to be accessible to others in the public sphere. He states that these public theologies risk cutting and trimming the gospel to fit it into some philosophical language (idealist, rationalist, Marxist, existentialist, pragmatist, postmodernist, etc). Moreover, it risks appealing to criteria of rationality assumed to be sufficiently universal to settle any dispute in the public sphere (Placher 1989:160). Michalson (1988:112) also argues that these attempts to defend the public status of theology by explaining them in inter-subjectively accessible categories are based on the assumption of the universality of certain anthropological givens. He states that: '... the intelligibility of Christian faith is potentially universal, since it has its source in an anthropological `given,' such as a `feeling of absolute independence' or an `ultimate concern'. [8]

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7. Tracy (1990:901-2) states clearly that there are good reasons to understand our period and our needs as more postmodern than modern. However, he adds: 'Even 'postmodernity', that ever-elusive word in search of a definition, is more an acknowledgment that we now live in an age that cannot name itself that we would simply reject modernity'.

8. There have been several criticisms of Tracy's supposedly 'universalistic assumptions'. In *Blessed Rage for order* Tracy used categories like 'common human experience' and 'the religious dimension of human experience' which was duly criticised as less 'common' than he might have assumed. Fiorenza (1984:283) argued, for example, that Tracy merely saw the Christian tradition as a particular specification of what is universally experienced as religious. Similar criticisms on these universalist experiential categories were also raised by postliberals like Lindbeck (1984:31-3). However, since *Blessed Rage for order*, Tracy has often empha-

It is important to realise what is at stake in these attempts to provide public explanations of Christian truth claims. If radical differences and conflict occur in public debates it does not help to merely and continuously redescribe Christian truth claims in the belief that they will in the end prove convincing in themselves. It will also become important to find some common ground to settle the disputes on urgent public issues. The search for criteria and forms of rationality to settle these disputes between particular traditions (including particular forms of rationality) therefore forms a natural part of public life. The very search for at least a degree of consensus and universality seems to be an inherent characteristic of public dialogues.

It may, however, be true that such consensus is not forthcoming. Any realisation of and emphasis on the contextuality of rationality will undermine the notion of a common rationality for the public sphere. Public life implies a search for some degree of universality but the fragmentation of rationality within particular contexts seems to render this ideal of universality unattainable. If one accepts the limitedness of different forms of human rationality within particular contexts, the very aim of a public way of doing theology, i.e. to address issues which affects society as a whole and to deal with these issues in a way accessible to everyone in the public sphere, is undermined. It becomes problematic whether it may be possible to defend the public status of theological truth claims *überhaupt*. It is understandable that this dilemma of a defense of the public status of theological truth claims would have led to a different approach for a public way of doing theology.

b) Theologians like George Lindbeck, Hans Frei, Paul Holmer, Stanley Hauerwas, Ronald Thiemann and others (what has become known as the 'Yale-school') have proposed that an 'intra-textual' approach to a public way of doing theology should rather be adopted.

According to this 'intra-textual' approach the aim of Christian theology should not primarily be to explain or justify Christian truth claims in a way accessible to publics external to the Christian community. It should rather concentrate on describing [9] the way in which Christian truth claims function within a particular faith community. Christian beliefs are to be understood from within the shared convictions of such a community of faith. Lindbeck (1990:493), with theorists like Wittgenstein, Thomas Kuhn, Peter Berger and

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sised the importance of the hermeneutical and the linguistic turns. His ever increasing hermeneutical awareness weakens the argument that he assumes universalist experiential categories (see Tracy 1985).

Comstock's (1987:692f) argument on the use of these experiential categories is helpful on this issue. He argues that experiential categories are used to *explain* particular Christian truth claims. These attempts at explanation involves a move from the concrete and the particular to the more abstract (and not from the universal to the particular). According to Comstock explanation is not *in itself* problematic although one may wish to argue that particular explanations of Christian truth claims are too reductionistic.

9. See Comstock's (1987) important distinction between *describing, explaining* and *justifying* Christian truth claims.

Clifford Geertz, thus emphasises the importance of the social, linguistic and cognitive construction of reality and experience. The primary task of theology is therefore to describe the way in which Christian truth claims function within a particular linguistic context (see Wittgenstein's analysis of language games within a particular form of life) and within a particular cultural context (see Geertz). [10] Placher (1989:163) formulates the emphasis of this approach appropriately:

> A good Lindbeckian, postliberal theologian will therefore operate less like a philosophically orientated apologist and more like a sensitive anthropologist, who tries to describe the language and practise of a tribe in terms of how they function in the life of that community and how they shape the way that community sees the world, rather than trying to defend these people's way of talking by the standards of some universal rationality or experience.

It is important to note that a particular set of rules (shared values, stories, ethical and linguistic codes, etc.) is prevalent in each of these cultural and religious communities and is not necessarily applicable to the world outside this community. To put it in another way: different rules apply to games like golf and tennis. These rules are perfectly understandable within the game in which they function but make no sense when applied to another game. Christian beliefs can therefore only be understood in terms of the rules (i.e. the dogmatic presuppositions) of the Christian community (see Comstock 1986:129). There are no neutral rules or criteria which can be identified to evaluate the validity of Christian truth claims outside the context of the Christian community of faith (Placher 1985:410).

This approach implies a rejection of any attempt to render Christian beliefs universally (publicly) accessible by explaining or translating them in existentialist, Marxist, pragmatist, idealist or any other categories presumed to be more familiar to those in the public sphere. According to Lindbeck and others, such attempts to save the public status of Christian theology could only lead to the loss of the specifically Christian or theological character of such discourse. The persuasiveness of Christian convictions is not served in this way. According to Lindbeck (1989:87) the problem with such public defenses of Christian theology is that they are inclined to substitute the biblical text with something else instead of leading interested readers to it:

> The problem is ... the more a theology translates the scriptural message into an alien idiom (rather than vice versa) the more easily it can be constructed as having captured the essence of the gospel (Lindbeck 1989:88).

In contrast to such attempts to render Christian truth claims publicly accessible, an 'intratextual' approach is suggested in which the truth claims of the

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10. See Lindbeck's (1984) well-known suggestion of a cultural-linguistic model to approach both the study of religion and of doctrine.

Christian tradition is described in terms of its own merits and from within the Christian community. Within this community one needs to learn a certain 'form of life', a certain set of rules, as well as the 'story' of the community which eventually becomes one's own story. Lindbeck (1984:34) comments: 'To become a Christian involves learning the story of Israel and of Jesus well enough to interpret and experience oneself and one's world in its terms'. An intratextual approach would therefore emphasise a faithfulness towards the language used in the Christian community(ies). When the Christian story is told it should not be translated into more general categories but should be told in terms of its own narrative world, allowing for its own persuasive powers. Christian faith is by no means unintelligible but, as Michalson (1988:116) argues,

> ... it is intelligible only from within a form of life that has to be learned and practiced; it is not intelligible because Christian faith is finally translatable into experiential terms that are universally available.

There are simply no such general categories, meta-language or conceptual frameworks into which Christian truth claims can adequately be translated.

The Bible should be allowed to speak to people in particular contexts in terms of its own narrative structures (Lindbeck 1989:86). The 'real' meaning of the biblical texts and of Christian beliefs cannot be found 'outside' their own parameters. It should be identified in the 'world' or interpretation framework which these texts create by themselves.

Lindbeck (1989:94-8) explains this argument with reference to literary theories arguing that some texts, especially sacred texts (understood as the fixated cultural patterns of communication expressed in rituals, myths, oral traditions and later written traditions) construct by themselves a habitable 'world'. In other words, these texts create a 'world' within which a community may live and they provide an interpretative framework for the self-understanding of that community: 'In short, texts project worlds in which entire cultures can and have lived' (Lindbeck 1989:95). According to Lindbeck (1989:38) the Bible has played exactly this kind of role in Western society:

> Until recently, most people in traditionally Christian countries lived in the linguistic and imaginative world of the Bible. It was not the only world in which they dwelt ... Yet the text above all texts was the Bible. Its stories, images, conceptual patterns, and turns of phrase permeated the culture from top to bottom.

The implication of this argument is that there is no '*real* world' outside such a text. For the community living within the framework provided by the (biblical) text, there is no other 'real' world besides that of the text. Placher (1989:161) explains the radical viewpoint of Lindbeck and Frei, saying that they argue: 'Suppose we do not start with the modern world. Suppose we start with the biblical world, and let those narratives define what is real, so that *our* lives may have meaning to the extent that we fit them into *that*

framework.' 'Intratextual theology', Lindbeck (1984:118) argues, 'redescribes reality within the scriptural framework rather than translating Scripture into extrascriptural categories. It is the text, so to speak, which absorbs the world, rather than the world the text.' It is not necessary to relate the biblical narrative to some *other* 'real' world to establish their value and truth status. The text itself construes the only 'real world':

> Scripture, when depicted in this way, depicts a real world, temporally structured, which encompasses both the times and the stories of the text and those of the reader. Since the world depicted by the Bible is the only real world, the reader must fit his or her own experience into scripture's cumulative narrative, thus becoming a `figure' of the text (Thiemann 1985:85).

Placher (1985:403) adds:

> Until the seventeenth century, Christian preachers and theological commentators ... envisioned the real world as formed by the sequence told by the biblical stories ...(U)nlike Homer, the Bible does not invite us to escape from the 'real world' for a few hours. It claims that the world it narrates *is* the real world. Our lives have significance only if they fit into that narrative framework.

It is therefore not necessary to relate the truth claims of the Christian community to some other 'real' world (the public sphere) outside the community of faith. It is neither necessary to explain these truth claims in 'neutral', experiential, existentialist, Marxist, idealist, or pragmatist categories presumed to be accessible to everyone in the public sphere. This could only lead to reductionism: 'The main difficulty is that their interpretations tend to replace Scripture rather than lead to it' (Lindbeck 1989:87). Comstock (1987:693) adds bluntly: 'It turns Christianity into something it is not.' According to this viewpoint Christian truth claims should rather be described within their own frame of reference if one is to serve their persuasive power and if they are to have any value for someone outside the community of faith. The best form of apologetics is good dogma! (Placher 1985:403).

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Tracy (1989b:555v) has acknowledged the value of this intra-textual approach and a 'thick description' of Christian beliefs because it tends to provide a more exact understanding of the identity of the Christian tradition. He also acknowledges the danger of a situation wherein '... modern theology ... has lost its distinctively theological center by attempting to be correlational at all ... for every tradition is in danger of losing its distinctiveness through the subtle erosions of all particularities by the illusory claims to universality of Western Enlightenment modernity' (Tracy 1989b:556). Worthwhile contributions to dialogues with other traditions can furtherore only be made if the particularity of one's own tradition is respected (Tracy 1981:452-3).

This intra-textual approach does however raise some important questions for a public way of doing theology. The emphasis on the metaphors of 'culture' and 'language' to describe the truth claims of the Christian community has led to criticisms of i) relativism (or 'Wittgensteinian fideism') with respect to the defense of the public status of Christian truth claims in an academic context and ii) radical sectarianism with respect to dialogues on ethical issues in the public sphere (society at large) (Placher 1989:163, Michalson 1988:111, Gustafson 1985).

i) It is easy to understand why the cultural-linguistic approach would lead to criticisms of relativism. After all, according to Lindbeck, Christian doctrines describe the rules of the Christian tradition - suggesting that other traditions might have other sets of rules which are equally valid within their own context (Placher 1989:163). The Wittgensteinian (?) emphasis on different language games, each having there own form of life and own set of rules, indeed harbours the danger of privatising theology within narrow, self-confining confessionalist ghettos. Tracy has, for example, accused Lindbeck of fideism, arguing that Lindbeck's approach is a

> ... methodologically sophisticated version of Barthian confessionalism. The hands may be the hands of Wittgenstein and Geertz but the voice is the voice of Karl Barth. Lindbeck wants theology to be done purely from 'within' the confessing community. He wants a new ecumenical confessional theology (Tracy 1985:465).

Tracy insists that we should not only describe the truth claims of the Christian tradition accurately, but should also proceed to assess how what we believe through our religious tradition coheres or does not cohere with what we otherwise know, practice, and believe (Tracy 1985:470). Tracy therefore maintains the conviction that ...

> Christianity has its own terms, rules and methods, but these can be translated into the conceptual universe of any reasonable person who is genuinely open to the subject of conversation (paraphrased by Comstock 1987:701).

Lindbeck (1984:130f) has, however, rejected the criticism that his approach necessarily leads to relativism. The sharp emphasis on the metaphors of 'language' and 'culture' may give the impression of totally self-enclosed or 'incommensurable' cultural-linguistic 'worlds'. In such a case the convictions of any religious community would *only* be intelligible from within its own particular form of life. However, although communication and comparisons between different social and linguistic worlds may prove difficult, it is not entirely impossible. While the emphasis on the role of comprehensive interpretative frameworks, language games (Wittgenstein), paradigms (Kuhn), epistemes (Foucault), symbolic universes (Berger), horizons (Gadamer), or vocabularies (Rorty) may be quite legitimate, this emphasis does not have the final word. These socio-linguistic worlds are by no means totally self-enclosed. Gadamer, for example, questions the 'myth of the framework'. He ar-

gues that one is indeed limited to a particular (socio-cultural and linguistic) horizon but that this horizon is never fixed nor self-enclosed: '... just as the individual is never simply an individual, because he is always involved with others, so too the closed horizon that is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction. The historical movement of human life consist in the fact that it is never utterly bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon' (Gadamer 1975:271).

Communication and comparisons between different cultural-linguistic worlds is indeed possible. For Lindbeck, this does not however imply that it is also possible (or worthwhile) to look for universal rules or criteria of rationality to adjudicate in disputes on public issues in general. Lindbeck, Frei and William Werpehowski rather propose that Christians should, if necessary, engage in what they call '*ad hoc*-apologetics'. It is possible and even important to find common ground with a particular conversation partner on a particular issue. This shared common ground may serve as a starting point for that particular conversation (only). Universal rules for all public dialogues are, however, not to be found (Placher 1989:167). The persuasiveness and intelligibility of Christian truth claims in such conversations do not depend on adherence to neutral or universal criteria. Lindbeck prefers a notion of intelligibility as 'skill' for such dialogues, arguing that 'credibility comes from good performance' (Lindbeck 1984:131).

To conclude, it may be argued that the metaphors of language and culture may lead to relativism if they are applied in some absolutist sense although this is not necessarily the case. [11]

ii) The cultural-linguistic approach has not only been criticised on questions pertaining to truth claims. They have also been criticised of ethical sectarianism, of retreating from public life and from discussions on urgent ethical issues into the comfort of theological ghettos. The primary sense of a public way of doing theology, i e that the issues of public life should be addressed in theological reflections, would be lost in such instances. A further argument is that Christians, in fact, live in a pluralistic society with non-Christian neighbours. Christians cannot hope to have any real influence in public debates on ethical issues if they use discourse and appeal to warrants only accepted in the Christian community. It is also necessary to explain and defend the values of the Christian tradition in the public sphere if Christianity is to make any contribution to the urgent dialogue on appropriate values within the public sphere. Gustafson (1985:84) therefore warns against the 'seductive temptation' of ethical sectarianism:

> Religiously and theologically it provides Christians with a clear distinctiveness from others in beliefs; morally it provides distinctiveness in

11. See Kelsey's (1991:19f) comments on the value but also the limitations of these metaphors. They have been primarily employed to solve the problem of discontinuity and identity in the Christian tradition and their powers to illuminate should not be pushed beyond their limits.

> behavior. It ensures a clear identity which frees persons from ambiguity and uncertainty, but it isolates Christianity from taking seriously the wider world of science and culture and limits the participation of Christians in the ambiguities of moral and social life in the patterns of interdependence in the world.

In response to these criticisms, a sectarian ethics has been proposed by Stanley Hauerwas and Lindbeck. The term 'sect' is here used in its sociological sense implying a relatively small group of persons whose beliefs and behaviour is sharply differentiated from the surrounding society (see Kelsey 1991:12). Lindbeck (see 1990) has proposed such a sectarian view of the church. The church in this sense does not however necessarily entail a disengagement from the public realm (Kelsey 1991:14). It may rather form an exemplary, 'alternative community', serving the needs of the world (see Hauerwas 1987). It remains 'in the public realm' but not 'of the public realm' (It is significant to note that Lindbeck is in the Lutheran tradition and Hauerwas in the anabaptist tradition). The existence of such an 'alternative community' may have its own kind of persuasive power in the wider society (see Placher 1989:167). It may again prove its credibility from its performance on public issues and not by attempting to formulate and adhere to universal moral standards. Placher (1985:416) suggests that, at the level of *praxis*, it becomes a question of tactics:

> Does one influence society most effectively by beginning with society's shared assumptions and trying to move in a new direction (revisionism) or by simply describing one's own world-view as forcefully as possible (postliberalism)?

The metaphors of 'culture' and 'language' may therefore harbour the danger of a disengagement from the public sphere, but this is not necessarily the case. It is therefore merely important to recognise the limited power of these metaphors to to illuminate the relation of the Christian community to the larger society (and the power structures involved [12]) (Kelsey 1991:25).

To conclude this analysis of these two possible approaches for a public way of doing theology a few comments may be made:

i) It is important to understand both of these approaches against the background of a pluralist society. In his approach Tracy considers the problem of privatising and the disintegration of a pluralistic society in multiple different publics as being very serious. He seeks to promote public life itself and therefore asks the question how conflicts and disputes between various views may be settled. Lindbeck is less interested in the latter (rather important) problem but thinks that a real contribution to public life can only be made if one draws

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12. One of the most serious criticisms raised against the use of 'culture' and 'language' as metaphors for the church relates to the danger of the church becoming ideologically captive (see Kelsey 1991:27). These metaphors tend to emphasise continuity rather than the need for the church to become constantly self-reforming and to expose such ideological captivities.

on one's own particular background. Lindbeck's analysis of the pluralist society is that universal rules for public disputes is not forthcoming and that the Christian community should realise its limited influence and marginalised position in society. Any real attempt to contribute to public life should start from that realisation. The former approach tries to overcome the segmentation of a pluralist society, the latter considers this to be impossible and therefore proceeds from the possible contributions which may be made from within a particular community.

It should be noted that confessional differences on the relation between church and state and the actual power structures in this relation in a particular context certainly play an important role in approaching a public way of doing theo-logy as well. This is rather important to take into account when considering public theology in South Africa with its quite different power structures.

ii) Tracy's attempt to take the conflicting views and disputes in the public sphere seriously, forces him to look for more universal rules for public dialogues. Contrary to his critics, Tracy does not *assume* some universal forms of rationality, but he does try to find enough common ground for the public dialogues which he calls for. Tracy has, however, been forced to take increasingly notice of the particularity of different forms of rationality. If the contextuality of rationality is granted, the notion of a common rationality for public dialogues is undermined ever more. This may eventually lead to an increasing fragmentation of public life, not only into the various different publics but also into the various approaches and disciplines within Christian theology.

On the other hand, Lindbeck's approach starts with an emphasis on the particularity of a culturally and linguistically structured community. The problem of relativism and sectarianism and the real conflicts within public disputes forces him, however, to enter into *ad hoc*-apologetics and to seek some common ground with others on public issues. The movement from universality to particularity in the one approach is thus complimented by a move from particularity to universality in the other.

iii) This discussion does not settle the question how a public way of doing theology should be approached. Although the two approaches stand in opposition to one another there may be room for both. It is, however, necessary to emphasise that the primary sense of a public theology should be kept in mind, i.e. that theology should be involved in the public sphere. If one acknowledges the extent to which our experiences, worldviews, rationalities, etc. are structured by a particular social form of life and the particular vocabulary used in a particular language world, it should at least also be stressed that it is not impossible to learn another language. It is possible and, according to Bellah (1989:89), important that we should become bilingual or multilingual, that is, that we should learn the language of two or more socio-linguistic worlds well enough to be able to communicate between these worlds. To

learn the languages and the forms of life of the arts and the sciences, of politics and economics, could be a first step in the direction of a public way of doing theology.

4. Public theology in the South African context

It is not possible to appropriate the USA debates on public theology directly within the South African context. It may however provide some guidelines for a public way of doing theology in South Africa as well:

a) It is important to reflect on comparisons between the USA and South Africa on the problem of privatisation in a pluralist culture.

There is undoubtedly also a tendency towards privatisation prevalent in South Africa. Due to the inner complexities of, for example, economic and juridical processes, these spheres of the South African society have increasingly been living a life of their own. It is beyond the grasp of the majority of ordinary South African citizens to understand or to contribute to debates presupposing expertise in these fields. It is also true that some Christian and theological traditions in South Africa (particularly in the more evangelical churches, but also in many of the independent churches) have largely been privatised. Many theological institutions are merely preparing pastors for the ministry and thus function only for the benefit of particular church denominations. They typically deal with issues of private life (personal skills, self-fulfillment, family life, sexuality, etc) rather than public life.

However, this provides only one perspective on the South African scene. There has been a very lively debate on many public issues in the past few decades in South Africa. These obviously include the many constitutional issues, the state's military endeavours, labour issues, the role of the police, many juridical issues, the role of the SABC and the press, the administration in state departments, economic policies, etc. It is also significant that these issues have not only been discussed in the media or in elitist groups but also in more local organisations, on the factory floors, in labour unions, in shebeens, during house parties, in the streets, during many well-attended meetings and rallies, etc. It is also true that many Christian churches have been actively involved in these discussions and campaigns.

In fact, from a South African perspective, a 'naked public square' might actually be seen as the product of a rather comfortable life style where those sharing in the political and economic power are never threatened by the issues raised by marginalised groups. Apathy towards public life (also in South Africa) is only affordable when it does not interfere with one's own comfort - or when the strenuous basic demands of daily living exhausts one's energy totally. Public life naturally flourishes when issues of public importance demand it. A plea for a public theology nevertheless remains urgent and relevant in the light of the more elusive and hidden dangers in the areas of ecology, economy, technology, medicine, etc in the South African society.

b) It is also important to note that the necessity to defend the (cognitive) status of theological truth claims in the public (academic) sphere is not experienced as being equally urgent in South Africa. Something similar applies to the value attributed to theological contributions on ethical disputes in the public sphere. It has been an assumption within the context of anti-apartheid theologies that it is the National Party government which needs to defend itself against the accusations and critiques voiced by political and religious opponents. The value of these prophetic theological critiques of political processes have often been taken for granted. At least to some extent it was not Christian theology which had to defend its value in the public sphere; the public sphere was seen to be accountable to theological and other criticisms! It is obviously true that particular theological contributions have been in dispute, but the possible value of religious beliefs in public life is usually not fiercely disputed.

c) It therefore seems clear that Christian theology does play a role in public life in South Africa. There are obviously wide theological differences on particular issues but this is in itself healthy and a characteristic of a vibrant public life. Public life in South Africa has, however, not been noted for the second characteristic mentioned in section 1, i e open inquiry and persuasion through argument. In fact, public disputes in South Africa have often been manifested in the form of verbal (or more brutal) wars. It seems urgently necessary to cultivate these basic values of public life, to cultivate a public life itself. One of the most valuable contributions which Christian theology may make in this regard is perhaps merely the vigorous and continuous use of existing public forums.

d) It is clear that no theological consensus on the more methodological questions as to hów a public way of doing theology should be approached, is forthcoming in South Africa. What the role of theology in public life is or should be and how a public theology should be approached seems to be influenced by two factors: i) the denominational differences on the relation between church and state, and ii) the power structures between particular churches and particular political powers. Whenever these power relations change, the questions surrounding an appropriate way of approaching public theology seems to become important. This is well illustrated by the history of the DRC which fluctuated from very active involvement in public life, to relative apathy ('the church should not be involved with politics') to the latest attempts to exert some influence on constitutional matters. The debates between the Chicago and Yale schools of theology provides some perspectives to grapple with the more theoretical questions on how a public way of doing theology should be approached in South Africa as well.

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